

Jeremiah Chapter 39

Verses 1-10: The fall of Jerusalem occurred in July 587 B.C., after an 18 month siege by the Babylonians. Another account of the fall of Jerusalem appears (in chapter 52), as the appendix to the Book of Jeremiah.

Verses 1-2: "In the ninth year ... in the eleventh year" (compare 34:1, and see note there; compare 52:1-7; 2 Kings 25:1-4). This siege of 30 months involved the enemy's surrounding the city walls, cutting off all entrances and exits, all food supplies, and as much water as possible, so that famine, thirst and disease would eventually weaken the beleaguered city dwellers and they could be easily conquered.

Jeremiah 39:1 "In the ninth year of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the tenth month, came Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and all his army against Jerusalem, and they besieged it."

Several details (in chapter 39), are paralleled in other accounts of Jerusalem's fall. Thus, for the siege of "Jerusalem", the breaching of its walls, and Zedekiah's flight (verses 1-7; see 52:4-11 and 2 Kings 25:1-7). For the looting of the city and the capture of its citizens (verses 8-10; see 52:12-23; 2 Kings 25:8-17; 2 Chron. 36:18-19).

We see from this, that Jeremiah prophesied for about 40 years. Jeremiah is one of the few prophets who actually saw his prophecy fulfilled. Zedekiah reigned for approximately 11 years. This siege on Jerusalem lasted about 18 months.

Jeremiah 39:2 "[And] in the eleventh year of Zedekiah, in the fourth month, the ninth [day] of the month, the city was broken up."

The month Tammuz, which answers to part of June, and part of July.

"The ninth day of the month, the city was broken up": Or taken by storm. The walls of it were broken by engines and battering rams, so that the Chaldeans could enter and take it. This was just a year and a half after it had been besieged as they were not able to hold out any longer, because of the famine (see Jer. 52:6).

A city as fortified as Jerusalem was, could last a good while. In this case, the battle went on for a year and a half.

Jeremiah 39:3 "And all the princes of the king of Babylon came in, and sat in the middle gate, [even] Nergal-sharezer, Samgar-nebo, Sarsechim, Rab-saris, Nergal-sharezer, Rab-mag, with all the residue of the princes of the king of Babylon."

"Sat in the middle gate": This expressed full military occupation of the city, since this gate was between the upper city (Mt. Zion), and the lower city to the north.

The names given here are those of various Babylonian officials. They apparently include: "Nergal-sharezer", the governor of the district of "Samgar-nebo" (or Sinmagir); Nebushazban, the "Rab-saris" (see the note on 2 Kings 18:17); another "Nergal-sharezer"; plus the "Rab-mag" (high military official). The first Nergal-sharezer was probably the brother-in-law of Nebuchadnezzar's son Amel-marduk (562-560 B.C.), who subsequently became king (in 559 B.C.).

This is just listing the names of some of the princes from Babylon who fought against Jerusalem and prevailed.

Jeremiah 39:4 "And it came to pass, [that] when Zedekiah the king of Judah saw them, and all the men of war, then they fled, and went forth out of the city by night, by the way of the king's garden, by the gate betwixt the two walls: and he went out the way of the plain."

That is, when Zedekiah and his soldiers saw the princes and generals of the Chaldean army enter the city through a breach made in the wall, and take possession of the middle gate. Which they might see from some high tower where they were for safety, and to make their observation of the enemy.

"Then they fled": Finding they were not able to keep their posts and resist the enemy.

"And went forth out of the city by night": It being the middle of the night, as before observed, that the city was taken. And they took the advantage of the darkness of the night to make their escape. This they chose rather to do than to surrender to the Chaldeans, and lie at their mercy.

"By the way of the king's garden, by the gate betwixt the two walls": Which lay either between the wall of the city and the outworks, as some. Or between the old wall and the new one Hezekiah built (2 Chron. 32:5), as others. Or rather between the wall of the city and the wall of the king's garden; this being a private way, they took it.

"And he went out the way of the plain": On the south side which led to Jericho. And on which side the king's garden was. Not that he went alone, but his wives, and children, and princes, and men of war with him (see Jer. 52:7).

There seemed to be a secret way between the walls to get out of the city and that is what Zedekiah and probably Zedekiah's sons used.

Verses 5-7: The fall of Jerusalem had serious consequences for Zedekiah and his family as well. Zedekiah attempted to flee by night, but the Babylonians captured him in the plains of Jericho, roughly 15 miles from Jerusalem, and took him north to Hamath in Syria. As prophesied, Nebuchadnezzar executed Zedekiah's sons and then blinded him before taking him away as a prisoner to Babylon.

Jeremiah 39:5 "But the Chaldeans' army pursued after them, and overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho: and when they had taken him, they brought him up to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon to Riblah in the land of Hamath, where he gave judgment upon him."

"Riblah in ...Hamath": Nebuchadnezzar's command headquarters were 230 miles to the north of Jerusalem.

"Gave judgment": He dealt with the king as a common criminal. The king had violated his oath (compare 2 Chron. 36:13; Ezek. 17:13-19).

The plains of Jericho are a short distance from Jerusalem, so Zedekiah had not gone far before he was caught. The Chaldean army took Zedekiah to Nebuchadnezzar to be judged. This might have been because he was a close relative of Nebuchadnezzar.

Verses 6-10 (compare 52:12-16; 2 Kings 25:8-12).

Jeremiah 39:6 "Then the king of Babylon slew the sons of Zedekiah in Riblah before his eyes: also the king of Babylon slew all the nobles of Judah."

Not with his own hands, but gave orders to do it. These must be very young, at least some of them; since Zedekiah at this time was but thirty two years of age. This must be a dreadful spectacle for him to behold. And the consideration must be cutting, that it was owing to his own obstinacy in not taking the advice of the Prophet Jeremiah to surrender to the Chaldeans. Whereby he and his family would have been saved (Jer. 38:17).

"Also the king of Babylon slew all the nobles of Judah": Who did not come over to the Chaldean army and surrender themselves. Such who advised the king to stand out to the last, and who fled, and were taken with him. As many of them as fell into the hands of the king of Babylon. Jarchi says those were the Sanhedrim, who loosed Zedekiah from his oath to Nebuchadnezzar.

There is no greater hurt than to see your sons slain before your eyes. This was a terrible grief to Zedekiah and probably the last act to see with his own eyes. Remember they all could have saved their lives if they had listened to Jeremiah's prophecy from God and heeded it. They did not, so they are paying the ultimate price.

Jeremiah 39:7 "Moreover he put out Zedekiah's eyes, and bound him with chains, to carry him to Babylon."

"Put out Zedekiah's eyes" (this reconciles 32:4 with Ezek. 12:13).

There are worse things than dying and putting out your eyes would be one of the things. It seems Zedekiah would have a long time to regret not heeding the prophet Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 39:8 "And the Chaldeans burned the king's house, and the houses of the people, with fire, and brake down the walls of Jerusalem."

His palace: this was a month after the city was taken, as appears from (Jer. 52:12).

"And the houses of the people, with fire": The houses of the common people, as distinct from the king's house, and the houses of the great men (Jer. 52:13). Though Jarchi interprets this of the synagogues. It is in the original text in the singular number, "the house of the people"; which Abarbinel understands of the temple, called not the house of God, he having departed from it; but the house of the people, a den of thieves.

"And broke down the walls of Jerusalem": Demolished all the fortifications of it, and entirely dismantled it, that it might be no more a city of force and strength, as it had been.

This is a fulfillment of the very thing Jeremiah had prophesied. He said the city would be burned, and that is just what happened.

Jeremiah 39:9 "Then Nebuzar-adan the captain of the guard carried away captive into Babylon the remnant of the people that remained in the city, and those that fell away, that fell to him, with the rest of the people that remained."

The Targum is, "the captain of those that kill"; of the soldiers of the militia. Some render it, the captain of the "cooks"; others, of the "butchers". But no doubt it was a military office he had as he was captain of the forces that were left in Jerusalem, after the other part went in pursuit of the king and those with him. Or the captain of a company, being sent by the king of Babylon to execute a commission of his.

"Carried away into Babylon the remnant of the people that remained in the city": That were left of the pestilence, famine, and sword. And who were found in it when it was taken.

"And those that fell away, that fell to him": That fell to the Chaldean army during the siege of the city. And those that went themselves to Nebuzar-adan, and voluntarily surrendered themselves to him afterwards.

"With the rest of the people that remained": In other cities in the land of Judah.

God will always save a remnant of His people. They were captives, but they were alive.

Jeremiah 39:10 "But Nebuzar-adan the captain of the guard left of the poor of the people, which had nothing, in the land of Judah, and gave them vineyards and fields at the same time."

Because they would have been of no service to the Chaldeans, but a burden to them. And because they had nothing to fear from them. They had no arms to rebel against them, nor money to purchase any. And because it would be to their interest to have the land manured, and not lie waste, that they might have some tribute from it.

"And gave them vineyards and fields at the same time": As their own property to dress and cultivate, and receive the advantage of them. Though very probably a tax was laid upon them. Or they were to pay tribute to the king of Babylon. Or however, contribute out of them to the support of the government that was placed over them. And this was a happy incident in their favor. Here was a strange change of circumstances with them. Though the nation in general was in distress, they, who before had nothing, are now proprietors of vineyards and fields, when the former owners were carried captive. There might be much of the justice of God conspicuous in this affair; such who had been oppressed and ill used by the rich are now retaliated with their possessions. The Targum is, "and he appointed them to work in the fields and in the vineyards in that day."

The poor were left because they were no threat to Nebuchadnezzar. They (in a sense), benefited from the siege. They were given land that they had never been able to have before and they were growing vineyards for themselves instead of working them for someone else. They had nothing the Babylonians wanted so they left them in the land.

11-14: News of Jeremiah's messages advising Judah and Jerusalem to submit to Babylon were doubtless well known to Nebuchadnezzar and his forces (compare 40:1-4). The Lachish Letters (see the note on 34:7), mention the presence of a prophet who appeared to voice a pro-Babylonian sentiment: "And behold" the words of the [prophet] are not good; they reduce morale; they sap the strength of the country and the city". The sparing of Jeremiah and Ebed-melech (verses 11-18), is not recorded in the parallel accounts of Jerusalem's fall.

The Babylonians treated Jeremiah far better than his own countrymen did. The deliverance of Jeremiah was the answer to his prayers for deliverance from his enemies (11:20).

Verses 11-12: Jeremiah's prophecies were known to Nebuchadnezzar through defectors (verse 9, 38:19), and also through Jews taken to Babylon with Jeconiah (compare 40:2).

Jeremiah 39:11 "Now Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon gave charge concerning Jeremiah to Nebuzar-adan the captain of the guard, saying,"

Of whom he had heard, by one or another of his generals or officers. Who had been informed, by those Jews that deserted to them that Jeremiah had prophesied of the taking of the city by the Chaldeans. And had advised the people to give up to them; and had even exhorted the king and princes to surrender up the city, and themselves, unto them. And that he had suffered much on this account. Wherefore the Lord put it into the heart of this monarch, otherwise not at all disposed to the prophets of the Lord, to show regard to him. And therefore, when he sent Nebuzar-adan upon an expedition to Jerusalem, he gave him a particular charge concerning Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 39:12 "Take him, and look well to him, and do him no harm; but do unto him even as he shall say unto thee."

Take him out of prison and take him under your immediate care. Receive him kindly, and treat him humanely. Provide everything necessary for him, and let him not want for anything. Or, "set thine eyes upon him", look pleasantly at him, and let him be always in your sight and observation. Treat him not with neglect and contempt, but see to it that nothing is needed by him.

"And do him no harm": No injury to his person by beating, imprisoning, or starving him. Nor suffer any to be done to him by the common soldiers, or by his own people.

"But do unto him even as he shall say unto thee": Let him have whatever he asks for. This was great favor from a Heathen prince indeed, and more than he met with from his own countrymen.

God is still taking care of Jeremiah. Possibly Nebuchadnezzar had heard of the predictions of Jeremiah. He also knew Jeremiah had tried to get the people to surrender without all this bloodshed. You remember how Zedekiah's sons thought Jeremiah to be a traitor to his country. Perhaps these Babylonians believe he was on their side. Both were wrong, Jeremiah was just bringing the message to the people that God had given him. Now Nebuchadnezzar tells Nebuzar-adan to give Jeremiah whatever he wants.

Jeremiah 39:13 "So Nebuzar-adan the captain of the guard sent, and Nebushasban, Rab-saris, and Nergal-sharezer, Rab-mag, and all the king of Babylon's princes;"

When he was come to Jerusalem, one of the first things he did was, he sent a messenger or messengers to the court of the prison where Jeremiah was, to bring him from thence. And this he did not alone, but with the rest of the princes, who had the same charge, and were joined in the commission with him. Two of them are mentioned by name.

"Nebushasban, Rab-saris and Nergal-sharezer Rab-mag": The latter of these is manifestly one of the princes that first entered Jerusalem, at the taking of it (see note on Jer. 39:3). And perhaps the former is the same with Sarsechim Rab-saris, as Hillerus thinks, mentioned at the same time, who might have two names. Unless we suppose there were two persons in the same office.

"And all the king of Babylon's princes": So that great honor was done to the prophet, to have them all charged with his commission from the king; and to be sent unto, and for, by them all.

Jeremiah 39:14 "Even they sent, and took Jeremiah out of the court of the prison, and committed him unto Gedaliah the son of Ahikam the son of Shaphan, that he should carry him home: so he dwelt among the people."

"Took Jeremiah out of the court": This was given as a general summary, whereas (40:1-6), gave more detail concerning the prophet who was first carried to Ramah (40:1) with the other captives before being released (40:2-5). "Gedaliah" was a former supporter of Jeremiah (26:24), and chief among the defectors, loyal to Nebuchadnezzar, so was made governor (40:5), over the remnant left in the land.

The minister must be with his people. That is why Jeremiah had stayed in Jerusalem. Now he will again be with his people. Jeremiah knew there would be affliction during the siege because he had prophesied it, yet he stayed with his people. Jeremiah is removed from imprisonment.

Verses 15-18: The Lord had also promised to protect and deliver "Ebed-melech" for how he courageously intervened to save Jeremiah's life. The Lord honors those who honor His servants.

(Compare 38:7-13, and see note there).

Jeremiah 39:15 "Now the word of the LORD came unto Jeremiah, while he was shut up in the court of the prison, saying,"

This prophecy was before the taking of the city, and after the prophet had been taken out of the dungeon by Ebed-melech": Though here inserted after the city was taken. And that to show the great regard the Lord has to such who show favor to his prophets. For though we have no account of the accomplishment of this prophecy, there is no doubt to be made of it. And that Ebed-melech was saved from the general destruction, as is here predicted.

This is looking back to the Word God had given him while he was yet imprisoned.

Jeremiah 39:16 "Go and speak to Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will bring my words upon this city for evil, and not for good; and they shall be [accomplished] in that day before thee."

Not that the prophet was to go, or could go, out of prison, to deliver this message to Ebed-melech. But that he should, as he had opportunity, acquaint him with it; either by writing to him, or by word of mouth, when he should visit him. For no doubt he sometimes did, having so great a respect for the prophet.

"Saying, thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel": Whom Ebed-melech, though an Ethiopian, served. Being a proselyte, and a good man. And therefore, would listen unto and believe what came from him.

"Behold, I will bring my words upon this city for evil, and not for good": Meaning the prophecies delivered out by Jeremiah, which Ebed-melech was no stranger to, should be accomplished. Not what promised good, on condition of repentance and amendment; but what threatened evil to the city, and the inhabitants of it, even the destruction of them.

"And they shall be accomplished in that day before thee": Signifying that he should live till then, and his enemies would not be able to take away his life. And that he should see with his eyes all that was predicted accomplished, and he himself safe amidst all this.

We remember that the Ethiopian had saved Jeremiah out of the cistern. This Word is a promise from God, because God saw the Ethiopian's good work with Jeremiah. God would not overlook

protecting someone who had protected His prophet. Surely the city of Jerusalem was to be destroyed and was as we read in the earlier part of this lesson.

Jeremiah 39:17 "But I will deliver thee in that day, saith the LORD: and thou shalt not be given into the hand of the men of whom thou [art] afraid."

As from the famine and pestilence, so from the sword of the Chaldeans, and from all the evil that shall come upon the city in the day of its destruction.

"And thou shalt not be given into the hand of the man of whom thou art afraid": For though he was a bold and fearless man, as appears by his charging the princes and prime ministers of state with having done evil to the prophet, and that in the presence of the king. Yet at times he was not without his fears, which is the case of the best of men. And whereas he knew the courtiers owed him a grudge, for the freedom he took with their characters before the king, and for his friendship to Jeremiah, he might fear they would seek to do him mischief, and contrive his ruin, in some way or another. But here he is assured he should not be given into their hands. Or rather, as Jarchi, into the hands of the Chaldeans. For, as he believed in the Lord and his prophet, so he knew that all that was predicted would certainly come to pass. And that the city, with the king, his nobles, and the inhabitants of it, would fall into the hands of the Chaldeans. He might tremble at the righteous judgments of God, and fear that he himself would become a prey unto them. But here he is assured of the contrary.

The Ethiopian will not suffer in the siege. He would be protected by the LORD. It appears this Ethiopian had feared the Babylonians. That would be a natural thing since his master, Zedekiah, feared them. God will bring the Ethiopian out of the city unharmed.

Jeremiah 39:18 "For I will surely deliver thee, and thou shalt not fall by the sword, but thy life shall be for a prey unto thee: because thou hast put thy trust in me, saith the LORD."

Or, in "delivering will deliver thee". This is a repetition and confirmation of what is promised in (Jer. 39:17), and more fully explains it.

"And thou shall not fall by the sword": By the sword of the Chaldeans, when the city should be taken, as he feared he should.

"But thy life shall be for a prey unto thee": Shall be safe; like a prey taken out of the hand of the mighty, and be enjoyed beyond expectation, having been given up for lost. And therefore, matter of the greater joy, such as is expressed at the taking of spoils.

"Because thou hast put thy trust in me, saith the Lord. The Targum is, "in my word"; what he had done in serving the prophet, and other good actions, sprung from a principle of faith and confidence in the Lord. And this the Lord had a respect unto; without which works are not right; and without which it is impossible to please God with them. And which faith may be, and be true, where fears are.

This Ethiopian had won favor in the sight of the LORD, because he feared God more than man. He had bravely gone to his superior, and saved Jeremiah's life. God is rewarding him now by protecting him from harm.

Nahum 1:7 "The LORD [is] good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him."

To trust in the Lord brings protection beyond the world's comprehension. The following Scripture is the very thing that happened to the Ethiopian.

Psalms 91:7 "A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; [but] it shall not come nigh thee."

Jeremiah Chapter 39 Questions

1. About how many years did Jeremiah prophesy?
2. How many years did Zedekiah reign?
3. How long did the siege on Jerusalem last?
4. When was the city broken up?
5. What is verse 3 a listing of?
6. When Zedekiah saw the men of war, what did he do?
7. Who pursued Zedekiah and captured him?
8. Where did they catch him?
9. Who personally judged Zedekiah?
10. What was done to Zedekiah's sons, before his eyes?
11. What punishment was inflicted on Zedekiah?
12. What happened to the king's house?
13. What happened to the remnant of the people?
14. What happened to the very poor?
15. What did Nebuchadnezzar do to Jeremiah?
16. Whose side was Jeremiah on? Explain.

17. Where had Jeremiah been imprisoned?
18. Where did Jeremiah go?
19. Why had Jeremiah stayed in Jerusalem?
20. What is verse 15?
21. What was the name of the Ethiopian who helped Jeremiah?
22. What did God promise would not happen to him in the siege?
23. Why was the Ethiopian afraid of the Babylonians, probably?
24. Who had the Ethiopian feared more than the king?