

JEREMIAH 34

RELEASE AND RE-ENSLAVEMENT

In this chapter, we have two messages which God delivered through Jeremiah. The first of them was to foretell the fate of King Zedekiah of Judah. He would fall into the hands of the king of Babylon, and he would live a captive; but he would at last die in peace in his captivity (verses 1-7). But the second message was addressed to both the king and the people (verses 8-22) as a reproof for their treacherous dealings with God; for they had brought back into bondage their servants, whom they had released according to the law. And so the Lord promised to cause the Babylonian army to return upon them – just when they were beginning to hope that they had gotten clear from them.

Jeremiah possessed a tender, sensitive nature, with a vast capacity for emotion and love. But the Lord's grace stepped into his life and made him – for 40 years – “a defenced city, and an iron pillar, and brazen walls against the whole land” full of princes, priests, and people. Indeed, they fought against him; but they could not prevail, because God was with him. He outlived all his foes, and held high the standard of Jehovah's truth to life's end. And this marvelous endurance and steadfastness of spirit was nowhere so conspicuous as it was during the last few months of his nation's independence. We learn part of this story in this chapter so that we may not miss its helpful inspiration; for if the presence of God could do so much for him, and for so long, then this narrative will be a wonderful comfort for the weakest of the Lord's redeemed sons and daughters who may read these words as they suffer at the hands of their spiritual enemies!

When Zedekiah was placed upon the throne of Judah, he was bound under the most solemn sanctions to be loyal to the king of Babylon who had put him there; and he took that oath of allegiance in the sacred name of Jehovah. But he was a weak king who was entirely in the hands of the strong courtiers who favored an alliance with Egypt, with the intention of casting off the Babylonian yoke. In spite of all Jeremiah's remonstrances, the confederacy was formed; and in a fatal moment, Zedekiah renounced his allegiance to the king of Babylon. Stung to the quick by the perfidy and ingratitude of the Jews, who had so persistently and obstinately outraged him; Nebuchadnezzar gathered a vast army – resolved to make a public example of them to surrounding peoples, by the swiftness and mercilessness of his vengeance. At last, the siege of Jerusalem began. The inhabitants of the city were daily expecting – in vain – the advance of Pharaoh with the horses and soldiers of Egypt, to raise the siege. At this point, King Zedekiah sent two well-known men to Jeremiah (chapter 21), to ask whether

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ A message to King Zedekiah, foretelling his capture by Nebuchadnezzar and his death in Babylon – verses 1-7
- ❖ A message to King Zedekiah and his people, reproving them for bringing their Hebrew servants back into bondage – verses 8-22

the Lord would interpose for His people as He had done in the great days of the past. But Jeremiah returned an answer that was not to the people's liking. He told them that the only way of safety was to willingly surrender themselves and their city into the hands of the Babylonians. And as the siege continued, Jeremiah fearlessly went to King Zedekiah with the heavy tidings that he himself would surely be taken captive by the master whom he had given his allegiance to and rebelled against, and he would go to Babylon in disgrace. This message is what is recorded here in the first seven verses of this chapter.

Despite the people's obstinate rebellion against the Lord, Jeremiah's vehement words of reproof did arouse their deeply drugged consciences somewhat. So they resolved, at the suggestion of King Zedekiah, to try to make some reparation for their sins by setting their Hebrew slaves free (verses 8-11). The Mosaic law stipulated that every Hebrew manservant or maidservant was to be released after a period of service lasting for six years. But this law had been ignored by the people. Now, however, they summoned a special assembly of the people at the Temple; and there they made a solemn national resolution to release their Hebrew servants, according to the law.

Great joy spread through hundreds of hearts in the city of Jerusalem upon the proclamation of this wonderful news! From among the liberated menservants, a new body of stalwart defenders was raised to assist in the defense of the besieged city. But best of all, the nation had done right in the eyes of the Lord. And within two or three months – to the unbounded joy of the inhabitants – the whole host of Babylonian soldiers left, for the approach of Pharaoh's army caused a diversion that drew the attention of Nebuchadnezzar away from Jerusalem. So the Jews thought that they would never see their foes again, and they most likely derided Jeremiah mercilessly. But what did they do next? They speedily repealed that edict of emancipation that they had solemnly resolved to observe, and compelled their liberated servants and handmaidens to return to their former condition of servitude.



Surely it must have needed uncommon faith and courage for the prophet to raise a bold and uncompromising protest to this treacherous behavior! (verses 12-22) And although they ridiculed him, the consciences of those who opposed him were not yet entirely silenced; they *knew*, in their heart of hearts, that he was indeed speaking the very words of Jehovah Himself. And if they had only listened to the wise advice of this loving shepherd who cared for their souls, things would have turned out a lot better for them than they did. But, as we shall see in the next few chapters, the words of the Lord – spoken through Jeremiah's mouth – did indeed come true! His faithfulness endures to all generations.

Lord, we repent and pray for forgiveness of the times when we behaved treacherously toward You, as the Jews did in the releasing of their Hebrew servants. Amen.