

## Message #43

## Jeremiah 39:1-18

**When God makes a prophetic prediction, He ALWAYS fulfills it literally.** Jeremiah was a prophet of God who had been proclaiming for years that Jerusalem would be conquered and destroyed by the Babylonians. He predicted this clear back in chapter 1, some 40 years earlier (1:14).

The people did not like that message and they did not like Jeremiah. However, that was the message God gave. **We may be certain of this reality, when God sends a prophetic message, He will fulfill it literally.** God's prophetic messages are not symbolic, they are not allegorical, they are all literal.

Now this is a very significant moment in Israel's history and in the eschatological program of God, as pointed out by C. I. Scofield. In Luke 21:24, Jesus predicted that "Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled." **This is the beginning of what is called "the times of the Gentiles."** This is the time in history when God began to allow the Gentile world to dominate Israel. This domination is still going on this very hour.

What has prompted God to cause this is the blatant rejection of the word of God. It is the blatant rejection of God's word and the rebellion against God's word by Israel that is the reason for every bit of this. Had Israel listened to the men of God, who expounded the word of God, she would not be in the mess she is in. What we clearly see from this text is this:

**IF GOD'S PEOPLE CONTINUE TO REJECT HIS WORD AND PERSIST IN SIN, GOD WILL FULFILL HIS WORD LITERALLY AND HE WILL SEND HIS CHASTISING JUDGMENT.**

We are living in a time when we are rapidly heading to the judgment of God. There are not too many who actually care about what the Bible actually says. There is a lot of religion and there is a lot of religious action, but there are not too many who are really interested in what the Scriptures actually say. The word of God is not taken seriously and it is all heading toward the judgment of God.

Jeremiah had been proclaiming and predicting the downfall and destruction of Jerusalem since the days of Josiah in 627 BC, the 13<sup>th</sup> year of his reign (Jeremiah 1:2). **At this point in time it is 40-41 years later, 587-586 BC and judgment time had arrived.** Jeremiah has been proclaiming and illustrating that judgment would come against Jerusalem for the past 40-41 years and now the judgment was literally here.

Now we know in every nation that many cities are destroyed over time. It is estimated that there are 3,800 "ghost towns" in the United States. When we were in Turkey, we saw the ruins of many cities that had at one time been major cities in the world. The two that stand out in my mind were Ephesus and Laodicea. The ruins of the cities are impressive, so the cities must have been impressive before they were destroyed.

So all countries have their abandoned cities. **The thing that makes Jerusalem different is that Jerusalem is the capital city of God.** So for God to actually permit His sacred city to be destroyed would mean that the people of God had become so corrupt that it demanded God permit His own sacred city to be destroyed.

**OBSERVATION #1 – Nebuchadnezzar captures Jerusalem. 39:1-3**

The capture of the city of Jerusalem was a judgment of God and it was carried out in real time that is carefully documented.

In **verse 1** we learn that this all started happening in the 10<sup>th</sup> month of the 9<sup>th</sup> year of King Zedekiah. This is around December 589 BC or January 588 BC.

In **verse 2** we learn that in the 11<sup>th</sup> year on the 4<sup>th</sup> month on the 9<sup>th</sup> day, Babylon breached the city. This is taking place in 587-586 BC.

So from the 10<sup>th</sup> month of the 9<sup>th</sup> year to the 4<sup>th</sup> month of the 11<sup>th</sup> year is 18 months, just under two years. **So for nearly two years God had been hammering the city of Jerusalem with judgment.**

It was a horrible judgment. Now the truth is the food supply was so low that some resorted to cannibalism (Jer. 52:4-6/Lam. 4:10).

After the walls had been breached, the Babylonian officials came into the city and sat down at the Middle Gate. They sat down wherever they wanted. The reason why they are sitting in the middle of the city is to plan strategy and show they now control the city.

Four of the Babylonian officials are named:

- 1) Nergal-sar-ezer
- 2) Samgar-nebu
- 3) Sar-sekim the Rab-saris, which means he was a chief officer
- 4) Nergal-sar-ezer the Rab-mag which probably means he was a high official or chief magi

Plus other officials. Nebuchadnezzar had turned the destruction over to them as he wasn't there.

Josephus says they bashed in the city walls and burned the city and the leaders proudly marched in around midnight and went into the Temple (*The Complete Works of Josephus*, p. 22).

**OBSERVATION #2 – Zedekiah flees Jerusalem. 39:4**

Zedekiah was not a man who listened to the word of God. God told people if they would surrender, it would go well with them. On multiple occasions, Jeremiah specifically told Zedekiah that he should not flee or run from the Babylonians but surrender and things would go well with him and his family (i.e. 38:17).

Zedekiah did not care what God's word said. He truly thought that if he disobeyed the word of God and fled with his family, he could get away. He thought he was smarter than the word of God.

He and his military men took off in the night and headed south toward the Arabah area. Josephus said that when he saw those Babylonian officials go into the Temple area, he took off with his family (*Ibid.*, p. 22).

Now you would naturally think that when God's people are warned about not doing something over and over again, that they would learn we need to obey God and not do it.

But God's people are often rebellious against God and His word and do just the opposite of what God told them to do. Zedekiah disobeyed the word of God and fled.

Well according to **verse 5**, the Babylonians overtook Zedekiah and brought him to Nebuchadnezzar himself who was at Riblah, 400 plus miles north of Jerusalem.

Riblah was located about 65 miles north of Damascus. Charles Feinberg says it gives a good vantage point of Syria and Palestine (*Jeremiah*, p. 622).

**OBSERVATION #3** – Zedekiah is captured and is punished. **39:5-8**

We may recall that it was Nebuchadnezzar who appointed Zedekiah to be king after removing Jehoiachin (II Kings 24:17-20). Nebuchadnezzar thought he would be an ally who would support him, not an enemy who would be a traitor who would run from him.

In fact, according to Josephus, when Zedekiah appeared before Nebuchadnezzar, he called him a “wicked wretch, and a covenant-breaker, and one that had forgotten his former words, when he promised to keep the country for him.” Josephus goes on to say, that “He also reproached him for his ingratitude, that when he had received the kingdom from him, who had taken it from Jehoiachin, and given it him, he had made use of the power he gave him against him that gave it” (*The Complete Works of Josephus*, p. 220).

When Zedekiah was brought before Nebuchadnezzar, he pronounced a horrible judgment on him. What Nebuchadnezzar decided to do was to kill all of Zedekiah's sons and all the nobles of Judah before Zedekiah and make Zedekiah watch it (**v. 6**). Then, according to **verse 7**, he blinded Zedekiah's eyes and bound him in bronze fetters and brought him to Babylon.

According to **verse 8**, they burned down the king's palace and the houses of the people and broke down the walls of Jerusalem. Zedekiah could have had a different outcome, had he obeyed the word of God. But he would not do it.

There are political leaders of this country who are not obeying the word of God and they don't care if they ever do obey the word of God. God promises these leaders, I will track you down and when I decide to do it, you will suffer the full brunt of My anger.

I was struck by the words of Josephus, who commented in depth on this episode. He said, "We have said much because it was sufficient to show the nature of God to such as are ignorant of it, that it is various and acts many different ways and that all events happen after a regular manner in their proper season and that it foretells what must come to pass...It also shows the ignorance of men whereby they are not permitted to foresee anything that is future and are without any guard exposed to calamities so that it is impossible for them to avoid the experience of those calamities" (*Ibid.*, p. 220).

In other words, most people are ignorant of the character of God and don't realize that His predictions of the future will come to pass and if they do not respond to His word, they will suffer the calamity of those predictions.

There are people who think they can escape hell. They refuse to believe in Jesus Christ and think they can escape hell by their own plans or achievements. It will never happen. If a person does not come to terms with their sin and Jesus Christ, the wrath of God will track them down.

**OBSERVATION #4** – Nebuzaradan takes some people captive. **39:9**

After punishing Zedekiah, he decided to permit his commander, Nebuzaradan, to take some of the people into captivity. It appears that many of the people wanted to submit to the Babylonians when they saw what was happening to the city.

So God permitted them to live. We may assume that these were skilled and successful people because of who he does not take.

**OBSERVATION #5** – Nebuzaradan let some people remain in the land. **39:10**

Now notice who it is that he left in the land. He left some of the poorest people in the land to take care of the land and vineyards. He did not leave the proud and the arrogant; he left the poor and the humble.

**In all reality, this judgment, which humiliated the proud and arrogant, elevated the humble and contrite.** They had probably never had access to this much land. The people who had nothing wound up with everything. That is what Jesus said. Many who are first will be last and many who are last will be first.

**OBSERVATION #6** – Nebuchadnezzar orders Jeremiah to be cared for and released. **39:11-14**

In Jeremiah 1:8, God told Jeremiah that He would deliver him (Also 15:20-21). God was sovereignly looking out for His faithful man. **Verse 11** is an amazing display of the sovereignty of God in taking care of his faithful servants even when He is pouring out His judgment.

Nebuchadnezzar had obviously heard about Jeremiah. Daniel was already in Babylon and we know Daniel was actually studying the book of Jeremiah. People in Babylon were probably telling the Babylonians that Jeremiah was proclaiming that it was the will of God for them to surrender to the Babylonians and obviously Nebuchadnezzar had learned of him.

In **verse 12**, Nebuchadnezzar demanded that Jeremiah be well-cared for and well-treated. Imagine this, this heathen King is demanding that this man of God, who told the truth of God, be treated far better than his own people had ever treated him. This is an amazing display of God's sovereignty.

According to **verses 13-14**, the guards and key officials went and got Jeremiah and assigned Gedaliah the responsibility to take care of him. This is not the evil Gedaliah, who was the son of Pashhur, who wanted to kill Jeremiah (38:1).

This Gedaliah was the son of Ahikam, who had actually saved Jeremiah's life earlier (26:24). So Gedaliah was Ahikam's son, which means this was a faithful family to rally behind a man of God presenting the truth of God.

What we must see here is that God rewards faithful people. God rewards people who obey His word even in a context when most people do not obey His word.

**OBSERVATION #7** – God protected and honored Jeremiah and Ebed-melech, his deliverer.  
**39:15-18**

As God was pouring out His wrath on most, He protected and honored those who were faithful.

According to **verse 15**, God's word had come to Jeremiah even before he got out of the court of the guardhouse. God has a specific message for Ebed-melech, the black man who rescued him from that mud pit cistern.

Ebed-melech, the Ethiopian, had rescued Jeremiah and God never forgot that. He had risked his own life to say that what was done to Jeremiah was wicked and evil. God assured him that he too would escape judgment.

These verses are here to reiterate the fact that God will take care of His faithful people even when He is in the process of pouring out His angry wrath on other of His own people.

G. Campbell Morgan said unless we are true to God and His word, we may expect that for us there will come an eleventh year, fourth month and tenth day. In other words, if God's people persist in sin, His judgment will come. H. A. Ironside said trouble will never result in repentance unless one sees the trouble as coming from the hand of God (*Jeremiah*, p. 218).

But these verses also teach us that no matter what our background or status or race, any who will be faithful to the word of God will be honored and rewarded.

It does not matter if we are rich or poor; educated or not educated; successful or not successful; red, yellow, black or white. It does not matter. Any who take God's word seriously and obey it will be blessed by God, they will be protected by God and they will be rewarded by God.

That point is clearly seen in Jeremiah 39.