

Lesson 6:

Part Three

Zedekiah, The Conquest And Its Immediate Aftermath

The Historical Setting

1. Egypt held sway over Judah during Jehoiakim's early years. After the death of Josiah at Megiddo, Jehoahaz was put on the throne by the Jews only to be replaced by Eliakim (renamed Jehoiakim) on Pharaoh Necho's return from his unsuccessful sortie to Haran. Jehoiakim then became Necho's vassal paying tribute to Egypt.
2. However, the Battle of Carchemish (605) removed Egypt from the equation (2 Ki 24:7). Jehoiakim initially submitted to the Babylonians, but rebelled after three years. Although raiding parties were sent to punish the rebellion (2 Ki 24:1-2), Nebuchadnezzar did not lay siege to Jerusalem until the reign of Jehoiachin.
4. Jehoiachin had reigned only three months when the Babylonian army appeared. He went out of the city, presumably thinking to compose the differences and submit to Nebuchadnezzar but to no effect. He was taken into exile along with thousands of Judah's skilled workmen and soldiers in 597 (2 Ki 24:8-17). Ezekiel was among these captives (Eze 1:1-3).
5. After the rebellion of Zedekiah, who had been left on the throne by Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonians again returned. In 586 Jerusalem was destroyed.
6. This outline provides the background for the remaining readings from Jeremiah. He lived through it all. The last of the passages date from the time after Jerusalem's destruction.

First Group Of Readings: Jer 24; 27; 28; 29; 31; 34

R1: 24 - The Two Baskets Of Fruit

The Vision: Two Baskets Of Figs (1-3)

1. The vision was received after the carrying away of Jehoiachin.
2. Two baskets of figs were placed in front of the Temple i.e. the meeting place between God and His people (Ex 29:42-43). In one are very good figs and in the other figs which are so bad that they could not be eaten.

The good figs explained as representing those carried away captive (4-7)

Certain promises were made saying (4-5) I will -

- "Set My eyes on them for good" and "bring them back to this land" (6).

- "Give them a heart to know Me, that I [am] the LORD; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God, for they shall return to Me with their whole heart" (7).

The bad figs explained as standing for the residue in Jerusalem and those in Egypt (8-10)

It must have seemed that those who had been taken into exile had been taken out of the picture; they were scattered in foreign lands. If the nation were to have any future, this hope must lie in those who remained. Ezekiel records that this line of thinking was being expressed by those that were still in Jerusalem (Eze 11:14-22; nn. 15). However, Jeremiah took a position that was contrary to appearances. Faith in God would require that the Jews must trust God rather than appearances.

R2: 27 - Judah And Adjacent Nations To Serve Nebuchadnezzar

Message To Foreign Kings Through Their Ambassadors (1-11)

1. Some versions including NKJV incorrectly read "Jehoiakim" (1). However, this is a copyist error and should read "Zedekiah" as in vs. 3, 12.

2. Translations differ as to whether there was a gathering of ambassadors in Jerusalem. If so, they had likely come together to discuss the possibility of revolt against Nebuchadnezzar. Jeremiah was instructed to make a collection of yokes and put one of these on his own neck. The rest he gave to the envoys of the neighbouring nations who had come to Zedekiah (3) with a message that they were to take to their masters. These nations were to be subject to the Babylonians until their time came. Then they in turn would be made subject to other nations (1-7). Back in the fourth year of Jehoiakim (ch. 25), Jeremiah had prophesied that Babylon was going to subjugate this part of the world for seventy years.
3. These nearby nations had their own false prophets who would counsel against submission but they were warned not to listen to their words. Accepting the yoke of service was the only route to living in their own lands (8-11). Nebuchadnezzar was content to put conquered nations under tribute, except where there was stubborn resistance (cf. 2 Ki 24:1 with vs. 10-16 and 2 Ki 25:1-7).

The Same Message To Zedekiah (12-15)

Message Repeated To Priests And People Of Judah (16-22)

1. False prophets were also presenting a contrary message. They told the people that the items removed from the Temple would soon be returned from Babylon (16; cf. 28:3).and encouraged revolt which would result in Jerusalem's ruin (17).
2. What these prophets would be doing if they were true prophets (18-20).
3. Jehovah's intentions regarding the remaining furnishings (21-22).

R3: 28 - Controversy With The False Prophet, Hananiah

Hananiah's Prophecy (1-4)

He predicted that Jehovah would break the yoke of the king of Babylon and return the Temple furnishings within two years (1-3), specifically contradicting Jeremiah's prophecy of 27:16-17. Jehovah would also return Jehoiachin with all those taken captive.

Jeremiah's Answer And Hananiah's Response (5-16)

1. He sarcastically wished that all Hananiah had predicted would come to pass (5-6).
2. But earlier prophets had only predicted war and disaster and not peace. Therefore, only threatening prophecies could be presumed true because only messages of this character would agree with what had gone before (7-8).
3. The prophet predicting peace could only be recognised as from Jehovah if his message was realised (9).
4. Hananiah's Retort (10-11).

The Prophecy Against Hananiah (12-16)

1. Rather than responding in kind, Jeremiah goes away and waits for a prophecy from Jehovah. Then he returned (12).
2. The message:
 - Re the nations. Their wooden yokes would be replaced with ones of iron (13-14).
 - To Hananiah. He had caused the people to believe lies. Therefore, within a year he would die because he had preached rebellion (15-16).

The Death Of Hananiah (17)

R4: 29 - Letters To Those In Exile

Setting

1. As was true in Judah, false prophets kept alive the hope of a speedy end to Babylonian domination and a quick return of the captives. Jeremiah wrote in order to counter this influence which would diminish the chastising effect of the exile.

2. The exact time of writing is not given but it is likely to have been during the early part of Zedekiah's reign (29:2). Note that Jeconiah is an alternative name for Jehoiachin.
3. Ezekiel began preaching among the captives in the fifth year of the captivity which would equate to Zedekiah's fifth year (Eze 1.1-3).

The First Letter (29:1-23).

Introduction To Jeremiah's Letter (1-3)

Zedekiah sent Letters to Nebuchadnezzar and Jeremiah took advantage of the situation to send his own communication. Since Zedekiah travelled in person to Nebuchadnezzar's court in his fourth year (51:59), it is likely that these letters were sent before then.

The Captives Counselling To Prepare For A Long Stay In Babylon And To Seek Babylon's Peace And Prosperity (4-7)

Warning Against Putting Trust In The False Prophets (8-9)

Justification For The Preceding Counsel (10-14)

Jehovah had plans for the people's future good, but they would be effected only after seventy years (10-11) but their fulfilment would be dependent upon the Jews returning to Him with their whole heart (12-14).

The Final Doom Pronounced Upon Jerusalem And Its Remaining Inhabitants (15-20)

1. V. 15 shows the reason and occasion for such an announcement to the captives in Babylon and v. 16 that Jeremiah's prediction was in direct opposition to the false prophets operating there. These prophets were evidently supporting their claim that it would be a short captivity by appealing to the continued existence of the kingdom. The throne of David was still occupied, and some Jews lived in Jerusalem - The city had survived so that the Temple treasures and the exiled people could easily be returned.
2. Jeremiah decisively undermined their argument by predicting that those who remained would be scattered among the nations (17-20).

Punishment Of The False Prophets In Babylon (21-23)

1. These false prophets would become so odious and detestable to some that their end would be a curse wished upon enemies.
2. Roasted in fire is explained by Dan 3:6 and was evidently a form of Babylonian execution.

A Second Letter In Response To The Message Of The False Propheet Shemaiah (29:24-32).

1. Some time passed between the sending of the first and second letters. Shemaiah, stung by Jeremiah's condemnation and rebuttal in the first, wrote letters to the people in Judah, and particularly Zephaniah, instructing that Jeremiah be punished (24-28).
2. Zephaniah's motivation is not known. He does not appear to be on unfriendly terms with Jeremiah and read the letter to him (29; 37:3).
3. Jehovah's pronouncement concerning Shemaiah and his descendants (30-32).

R5: 21 - Prophecy During The Siege Of Jerusalem

Setting

From 21:1 the book deals with prophecies after the reign of Josiah. They are not arranged in chronological order.

The Occasion For The Following Prediction (1-2)

Jerusalem was under siege (4). King Zedekiah ignoring warnings (ch. 27), rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar. He sent messengers to Jeremiah asking him to enquire of Jehovah.

Response To The King's Hope That Jehovah Would Deliver Them (3-7)

1. The ASV renders v. 4: "Thus saith Jehovah, the God of Israel, Behold, I will turn back the weapons of war that are in your hands, wherewith ye fight against the king of Babylon, and against the Chaldeans that besiege you, without the walls; and I will gather them into the midst of this city." Evidently some of the Jews were outside the walls fighting against the Babylonians. These would be chased back into the city.
2. Far from helping, Jehovah would Himself turn against them (5) as Jeremiah goes on to detail (6-7).

Counsel To The People As To How They May Escape Ruin And Death (8-10)

1. Whoever leaves the city and defects to the Babylonians will live (8-9). The city would be given into the hands of their enemies and burned (10).
2. For further passages on this frequently given advice and the charge made against the prophet see 38:1-4, 17-19.

Exhortation To The Royal Family Concerning How Destruction Could Yet Be Averted (11-12)

Execute justice. Such preaching perhaps caused the temporary freeing of the slaves as a token obedience (34:8-11). But the slaves were subsequently taken back. This change of heart perhaps coincided with the temporary lifting of the siege (34:21-22; 37:5).

The Decree Against Jerusalem (13-14)

To rely on Jerusalem's favoured location was useless, the strength of the city would not save her.

R6: 34 - Two Prophecies In Connection With The Siege And Destruction Of Jerusalem**A Word For Zedekiah Concerning The Outcome Of The Siege And His Own Fate (1-7)**

1. This time Zedekiah did not send to Jeremiah, but Jehovah sent the prophet to him with a message. Resistance against the Babylonians was hopeless. The city would be burned but he would see the king with his own eyes and be taken to Babylon (1-3).
2. Jehovah's promise to Zedekiah (4-6). He would die peacefully and have an honourable funeral (cf. 22:18-19).
3. The desperate state of Judah (7). The only other fortified cities still holding out were Lachish and Azekah.

Prophecy Regarding The Liberation Of Slaves (8-22)*Occasion Of The Prophecy (8-11)*

Zedekiah made a covenant with the people that all Hebrew slaves should be saved. Perhaps that was to impress God in the hope that the siege would be lifted (cf. 21:1-12).

The Breach Of Faith Set Before The People (12-16)

Jeremiah reminded the people of the provision of the Mosaic Law requiring them to set free any countryman who was in bondage to them in the seventh year of their service (Ex 21:2; Dt 15:12). By forcing the freed slaves back into service, they had even broken the covenant they had personally made in the Temple. Perhaps this re-enslaving coincided with the brief lifting of the siege when the Babylonians withdrew to deal with the Egyptian threat (21-22; cf. 37:5).

The Curse To Come For Violation Of Their Sworn Covenant (17-22)

1. Jehovah proclaims His liberty to the Jews - a freedom to fall by the sword and pestilence etc. (17). They were God's servants brought under His protection but now He sets them free (Lev 25:55).
2. Having loosed the Jews from His protection, Jehovah now resolved to give them over to their enemies (18-22). Barnes comments concerning the reference to Genesis 15:10 (18) as follows: "The Jews spoke of "cutting" a covenant, because the contracting parties cut a calf in twain and passed between the pieces. Thus cutting a covenant and cutting a calf in twain, meant the same thing."