

## Lesson 7: Part Three

### Zedekiah, The Conquest And Its Immediate Aftermath

#### **First group of readings: Jer 37-39 - The experiences and Words of Jeremiah During the Siege and Capture of Jerusalem**

##### **R1: 37 - During the temporary withdrawal of the Babylonian army**

*The attitude towards Jehovah's word during Zedekiah's time (1-2).*

neither the king, his servants nor the people of the land gave heed to it.

*Zedekiah's appeal to Jeremiah (3-5)*

1. This embassy is to be distinguished from that detailed earlier (34:1-2). Both prophecies are set at a time when the Babylonians had departed (cf. 34:21-22 with 37:5; see also Eze 17:5).
2. With the Babylonian army withdrawn from the walls, Zedekiah saw hope. Perhaps he was reminded of the circumstances in which Isaiah successfully interceded for the relief of Samaria (Isa 37:1-7).

*The reply from Jehovah (6-10)*

1. All hope is extinguished. The purpose of Pharaoh's army is stated to be to help Judah, but that help was of no value. They would go back to their own lands (6-7).
2. The Babylonians who had temporarily withdrawn would return and even if their remaining forces consisted of only mortally wounded men, they would burn the city (8-10).

*Jeremiah arrested and imprisoned (11-15)*

1. The temporary raising of the siege gave the city inhabitants the chance to leave. Jeremiah took advantage of the freedom to claim his share of the "property" in his hometown of Anathoth (11-12). One suggestion is that he was trying to collect the produce of the property belonging to him in readiness for the siege on its resumption, but the meaning is unclear.
2. At the gate he was arrested by a captain of the guard named Irijah and accused of falling away/defecting to the Chaldeans (13). This was a reasonable accusation in the light of Jeremiah's message to the people that the only way to save one's life was to "defect to the Chaldeans" (21:9).
3. On being brought to the princes, they struck him and put him in prison (14-15). Their action implies a hardening of attitude towards Jeremiah in the princes since the days of Jehoiakim (26:16, 24; 36:11-19, 25). These are different individuals in ch. 34. Some of those of Jehoiakim's reign had been in Josiah's government. But the best of the princes had been carried into captivity with Jehoiachin (2 Ki 24:10-17).

*A secret Interview with Zedekiah and its result (16-21)*

1. Zedekiah brought Jeremiah secretly from the prison and asked if there is any word from Jehovah. The prophet answered that he would be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon (16-17).
2. Note that vs. 17 and 19 suggest that the Babylonians had returned.
3. In response to Jeremiah's request, he was transferred to "the court of the prison." The ASV "court of the guard" with "watch" as a marginal note. Here he was to be given a piece of bread daily while food remained (18-21).

##### **R2: 38 - The final stages of the siege**

*Introductory note*

The situation in chapter 38: The number of fighting men was evidently greatly reduced (4) and this was a source of concern to Zedekiah. Famine had set in (9); the number of deserters had become large (19) - all of these factors indicating that it was the closing period of the siege.

*Jeremiah cast into a miry pit (1-6)*

1. Though confined, the prophet was able to repeat his message to those who came to visit (2-3), a message which alarmed some (1).
2. A charge of treason brought to the king - "he is weakening the hands" i.e., lowering morale (4). This contained some truth because doubtless these words would make men unwilling to sacrifice their lives for a hopeless cause, the defence of a doomed city. But this was unjust. He was not speaking on behalf of himself but God. It was a message declared out of love for his countrymen expressing a personal conviction that they could only be saved by submission to Babylon. He sought to weaken not a heroic courage fed by trust in God but a stubborn obstinacy which could only lead to their ruin.
3. Faced by the demand for Jeremiah's death, Zedekiah capitulated and allowed the prophet's accusers to do as they felt fit (5).
4. Jeremiah let down into a "dungeon", better "pit", ASV marg. (6). As Gill put it: "Here the princes cast the prophet, in order that he should perish, either with famine or suffocation, or the noisomeness of the place; not caring with their own hands to take away the life of a prophet, and for fear of the people; and this being a more slow and private way of dispatching him, they chose it; for they designed no doubt nothing less than death ..."

*The prophet Rescued by Ebed-Melech, But Kept in the Court of the Guard (7-13)*

After being freed from the pit, Jeremiah was returned to the court of the guard from whence he had been taken (37:21).

*The Last meeting Between Jeremiah and Zedekiah (14-28)*

1. The king's enquiry and guarantee of safety (14-16).
2. The word from Jehovah - surrender to the Babylonians, save your life and preserve the city (17-23).
  - The king's concern and assurance given (19-20).
  - The consequences if he failed to surrender (21-23). The women left in the royal house would be taken by the Babylonians. These women would identify what had led to his present predicament. His advisers had led him into this hopeless struggle with the Babylonians and now that the cause was lost had deserted him (20-23).
4. Zedekiah's final order (24-27). The spineless character exhibited here and in v. 5 guaranteed that the outcome of the interview would be fruitless.

**R3: 39 - Jerusalem falls***The fate of Jerusalem and its rulers (1-10)*

1. A summary of the capture of the city (1-3).
  - In the tenth month of the ninth year of Zedekiah's reign, Nebuchadnezzar began the siege (1).
  - In the fourth month of the eleventh, eighteen months later, the walls were breached (2; on vs. 1-2 comp. 52:4-7 and 2 Ki 25:1-4).
  - Then certain of the Babylonian princes took up a position in the middle gate (3).
  - Notice that this is a condensed account of the destruction of the city.
2. The fate of Zedekiah and the city inhabitants (4-10)
  - On seeing the imminent danger posed by the entry of the Chaldeans, Zedekiah fled Jerusalem by night with the men of war only to be captured and taken to Nebuchadnezzar in the land of Hamath to be judged. Here he saw the killing of his sons before his eyes were removed after which he was taken to Babylon (4-7).
  - The palace and the people's houses were burned down (8). This happened in the fifth month (52:12-13; 2 Ki 25:8-10).

- Nebuzaradan carried away captive those who had defected to the Babylonians and the remnant who remained in the city. Only the very poorest were left behind and these he treated generously (9-10).

*Provision made for Jeremiah (11-14)*

*A message of encouragement to Ebed-Melech (15-18)*

Jehovah's promise is explained by the bravery of Ebed-Melech on Jeremiah's behalf earlier in the siege (38:7-13). The prophecy was delivered before the taking of the city but is perhaps inserted here so as not to break the sequence of events.

## **Second group of readings: Jer 40-44 - Words and experiences of Jeremiah after Jerusalem was taken**

### **R1: Chs. 40-41 The Governorship and Assassination of Gedaliah**

*A fuller account of the release of Jeremiah (40: 1-6; cf. 39:11-14)*

1. Jeremiah taken to Ramah (1-3).

- This more detailed account shows that Jeremiah was not immediately freed to Gedaliah's care (39:14) but first taken to Ramah in chains along with those destined for Babylonian captivity (1). Ramah was likely located about five miles north of Jerusalem.
- The conclusion drawn by the captain of the guard (2-3).

2. Jeremiah returns to Judah (4-6).

- Nebuzaradan is carrying out Nebuchadnezzar's order (4; 39:11-12).
- "When I did not answer... (ESV)" (5). There seems to have been some initial indecision on Jeremiah's part which the captain of the guard ended as verses 5 and 6 describe.

*The return of fugitives and Peaceful Settlement Under Gedaliah (40:7-12)*

1. Encouragement given to those who had borne arms against the Babylonians and subsequently fled (7-10). Gedaliah assures them of safety and protection provided they accept Babylonian rule and peaceably work the land.

2. Likewise, to those who had sought refuge in adjacent countries (11-12).

*Gedaliah Forewarned of an Assassination Plot (40:13-16)*

Johanan alerted the governor that Baalis the king of Ammon had sent Ishmael to kill him, but Gedaliah did not believe it. Notice that Ishmael was of "the royal family" and so may well have been motivated by jealousy thinking that Gedaliah had no right to this office (41:1).

*Gedaliah murdered together with Certain Jews and some Chaldeans at Mizpah (41:1-3)*

Despite the warning, Ishmael was received hospitably, and no precautions are mentioned as being taken.

*Some visitors from the north slaughtered and those left in Mizpah Carried Away Captive (41:4-10)*

1. Ishmael's plan (4-7).

- Unaware of Gedaliah's death, some eighty men came with sacrifices expecting to offer them, likely on the site where the Temple had stood. They were in mourning for the destroyed Temple and perhaps also for the deported Jews. Though the shaving of their beards and the rending of their clothes was in accord with the law, the cutting of themselves was not (4-5; cf. Lev 19:28; Dt 14:1).
- Ishmael went out to meet them and faking grief invited them to meet Gedaliah but instead treacherously killed them (6-7).

2. Eight survived (8-10).

*Defeat of Ishmael by Johanan, Liberation of the Captives, and the Plan to go to Egypt (41:11-18)*

1. Johanan took his forces to deal with Ishmael, but he escaped and dwelt among the ammonites (11-15).

2. He and those with him went to a place near Bethlehem intending to go on to Egypt. This because they feared that the Babylonians would come against them on account of Gedaliah's murder (16-18).

## **R2: 42 - The Word of Jehovah Concerning the proposed Flight to Egypt**

### *Request for Guidance (1-6)*

The people had no intention to give the full obedience their words suggest. They had already resolved to go to Egypt. They did not expect that Jehovah would ask them to stay in the land given the current situation. They only sought to determine the best way to pursue their fixed plan, seeking guidance within that narrow framework.

### *Jehovah's answer (7-22)*

1. They were to remain in the land having no fear for their future; that was the way to restoration (7-12).
  - The assurance given (10-12).
  - This would test their faith because the possibility of Babylonian reprisals would be an ever-present threat which flight to Egypt would appear to eliminate. They would have to trust God that He would shield them.
2. The Disaster Certain to Follow relocation to Egypt (13-17).
3. Jehovah's Testimony Against a People with such an attitude (18-22).

## **R3: 43 - Prediction of Nebuchadnezzar's entry into Egypt**

### *The reaction to Jeremiah's Speech—Flight to Egypt (1-7)*

1. Johanan and those with him evaded the obligation to which they had committed themselves (42:1-3; 5-6) by charging Jeremiah with speaking falsely (1-3).
  - What does this teach about the nature of genuine commitment?
2. Disobeying Jehovah's word, Johanan and the captains with him fled as far as Tahpanhes, "on the frontier of Egypt, towards Palestine" (JFB) (4-7).
  - They "took all the remnant of Judah who had returned to dwell in the land of Judah, from all nations where they had been driven—" (5). Barnes comments: "Thus was fulfilled the predictions of Jer 24:8-10, and the sole hope of the nation now centered in the exiles at Babylon."
  - Amongst those taken were Jeremiah and Baruch (6).

### *Revelation at Tahpanhes Regarding the Invasion of Egypt (8-13)*

1. A figurative portrayal of Nebuchadnezzar coming to Egypt and there setting up his throne and court (8-10).
2. When he came, he would not only take the land but deliver all to their appointed end - thus those Jews who had thought to take refuge within that land contrary to Jehovah's express command (11).
3. He would burn the buildings housing their false gods and carry away their idols. This would be done with the ease with which a shepherd puts on his cloak and afterwards he would leave in peace (12-13).

## **R4: 44 - Jeremiah's Last Message, a message against idolatry**

### *Introduction*

Chapter 44 shows that the Jews had completely failed to grasp the significance of the disaster that had befallen Jerusalem.

### *The Threat of Punishment for Idolatry (1-14)*

1. We must assume that some time had elapsed since the prophet had delivered his message at Tahpanhes to allow for the Jews to have settled in various parts of Egypt (1).

- "Migdol, a place near the Red sea, just at the entrance into Egypt, from the land of Canaan, Ex 14:2; called, by Herodotus, Magdulus {w}; and by Adrichomius {x} said to be distant about a mile and a quarter from Pelusium, or Sin, the strength of Egypt, Eze 30:15..." (Gill)
- Noph: "Memphis, now Cairo (Jer 2:16). (JFB)
- "The country of Pathros: A district of Upper Egypt, known by the name of the [Thebais.]..." (Clarke).
- 2. The Jews reminded of the calamities brought upon them by God because of their idolatrous practices (2-6).
- 3. Application to the present (7-10).
- V. 7 makes an interesting argument. Idolatry was not only a sin against God but also contrary to the interests of themselves, their families and their posterity. As Gill put it: "...Hereby they provoked the Lord to anger, to cut off the men that offered incense to idols; and the women their wives, whom they allowed so to do; and their children, who were brought up in the same practices; so that they would have none to succeed them, to bear their name, and inherit their land ..."

*The people's Answer to Jeremiah's Threat (15-19)*

1. The occasion and verdict of the people (15-16).
  - Evidently a festival of some type, "a great multitude" being gathered (15).
  - Their decision regarding the word delivered by Jeremiah: "We will not listen to you" (16).
2. The justification for their action (17-19).
  - They would fulfil their vows and burn incense to the Queen of heaven as they had done in the past for then they were well fed and experienced no trouble (17).
  - but since they had stopped doing that "they had lacked everything" (18).

*Jeremiah's Reply (20-30)*

1. Rebuttal of the people's reasoning (20-23).
  - Did not God remember the idol worship practised throughout the land (20-21).
  - When Jehovah could no longer endure their wickedness, then their land became a desolate and uninhabited place (22).
  - This was the reason for their present predicament (23).
2. The threat of punishment repeated (24-28).
3. A sign of the coming punishment given (29-30).
  - Jehovah would give Pharaoh Hophra into the hand of his enemies as He had Zedekiah into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar.
  - Known by Herodotus as Apries, He reigned as sole king 589-570 B.C. In 568 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar brought his army into Egypt. Following a revolt, Pharaoh Hophra was subsequently strangled.

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