

Jeremiah 39:1-18 The Final Day Falls Church AM 11/20/2022

In his previous preaching, Jeremiah had made clear the two choices. 1) Surrender to Babylon and live, or 2) resist and die. Under King Zedekiah, the king, the city and the nation made the wrong choice, except for a precious few.

This chapter provides an ominous, graphic, and concise account of the capture of Jerusalem, her king and her people, and also the protection of Jeremiah and another servant of the Lord, who both trusted in God.

It is God alone who decides what will happen in the final day, both to those who trust in Him, and those who won't.

1. Judgment from God eventually falls on those who will not listen/turn/trust. (v.1-10)

Verse 1, we have the final day for Jerusalem. the fall of Jerusalem was an event of such magnitude that the date of the beginning of the attack on the city are carefully preserved here. Much like we mark December 7 as Pearl Harbor Day, and 9/11 as the day of the attack on America. The ancient timestamp for the fall of Jerusalem was measured by the years of the reign of King Zedekiah, which we know as the year 588BC. We also have the month recorded! Over in the book of Ezekiel, it is even added which day of the month that the siege started! The attack lasted 18 months, so verse 2 refers to 586 BC, for the defeat of Jerusalem. We know from Jeremiah 52 and from the book of Lamentations, chapter 4, that the city was forced to surrender after the food supply was so exhausted that the people were resorting to cannibalism.

Verse 3, one month after the wall of Jerusalem was broken through, the enemy army's generals triumphantly entered the city. They took seats in the main court, the symbolic seat of power. That emotional moment marked the conclusive downfall of Jerusalem. The generals established a military command center at the central gate of Jerusalem. This event is a direct fulfillment of Jeremiah 1:15, where the LORD God said, *"For behold, I am calling all the tribes of the kingdoms of the north, declares the Lord, and they shall come, and every one shall set his throne at the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem, against all its walls all around and against all the cities of Judah."*

It is interesting that Jeremiah listed the names of the Babylonian officials. Their names were formed with the names of false Babylonian gods, such as Nebo and Nergal. So, Nergal-sar-ezer means 'May Nergal protect the king'. This was a group of the high-ranking dignitaries, diplomats, and generals from the enemy. All the people we would expect to be there in order to replace the government.

Verse 4, the King of Jerusalem and Judah, our King Zedekiah, whom we have been studying, tried to flee. At night. Through the king's gardens, and along a deep valley called the Arabah, which seemed like the best escape route.

Verse 5, however, the king was quickly captured. What would you suppose the enemy army would do when they found the highest-ranking official of the region? They brought the king to their boss, the highest-ranking official of the attacking army of Babylon. Who was that? King Nebuchadnezzar! Ominously, and symbolically, the King of Babylon passed sentence on the King of Judah.

Verse 6, the sons of the king were slaughtered, while the king watched. The nobles, too. This is the last thing that King Zedekiah ever saw with his eyes.

Verse 7, they removed the eyes of King of Judah. Next, the king was shackled in chains. Lastly, the king was taken away as a chained prisoner of war to the foreign city of Babylon.

Verse 8, the king's house was burned. The houses of the people were burned. The protective walls surrounding the city of Jerusalem were broken down.

Verse 9, there were two groups of people left in the city. Those who had surrendered to Babylon, and those who had not. Both groups were brought away into exile. This dual exile of those who were going to live and those who were going to die, foreshadows the two outcomes in the final judgment. Listen to the words of Jesus from John 5:28-29, "...*an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear His voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.*"

Verse 10, in those days, some poor people were left behind, because they were not a danger of revolt, and they could provide food for any troops left to monitor the area.

God is not mentioned in these 10 verses. God's judgment operated through the agency of humans in the enemy army. In the process, each of the sinners were facing accountability to God on earth, only to be followed by accountability to God in life beyond this world.

God's wrath caused God to turn His face away. God abandoned the king and the people. How much more profound was the silence of God's abandonment when the sinless Son of God, who was bearing our sins, cried out, "*My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?*" (Mt. 27:46). In the case of Jerusalem, the answer was for their own sins. In the case of Jesus, the answer was for our sins.

Consider the irony of what happened to the king and what happened to the poor starving people. At one level, there is a financial reversal. Like the Virgin Mary sang in Luke 1:52-53, "...*He has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty.*"

The king and the whole of Jerusalem's elite crowd of wealthy, powerful people, had been humbled in the dust of death, while the poorest in the land had been given resources and assets that would help them build viable lives for themselves and their families.

Look who accomplished this reversal. God used a foreigner. God had given the task to His leaders to provide economic fairness and to provide for the needy. But the city of God trampled on those covenant requirements. So, it was a pagan king who gave some real and immediate action toward this ideal. While the “have’s” were taken away into exile for 2 generations, the “have-not’s” were given land! And they receive that land from their conqueror!

2. God’s providential hand cares for His trusting servants. (v.11-17)

Jeremiah received better treatment at the hands of the enemy king than he had received at the hands of his own people, whom Jeremiah loved.

In verses 11 and 12, we have a quote from the King of Babylon regarding Jeremiah, “*Take him, look after him well, and do him no harm...*”

In verses 13-14, the chief officers of Babylon released Jeremiah from the court of the guard, where he had been on house arrest under his own king. They entrusted Jeremiah to the care of Gedaliah, the soon to be governor (40:7), in order to take Jeremiah to his own home and take care of Jeremiah there. Jeremiah was now a free man. Jeremiah was not taken as an exile to Babylon.

Jeremiah knew that the task of tearing down and overthrowing was finished. Now it was time to prepare for building and planting. (Jer. 1:10)

Verses 15-17, we get verses that belong chronologically to the events prior to the fall of Jerusalem. These verses are listed here in order to highlight that God’s Word is true. Not only is God’s word true for judgment, but also God’s Word is true for salvation for those who trust in God. Verse 15 says that back in the time when Jeremiah was still confined in the court of the guard, then the Word of the LORD came to Jeremiah to say what is recorded in verse 16. Say to Ebed the Ethiopian, “*I will fulfill My Words...*” fine. But notice verse 17, where God also said, “*I will deliver You on that day...*”

3. Life is given to us not by our doing, but rather by our trusting. (v.18)

Verse 18, now do you see why Jeremiah organized his book by topic, instead of by timeline? Jeremiah wanted us to see the similarity between God’s care for Jeremiah, and God’s care for this man called Ebed Melech. Ebed-Melech was the one who stood up to the king about the conditions of Jeremiah in a pit and about to die. Ebed-Melech is the one who got together a team of people to lift Jeremiah out of that pit. For this courageous act, he was rewarded. The action of God to declare deliverance for Ebed, is just like our God! It is something King David knew about God and celebrated in songs such as Psalm 37:40, “*The LORD helps [the righteous] and delivers them; He delivers them from the wicked and saves them, because they take refuge in Him.*” David knew it. Jeremiah knew it. Ebed-Melech found out. The righteous are safe. For Ebed, just as for others, his trust in God was his salvation.

It shows how the action of God is two-fold. Consider the double action of God on the Day of the LORD, as we read in Westminster Larger Catechism 83, “Q. 83. What is the communion in glory with Christ which the members of the invisible church enjoy in this life? A. The members of the invisible church have communicated to them in this life the firstfruits of glory with Christ, as they are members of Him their head, and so in Him are interested in that glory which He is fully possessed of; and, as an earnest thereof, enjoy the sense of God's love, peace of conscience, joy in the Holy Ghost, and hope of glory; as, on the contrary, sense of God's revenging wrath, horror of conscience, and a fearful expectation of judgment, are to the wicked the beginning of their torments which they shall endure after death.”

In the flood, God remembered Noah and his family.

In the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, God rescued Lot and his family.

In the wilderness generation, God rescued Joshua/Caleb to enter the land.

In the conquest of the land, the first Canaanite we read about in Joshua was the converted one who Gets saved by God – Rahab and her family.

Why? This is our God. Even while giving out wrath, God remembers mercy. Same here in Jeremiah 39.

In the middle of the engulfing destruction of a city, some poor people are saved, and two others are rescued. Judgment is mixed with salvation.

Jeremiah is saved in verses 11-14, and Ebed-Melech is saved in verses 15-18. Jeremiah was protected by foreigners. Ebed-Melech was himself a foreigner from Ethiopia, and He is saved by direct command of the God of Israel. Why? Because this foreigner was doing what God’s people refused to do – trust in the LORD. The faith of a foreigner is contrasted with the hardened unbelief of God’s own people. The courageous action of this foreigner showed that his faith was in both word and deed. The chapter of Hebrews 11 lists those who trusted in God. Hebrews 11:32, “..time would fail me to tell of....(others)” One of those we could add is Ebed. He fits right in. We could read, “By faith Ebed-Melech stood up to a king, advocated for the life of a prophet, and rescued Jeremiah with old clothes as a buffer between the ropes and Jeremiah’s arms.” Or, in the book of James, when we read about Rahab, who was considered righteous for saving the lives of Israelite spies, we could also read about Ebed, who was considered righteous for what he did in saving a life of a faithful old prophet.

All the righteous are safe, except Jesus the righteous. He died for our sins!

The only time that God appears in chapter 39, is when God speaks. And God is silent to all of Jerusalem on the day that they fell. Instead, what God speaks is addressed to a foreigner. The arrangement of the chapters is not chronological, but rather topical. The topic is, by the time we get to the final day and the destruction of Jerusalem, then God and Israel have nothing more to say to one another! What

God has to say about protecting Jeremiah can be said by a foreigner. And what God has to say Himself, is addressed to a foreigner Ebed the Ethiopian.

Concluding applications:

1. Be assured of God's loving concern and care for you. Matthew 10:30, "*even the hairs of your head are all numbered*" That is not a random detail about a God who has an incredibly detailed inventory of his universe. No, that detail is given to send you a message about your safety. Not a sparrow falls to the ground without God's permission, and not a hair from your head will fall to the ground without God's permission. As for your life and personal safety – God alone decides what happens to you. The apostle Peter, writing to Christians who were scattered and persecuted, wrote in 1 Peter 5:7, that because of God's loving concern for us, we ought to daily be "casting all your anxieties on [God], because He cares for you." It matters to God what happens to you, and God Himself remains involved in making sure that you are kept safe. What about Christians who have died? Right. God keeps us safe ultimately. No promise that we each have 100 years of healthy life on earth. Rather, a promise beyond this life, that we will be kept safe. In the context of persecution and people being killed and jailed, what did Paul and Silas say to the jailer? Acts 16:31, "*Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.*" It does not mean saved from a sword, an arrest, a jail cell, an exile, or a disease. Rather, it means ultimate salvation. In the Final Day. When it counts. How valuable is this assurance! Be assured of God's loving concern and care for you.

2. Consider those in exile reading the book of Jeremiah. What are they thinking when they read chapter 39? In the wisdom of God, chapters 30-33 have been read before the reading of chapter 39. How comforting in exile to read that the hope for the future was expressed by God even before the events of judgment happened! For the believers in exile, reading about the final day was the end of Jerusalem, but no the end of God's covenant, not the end of God's people, not the end of God's temple, not the end of God's Word. Even in exile, God's Word reached God's people! Even in exile, God's covenant covered God's people. Even in exile, God's rebuilding followed God's destruction. Restoration after judgment! Homecoming after exile. Resurrection after death.

3. Know what the Bible says will happen on the final day. The Lord Jesus will return. We will give account to God for our lives. Jesus will separate people one from another "...as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats..." (Mt. 25:32) There will be two kinds of people on the final day, righteous and unrighteous. Some will be saved, others will be lost forever. Some will enter heaven's gates, others will be condemned to an eternal hell of fire. The burning of Jerusalem is a picture of the final day, the final judgment of God. Like King Zedekiah, some people will think that they can run away and escape God's judgment. They doubt

the personal return of Jesus Christ to judge the world. They deny the existence of hell, claiming that they know God is nicer than that. They think that they are good enough to get into heaven. This chapter stands as a Biblical warning to all hopes of escaping the coming judgment of God. Right up to the very end, King Zedekiah could have repented. God repeatedly sent Jeremiah to Zedekiah and pleaded with him to turn to God in faith and repentance. The king rejected every invitation.

God is giving us the same opportunity that He gave Zedekiah. Confess your sins, trust in Jesus, and escape the coming judgment.

What the Bible says about the final day is that it is a dual day. It is a day of judgment for some, while at the same time being a day of salvation for others.

Keep that in mind. That is important to know.

The same day – simultaneously judgment and salvation.

As ancient Jerusalem burned, God brought out Jeremiah and Ebed-Melech.

This was an Old Testament hint that God offers salvation in Jesus Christ to all the nations of the world.

The New Testament confirms it when in Acts 8:26-40, the man whom Philip baptized was also a man from Ethiopia. In the final day, all nations will be judged, but also in the final day, there will be people saved from every tribe, people, and nation.

Here is one more thing about what will happen on the final day, that is taught in both Old Testament and New Testament. God is looking for those who trust in Him. Jeremiah 39:18, Ebed was saved not because of his actions, but because he put his trust in God. Same thing is taught in the New Testament in Ephesians 2:8-9, *“by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast...”*