

Jeremiah 34 - Zedekiah Warned by God

V. Present calamity of Judah (Jer 34:1–45:5)

(1) Before the fall (Jer 34:1–36:32)

(A) Vacillating nature of the people regarding slavery (34:1-22)

(a) Message to Zedekiah (34:1-7)

(i) Destruction of Jerusalem (34:1-3)

(ii) Personal hope to Zedekiah (34:4-7)

(b) Message to the people (34:8-22)

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(ii) Such reneging will cause the Babylonians to return (34:12-22)

V. Present calamity of Judah (Jer 34:1–45:5)

Jer 34-38 is going to be five chapters that essentially cover Jeremiah's experiences during the sieges of Jerusalem; it is very narrative and biographical. Jer 39 will be the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC after a two-year siege. Jer 40-44 will be the events after the fall.

These are essentially historical passages. Incidentally, the book of Dan 3:2-4; 4:1, Nebuchadnezzar's reign during that time is very widespread. (Jer 34).

Jeremiah 34

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(A) Vacillating nature of the people regarding slavery (34:1-22)

(a) Message to Zedekiah (34:1-7)

(i) Destruction of Jerusalem (34:1-3)

1 The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, when Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and all his army, with all the kingdoms of the earth that were *under* his control and all the peoples, were fighting against Jerusalem and all its cities, saying,

1 The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD, when Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and all his army, with all the kingdoms of the earth that were under his dominion and all the peoples, were fighting against Jerusalem and against all its cities, saying,

1 This is the message that came to Jeremiah from the LORD while king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, all his army, all the kingdoms of the earth that were under his authority, along with all the people were fighting against Jerusalem and all its towns:

1 The word which came unto Jeremiah from the LORD, when Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and all his army, and all the kingdoms of the earth of his dominion, and all the people, fought against Jerusalem, and against all the cities thereof, saying,

2 "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel says: 'Go and speak to Zedekiah king of Judah and say to him, "This is what the LORD says: 'Behold, I am handing this city over to the king of Babylon, and he will burn it with fire.

2 "Thus says the LORD God of Israel, 'Go and speak to Zedekiah king of Judah and say to him: "Thus says the LORD, 'Behold, I am giving this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he will burn it with fire.

2 "This is what the LORD God of Israel says: 'Go and speak to king Zedekiah of Judah. Say to him, "This is what the LORD says: 'Look, I'm giving this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he will set it on fire.

2 Thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel; Go and speak to Zedekiah king of Judah, and tell him, Thus saith the LORD; Behold, I will give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire:

- The Lord focuses very specifically, indicting Zedekiah, who actually did better than the kings that preceded him. Babylonians temporarily retire from siege to meet with Pharaoh Hophra (Jer 37:5).

3 And as for you, you will not escape from his hand, for you will assuredly be caught and handed over to him; and you will see the king of Babylon eye to eye, and he will speak with you face to face, and you will go to Babylon."'"

3 You will not escape from his hand, for you will surely be captured and delivered into his hand; and you will see the king of Babylon eye to eye, and he will speak with you face to face, and you will go to Babylon."'"

3 You won't escape from him. You will certainly be captured and given into his control. You will see the king of Babylon eye to eye, he will speak to you face to face, and you will go to Babylon."'"

3 And thou shalt not escape out of his hand, but shalt surely be taken, and delivered into his hand; and thine eyes shall behold the eyes of the king of Babylon, and he shall speak with thee mouth to mouth, and thou shalt go to Babylon.

- Jeremiah talking to Zedekiah the king. Zedekiah is going to have to be face to face with Nebuchadnezzar. Insight as to how much Nebuchadnezzar was feared (Cf. Ezek 12:13; Jer 52:11). He was probably one of the most absolute despots that has ever ruled on the planet earth. In the book of Daniel, when he thought someone didn't perform quite up to snuff and through them into the fiery furnace. When his advisors weren't quick to give him the answer he wanted, he wanted to tear them limb from limb and make their houses a dunghill. It is interesting that it is hinted at when the Lord tells Zedekiah that he will not escape.

(ii) Personal hope to Zedekiah (34:4-7)

4 Yet hear the word of the LORD, Zedekiah king of Judah! This is what the LORD says concerning you: 'You will not die by the sword.

4 Yet hear the word of the LORD, O Zedekiah king of Judah! Thus says the LORD concerning you, 'You will not die by the sword.

4 Yet, hear this message from the LORD, king Zedekiah of Judah. This is what the LORD says to you, 'You won't die by the sword.

4 Yet hear the word of the LORD, O Zedekiah king of Judah; Thus saith the LORD of thee, Thou shalt not die by the sword:

- Some people assume that this is cremation, as a historical point, cremation was not the norm in the history of Israel. Burnings referred to here and other places, is the burning of spices (2 Chr 16:14; 21:19). Other Jews practice cremation, especially if there is a fear of the body being desecrated.

5 You will die in peace; and as *spices* were burned for your fathers, the former kings who were before you, so they will burn *spices* for you; and they will mourn for you, *crying*, "Oh, my lord!"' For I have spoken the word," declares the LORD.

5 You will die in peace; and as *spices* were burned for your fathers, the former kings who were before you, so they will burn *spices* for you; and they will lament for you, "Alas, lord!"' For I have spoken the word," declares the LORD.

5 You will die peacefully, and as they burned fires for your ancestors, the former kings who were before you, so they'll burn fires for you, wailing, "Oh how terrible, your majesty!"' For I've spoken the message," declares the LORD.

5 *But* thou shalt die in peace: and with the burnings of thy fathers, the former kings which were before thee, so shall they burn *odors* for thee; and they will lament thee, *saying*, Ah lord! for I have pronounced the word, saith the LORD.

6 Then Jeremiah the prophet spoke all these words to Zedekiah king of Judah in Jerusalem

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6 Then Jeremiah the prophet spoke all of this in Jerusalem to king Zedekiah of Judah,

6 Then Jeremiah the prophet spake all these words unto Zedekiah king of Judah in Jerusalem,

7 when the army of the king of Babylon was fighting against Jerusalem and all the remaining cities of Judah, *that is*, Lachish and Azekah, for they *alone* remained as fortified cities among the cities of Judah.

7 when the army of the king of Babylon was fighting against Jerusalem and against all the remaining cities of Judah, *that is*, Lachish and Azekah, for they *alone* remained as fortified cities among the cities of Judah.

7 while the army of the king of Babylon was fighting against Jerusalem and all the cities of Judah that were left, namely Lachish and Azekah. (They were the only fortified cities that remained among the cities of Judah.)

7 When the king of Babylon's army fought against Jerusalem, and against all the cities of Judah that were left, against Lachish, and against Azekah: for these defenced cities remained of the cities of Judah.

- These two cities are southwest of Jerusalem about the southern extent of the siege in the land of Judah. Lachish (now *Tel-ed-Daweir*) is about 35 miles southwest and Azekah (now *Tel-ez-Zakhriyeh*) is about 50 miles southwest. The Lachish letters give vivid descriptions of all of this.

Laws of Slave Trade

Laws of slave trade. Ex 21:1-11. The concept about the ear and the doorpost is to be a slave for life. Lev 25:39-55. A man can indenture himself to pay off a debt. Indenturing can only go to the year of jubilee. Every seventh year was a Sabbath year and after seven weeks of Sabbath years (forty-nine years) was a Jubilee Year. Could not indenture oneself beyond the year of jubilee.

Deut 15:12-15. The law of the slave was linked to the fact that they were slaves in Egypt and God redeemed them. They are not to abuse the slaves. The 8th century prophets, Isaiah, Micah, Hosea, and Amos have special passages telling them not to do social injustice to their slaves. The fact that they were indentured servants was no reason to abuse them. No one paid attention to the Law. The last 30 chapters in Jeremiah show how liberally Judah obeyed God's rules, so it is no surprise that they were abusing this. The place is under siege and they recognize that the place is about to go down. There is nothing like a terminal countdown to bring them all to repentance. For a little there is while a commitment by them to get their act together and repent.

(b) Message to the people (34:8-22)

(i) People renege on promise to release slaves (34:8-11)

8 The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD after King Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people who were in Jerusalem, to proclaim release to them:

8 The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD after King Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people who were in Jerusalem to proclaim release to them:

8 This is this message from the LORD that came to Jeremiah from the LORD after Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people in Jerusalem proclaiming release for

them.

8 *This is the word that came unto Jeremiah from the LORD, after that the king Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people which were at Jerusalem, to proclaim liberty unto them;*

9 that each person was to set his male servant free and each his female servant, a Hebrew man or a Hebrew woman, so that no one would keep them, his Jewish brother *or sister*, in bondage.

9 that each man should set free his male servant and each man his female servant, a Hebrew man or a Hebrew woman; so that no one should keep them, a Jew his brother, in bondage.

9 Each person was to set free his male and female slaves who were Hebrews, so that no Jewish person would enslave his brother.

9 That every man should let his manservant, and every man his maidservant, *being* an Hebrew or an Hebrewess, go free; that none should serve himself of them, *to wit*, of a Jew his brother.

- They had abused all these limitations for slaves. They were in violation of the Torah. Zedekiah had the people in Judah let them all go, which they do for a little while. Under siege they are suddenly becoming very pious. The Babylonians fold up their tents and leave for a while to meet Pharaoh Neco. When the Babylonians retired, these people reneged on their covenant. They made a covenant to release them, once the threat was gone, they forced them back into labor. God is offended by that, which we will see in Jer 34. They make this covenant, Zedekiah has a new covenant, they are going to free up the Hebrews that are in a form of servitude.

10 And all the officials and all the people obeyed who had entered into the covenant that each person was to set his male servant free and each his female servant, so that no one would keep them in bondage any longer; they obeyed, and set *them* free.

10 And all the officials and all the people obeyed who had entered into the covenant that each man should set free his male servant and each man his female servant, so that no one should keep them any longer in bondage; they obeyed, and set *them* free.

10 All the officials and all the people who had entered into the covenant agreed that each would set his male and female slaves free so that they would not enslave them any longer. They obeyed and they released them.

10 Now when all the princes, and all the people, which had entered into the covenant, heard that every one should let his manservant, and every one his maidservant, go free, that none should serve themselves of them any more, then they obeyed, and let *them* go.

11 But afterward they turned around and took back the male servants and the female servants whom they had set free, and brought them into subjection as male servants and as female servants.

11 But afterward they turned around and took back the male servants and the female servants whom they had set free, and brought them into subjection for male servants and for female servants.

11 But afterward they turned around and took back the male and female slaves that they had set free, and they forced them to become male and female slaves.

11 But afterward they turned, and caused the servants and the handmaids, whom they had let go free, to return, and brought them into subjection for servants and for handmaids.

(ii) Such reneging will cause the Babylonians to return (34:12-22)

12 Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying,

12 Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying,

12 Then this message from the LORD came to Jeremiah from the LORD:

12 Therefore the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying,

13 "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel says: 'I made a covenant with your forefathers on the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, saying,

13 "Thus says the LORD God of Israel, 'I made a covenant with your forefathers in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, saying,

13 "This is what the LORD God of Israel says: 'I made a covenant with your ancestors on the day I brought them out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. I told them:

13 Thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel; I made a covenant with your fathers in the day that I brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondmen, saying, Specific reference to their own origin, He made a covenant and He keeps His covenants.

14 "At the end of seven years each of you shall set free his Hebrew brother who has been sold to you and has served you for six years, and you shall send him out free from you." But your forefathers did not obey Me nor incline their ear to Me.

14 "At the end of seven years each of you shall set free his Hebrew brother who has been sold to you and has served you six years, you shall send him out free from you; but your forefathers did not obey Me or incline their ear to Me.

14 "At the end of seven years, each of you is to set free your fellow Hebrew who has sold himself to you and has served you for six years. You are to send him out from you with no further obligation." But your ancestors didn't obey me or pay attention.

14 At the end of seven years let ye go every man his brother an Hebrew, which hath been sold unto thee; and when he hath served thee six years, thou shalt let him go free from

thee: but your fathers hearkened not unto me, neither inclined their ear.

15 Although recently you *had* turned and done what is right in My sight, each one proclaiming release to his neighbor, and you had made a covenant before Me in the house which is called by My name.

15 Although recently you *had* turned and done what is right in My sight, each man proclaiming release to his neighbor, and you had made a covenant before Me in the house which is called by My name.

15 You recently repented and did what was right in my eyes by proclaiming release for one another, and you made a covenant before me in the house that is called by my name.

15 And ye were now turned, and had done right in my sight, in proclaiming liberty every man to his neighbour; and ye had made a covenant before me in the house which is called by my name:

- Apparently, Zedekiah had this covenant ratified in the Temple and God honored it, now they reneged

Polluted God's Name

16 Yet you turned and profaned My name, and each person took back his male servant and each his female servant whom you had set free according to their desire, and you brought them into subjection to be your male and female servants.'

16 Yet you turned and profaned My name, and each man took back his male servant and each man his female servant whom you had set free according to their desire, and you brought them into subjection to be your male servants and female servants."

16 But then you turned around and profaned my name when each of you took back his male and female slaves whom you had set free according to their desire, and you forced them to become male and female slaves."

16 But ye turned and polluted my name, and caused every man his servant, and every man his handmaid, whom ye had set at liberty at their pleasure, to return, and brought them into subjection, to be unto you for servants and for handmaids.

- When they make a covenant before the Lord and don't keep it, they pollute God's name. That is what makes vows so dangerous. Resolve to do things, but don't make vows.

17 "Therefore this is what the LORD says: 'You have not obeyed Me in proclaiming release, each one to his brother and each to his neighbor. Behold, I am proclaiming a release to you,' declares the LORD, 'to the sword, to the plague, and to the famine; and I will make you a terror to all the kingdoms of the earth.'

17 "Therefore thus says the LORD, 'You have not obeyed Me in proclaiming release each man to his brother and each man to his neighbor. Behold, I am proclaiming a release to

you,' declares the LORD, 'to the sword, to the pestilence and to the famine; and I will make you a terror to all the kingdoms of the earth.

17 "Therefore, this is what the LORD says: 'You haven't obeyed me by each of you proclaiming a release for your brothers and neighbors. Now I'm going to proclaim a release for you,' declares the LORD, 'a release to the sword, to plague, and to famine, and I'll make you a horrifying sight to all the kingdoms of the earth.

17 Therefore thus saith the LORD; Ye have not hearkened unto me, in proclaiming liberty, every one to his brother, and every man to his neighbour: behold, I proclaim a liberty for you, saith the LORD, to the sword, to the pestilence, and to the famine; and I will make you to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth.

18 I will give the people who have violated My covenant, who have not fulfilled the words of the covenant which they made before Me, *when* they cut the calf in two and passed between its parts—

18 I will give the men who have transgressed My covenant, who have not fulfilled the words of the covenant which they made before Me, *when* they cut the calf in two and passed between its parts—

18 I'll give over the men who transgressed my covenant, who haven't fulfilled the terms of the covenant that they made before me when they cut the calf in two and passed between its parts—

18 And I will give the men that have transgressed my covenant, which have not performed the words of the covenant which they had made before me, when they cut the calf in twain, and passed between the parts thereof,

- The Assyrian inscriptions make reference to an ancient practice in making an agreement. They would take an animal, typically one who is offered for an offering, and would cut it in pieces and set the pieces aside and then would pass between them. In going between the pieces, they seal the covenant. The idea in the Assyrian inscriptions is if they break the covenant they will be cut in pieces. This is just a gesture to seal the bargain. For example: Gen 15:9-17, God entered into such a covenant with Abraham. (No pledge for Abraham, therefore pure Grace).

When Boaz seals his redemption act in Ruth 4, the guy that refuses to do the kinsman part hands Boaz his shoe. In the early days of Israel, when a widow put upon a kinsman to do the kinsman's part, he didn't have to, but if he didn't he was disgraced. So if he did the kinsman's part and take her to wife to raise up seed for a dead brother or take the land, if he didn't do that she was to spit on him and he hands her his shoe as a testimony of disgrace. Obviously over time that becomes just a gesture. So when this near kinsman

can't follow through he hands him his shoe in gesture and that shoe becomes a marriage license for Boaz.

19 the officials of Judah and the officials of Jerusalem, the high officials and the priests, and all the people of the land who passed between the parts of the calf—

19 the officials of Judah and the officials of Jerusalem, the court officers and the priests and all the people of the land who passed between the parts of the calf—

19 the officials of Judah, the officials of Jerusalem, the eunuchs, the priests, and all the people of the land who passed between the parts of the calf.

19 The princes of Judah, and the princes of Jerusalem, the eunuchs, and the priests, and all the people of the land, which passed between the parts of the calf;

- The ones who didn't keep the covenant will be cut in pieces.

20 I will hand them over to their enemies and to those who seek their lives. And their dead bodies will be food for the birds of the sky and the animals of the earth.

20 I will give them into the hand of their enemies and into the hand of those who seek their life. And their dead bodies will be food for the birds of the sky and the beasts of the earth.

20 I'll give them to their enemies who are seeking to kill them, and their dead bodies will be food for the birds of the sky and the animals of the land.

20 I will even give them into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of them that seek their life: and their dead bodies shall be for meat unto the fowls of the heaven, and to the beasts of the earth.

21 Zedekiah king of Judah and his officials I will also hand over to their enemies and to those who seek their lives, and to the army of the king of Babylon which has withdrawn from you.

21 Zedekiah king of Judah and his officials I will give into the hand of their enemies and into the hand of those who seek their life, and into the hand of the army of the king of Babylon which has gone away from you.

21 I'll give Zedekiah, king of Judah, and his officials into the domination of their enemies, to those who are seeking to kill them, and to the army of the king of Babylon that is coming against them.

21 And Zedekiah king of Judah and his princes will I give into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of them that seek their life, and into the hand of the king of Babylon's army, which are gone up from you.

22 Behold, I am going to give a command,' declares the LORD, 'and I will bring them back to this city, and they will fight against it and take it and burn it with fire; and I will make the

cities of Judah a desolation without inhabitant.'"

22 Behold, I am going to command,' declares the Lord, 'and I will bring them back to this city; and they will fight against it and take it and burn it with fire; and I will make the cities of Judah a desolation without inhabitant.'"

22 Look, I'm in command of them,' declares the LORD, 'and I'll bring them back to this city. They'll capture it and burn it with fire, and I'll turn the towns of Judah into desolate places without inhabitants.'"

22 Behold, I will command, saith the LORD, and cause them to return to this city; and they shall fight against it, and take it, and burn it with fire: and I will make the cities of Judah a desolation without an inhabitant.

- God is going to command them to come back, they have gone for a while, and the princes of Judah assumed they were gone.