

Journey through Jeremiah Part 39, Prophecy Concerning Zedekiah

A sermon series by Pastor Byron Chesney, Th.D. – Wednesday, Sept. 27, 2017

† Jeremiah 34:1-22

1 The word which came unto Jeremiah from the LORD, when Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and all his army, and all the kingdoms of the earth of his dominion, and all the people, fought against Jerusalem, and against all the cities thereof, saying,
2 Thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel; Go and speak to Zedekiah king of Judah, and tell him, Thus saith the LORD; Behold, I will give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire:

We have been discussing this prophecy all throughout our studies. It is the one where the LORD tells Jeremiah to inform King Zedekiah that Nebuchadnezzar will take Jerusalem, burn it, and will also carry the King into captivity. This is one of the reasons why the King had Jeremiah locked up.

3 And thou shalt not escape out of his hand, but shalt surely be taken, and delivered into his hand; and thine eyes shall behold the eyes of the king of Babylon, and he shall speak with thee mouth to mouth, and thou shalt go to Babylon.

We will eventually get there in our studies but we read where this prophecy was fulfilled in **Jeremiah 52:4-11**

4 And it came to pass in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, in the tenth day of the month, *that* Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came, he and all his army, against Jerusalem, and pitched against it, and built forts against it round about.

5 So the city was besieged unto the eleventh year of king Zedekiah.

6 And in the fourth month, in the ninth day of the month, the famine was sore in the city, so that there was no bread for the people of the land.

7 Then the city was broken up, and all the men of war fled, and went forth out of the city by night by the way of the gate between the two walls, which *was* by the king's garden; (now the Chaldeans *were* by the city round about:) and they went by the way of the plain.

8 But the army of the Chaldeans pursued after the king, and overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho; and all his army was scattered from him.

9 Then they took the king, and carried him up unto the king of Babylon to Riblah in the land of Hamath; where he gave judgment upon him.

10 And the king of Babylon slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes: he slew also all the princes of Judah in Riblah.

11 Then he put out the eyes of Zedekiah; and the king of Babylon bound him in chains, and carried him to Babylon, and put him in prison till the day of his death.

Not only do we read the account in Jeremiah of Zedekiah being taken by Nebuchadnezzar but it is also recorded in: **2 Kings 25:1-7**

1 And it came to pass in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, in the tenth day of the month, *that* Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came, he, and all his host, against Jerusalem, and pitched against it; and they built forts against it round about.

2 And the city was besieged unto the eleventh year of king Zedekiah.

3 And on the ninth day of the fourth month the famine prevailed in the city, and there was no bread for the people of the land.

4 And the city was broken up, and all the men of war fled by night by the way of the gate between two walls, which *is* by the king's garden: (now the Chaldees *were*

against the city round about:) and *the king* went the way toward the plain.

5 And the army of the Chaldees pursued after the king, and overtook him in the plains of Jericho: and all his army were scattered from him.

6 So they took the king, and brought him up to the king of Babylon to Riblah; and they gave judgment upon him.

7 And they slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him with fetters of brass, and carried him to Babylon.

So, Zedekiah meets a pretty horrible end. The last thing he ever saw was his sons being killed and then he has his eyes gouged out and is bound and locked up in prison until he died.

4 Yet hear the word of the LORD, O Zedekiah king of Judah; Thus saith the LORD of thee, Thou shalt not die by the sword: 5 *But* thou shalt die in peace: and with the burnings of thy fathers, the former kings which were before thee, so shall they burn odours for thee; and they will lament thee, *saying*, Ah lord! for I have pronounced the word, saith the LORD.

Now, these verses may seem contradictory considering the other verses that we just read about Zedekiah's ending, however, when it is speaking of him dying in "peace," that just means he would not die by sword or die violently, but would just pass away peacefully. -- He also is promised that he will receive a proper burial fit for a King with the burning of incense and people will gather together and weep and mourn for him.

6 Then Jeremiah the prophet spake all these words unto Zedekiah king of Judah in Jerusalem, 7 When the king of Babylon's army fought against Jerusalem, and against all the cities of Judah that were left, against Lachish, and against Azekah: for these defenced cities remained of the cities of Judah.

Jeremiah delivered these words to Zedekiah in the midst of the Chaldeans plundering the cities around Jerusalem. There were just a couple of cities left that had not been ransacked by Nebuchadnezzar; Lachish, and Azekah.

8 *This is* the word that came unto Jeremiah from the LORD, after that the king Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people which *were* at Jerusalem, to proclaim liberty unto them; 9 That every man should let his manservant, and every man his maidservant, *being* an Hebrew or an Hebrewess, go free; that none should serve himself of them, *to wit*, of a Jew his brother.

This is describing a "covenant" that the king made with the people that they should let any of their slaves go free at this time. The King was actually following the law as prescribed in **Deuteronomy 15:12** *And if thy brother, an Hebrew man, or an Hebrew woman, be sold unto thee, and serve thee six years; then in the seventh year thou shalt let him go free from thee.*

The same law also applied in the year of Jubilee: **Leviticus 25:38-43**: *I am* the LORD your God, which brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, to give you the land of Canaan, *and* to be your God. 39 And if thy brother *that dwelleth* by thee be waxen poor, and be sold unto thee; thou shalt not compel him to serve as a bondservant: 40 *But* as an hired servant, *and* as a sojourner, he shall be with thee, *and* shall serve thee unto the year of jubile: 41 *And then* shall he depart from thee, *both* he and his children with him, and shall return unto his own family, and unto the possession of his fathers shall he return. 42 For they *are* my servants, which I brought forth out of the land of Egypt: they shall not be sold as bondmen. 43 Thou shalt not rule over him with rigour; but shalt fear thy God.

Don't you find it strange that this King is willing to follow the law concerning the slaves yet he has no problem with all of the other laws that he has broken and those that he is allowing to be broken by the people in Judah?

Well, there may have been other motives behind it though. There are a few possibilities of why the King would want all the slaves to be released at this particular time.

1. He may have thought if he was obedient to the law that the LORD would reward them by not allowing the Chaldeans to overtake them.
2. He may have thought if the slaves were released that they would be more willing to fight when Nebuchadnezzar and the Chaldeans invade the city.
3. He may have been planning on driving all of the slaves out of the city so they would not be a burden on the more well-off folks when it came time for rationing food and supplies.

10 Now when all the princes, and all the people, which had entered into the covenant, heard that every one should let his manservant, and every one his maidservant, go free, that none should serve themselves of them any more, then they obeyed, and let *them* go. 11 But afterward they turned, and caused the servants and the handmaids, whom they had let go free, to return, and brought them into subjection for servants and for handmaids.

Well, whatever the reason the King made the covenant to release all of the slaves, it didn't work. The people that entered the covenant and released their slaves, changed their minds and made them come back as their slaves again. This was a big mistake. Because they have defied the law, they have invoked the anger of the LORD.

This covenant was made under a solemn vow in the LORD's house in front of witnesses. It was a real covenant, a contract if you will, with the LORD. When we get to verse 18 we will see more about how they performed the covenant.

12 Therefore the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, 13 Thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel; I made a covenant with your fathers in the day that I brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondmen, saying, 14 At the end of seven years let ye go every man his brother an Hebrew, which hath been sold unto thee; and when he hath served thee six years, thou shalt let him go free from thee: but your fathers hearkened not unto me, neither inclined their ear.

15 And ye were now turned, and had done right in my sight, in proclaiming liberty every man to his neighbour; and ye had made a covenant before me in the house which is called by my name:

16 But ye turned and polluted my name, and caused every man his servant, and every man his handmaid, whom ye had set at liberty at their pleasure, to return, and brought them into subjection, to be unto you for servants and for handmaids.

The LORD is not pleased with the people of Judah defying his law. He instituted it for a reason. Anyone Hebrew that was made a slave, was made that way because they were not able to pay their debts, God allows for a temporary enslavement which would allow them to pay off their debts.

All of the Hebrews were God's people. It was His plan to bless all of them and for all of them to be free. God had set the Hebrews free from the bondage of Egypt when he led them out of that land. By instituting these laws, it assured that everyone had opportunities to live a more abundant life of freedom.

Jesus does the same thing for us today. He breaks our bonds of sin and sets us free. Paul reminded this to the Galatians over in: **Galatians 5:1** Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.

17 Therefore thus saith the LORD; Ye have not hearkened unto me, in proclaiming liberty, every one to his brother, and every man to his neighbour: behold, I proclaim a liberty for you, saith the LORD, to the sword, to the pestilence, and to the famine; and I will make you to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth.

The LORD pronounces judgement upon those that broke the covenant. The punishment will fit the crime. Just as Jesus said in **Matthew 7:2** For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.

18 And I will give the men that have transgressed my covenant, which have not performed the words of the covenant which they had made before me, when they cut the calf in twain, and passed between the parts thereof, 19 The princes of Judah, and the princes of Jerusalem, the eunuchs, and the priests, and all the people of the land, which passed between the parts of the calf; 20 I will even give them into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of them that seek their life: and their dead bodies shall be for meat unto the fowls of the heaven, and to the beasts of the earth.

It was the custom of the Hebrews, when they made a covenant, they would take an animal and cut it in two pieces. You can read about Abraham doing this back in Genesis chapter 15. But, they would cut the animal in half, such as the calf mentioned here in Jeremiah, then they would walk between the two pieces. When they did this, they were in essence saying; *"If I break this covenant, may the same thing be done to me as this animal."*

The LORD is making them keep up their end of the covenant, since they broke it, now they must abide by the rules of it. He said that their **dead bodies would be meat unto the fowls of heaven, and to the beasts of the earth.**

21 And Zedekiah king of Judah and his princes will I give into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of them that seek their life, and into the hand of the king of Babylon's army, which are gone up from you. 22 Behold, I will command, saith the LORD, and cause them to return to this city; and they shall fight against it, and take it, and burn it with fire: and I will make the cities of Judah a desolation without an inhabitant.

It is obvious that the LORD is not going to change his mind. He is going to do just exactly as He said He would do and would allow Nebuchadnezzar and the Chaldean army to invade Jerusalem, destroy it, burn it, and slay or take the people as slaves into Babylon, and that includes King Zedekiah.

Well, believe it or not we only have 18 more chapter to go in this great Book of Jeremiah. If I calculated it correctly there should be around 23 or 24 more lessons out of this Book. That should put us right around the middle of February of next year when we finish.

† All Scripture from the Authorized King James Version of the Bible