

Judah After Israel's Fall (725-585 BCE) *Jeremiah's Prophecies During Siege*

Readings: *Jeremiah 21:1-14; 22:1-9; 34:1-7; 32:1-44; 33:1-9*

Reflections:

- Nebuchadnezzar's army has now surrounded the walls of Jerusalem and King Zedekiah finally starts to seek God. The answer comes through Jeremiah: surrender or be destroyed. This part in the story reminds us that too often people wait for a crisis to start to seek God when it can be too late to turn around tragedy. The best day to start to seek God with all of your heart is today.
- As Zedekiah seeks an answer from God through Jeremiah, he says, "Perhaps the Lord will perform wonders for us as in times past so that [Nebuchadnezzar] will withdraw from us." People who are far from God in their hearts, often see God as their magical emergency rescuer who they can just turn to in a crisis and God will somehow do something to get them out of their crisis. If Zedekiah would have had the close relationship with God as Moses did and was living in total dependence and trust on God, then God may very well have acted on his behalf. But Zedekiah only wanted God's involvement in his life because it was a crisis. Rather than humbling himself and repenting, his words only further betray his self-centered heart and complete lack of understanding of God's heart.
- God's response: "I myself will fight against you..." As we saw with Ezekiel, it's God who is working through Babylon to judge Israel for her rebellion and wickedness. This judgment falls not just on people but on creation, "both men and animals – and they will die of a terrible plague." Here we see again the interconnection between humanity and all of life on this planet.
- Once again God provides a path of salvation but it is one that still carries deep consequences, "See, I am setting before you the way of life and the way of day." Whoever stayed would die. Whoever surrendered would live. When God's judgment falls, the path of redemption is not fighting it, but humbly submitting to it.
- In Jeremiah 22, the message continues to Zedekiah and we see again righteousness spelled out in terms of compassion and right dealings with the poor and vulnerable within community. "Do what is just and right. Rescue from the hand of his oppressor the one who has been robbed. Do no wrong or violence to the alien (non-Jew in your midst), the

fatherless or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place.” Have they cared for the poor? No. Israel had “forsaken the covenant of the Lord their God and...worshiped and served other gods.”

- The section on Zedekiah’s personal future is interesting. It sounds like a mix of judgment and yet mercy in terms of his death not being eminent but in fact it does get much worse in the end for Zedekiah. It seems strange that Jeremiah would tell him that he would die peacefully in Babylon and even be honored and yet he will lose his eyes before he dies. This hardly seems peaceful. There are probably at least few options to understand the reasoning for this. One, more may have happened in Zedekiah’s heart that led to further judgment. Two, God was trying to assure him at this point so as to encourage surrender and spare more lives. Three, that both one and two are true. God was encouraging him to surrender at this point and then more happened in Zedekiah’s heart that led to further personal judgment before his death. The third option seems most likely as Zedekiah immediately after hearing this encouragement puts Jeremiah under house arrest. Zedekiah’s spiritual blindness will one day be made into a devastating physical blindness.
- Here in his prison Jeremiah continues to speak the word of God. He first does a prophetic act of purchasing a piece of land to symbolize the certainty of Israel’s return to the land. Then he announces the plans of God.
- Jeremiah models what all those who serve God should do. He recounts the character of God (remember God is the main character of this story) and then tells his story from the beginning up to the present. At that point he weaves the immediate story into God’s overarching story. This is important to note. For our lives to find their proper place and meaning, we must be able to see our lives in relationship to the main character’s life, God, and be able to see how our story and immediate circumstances fit within God’s overarching story.
- One of the truths Jeremiah reaffirms about God is, “Nothing is too hard for you.” Many times we feel completely bound and limited by our circumstances and yet when God is unfolding his purposes we need to remember that God is able to do whatever he wants. He also reminds the people (and himself) that God is a God of incredible love. God’s love stretches through the generations while the consequences of human sin and the judgment that follows after is often limited only to one generation. We are reminded again of how God’s mercy triumphs over judgment.
- Jeremiah then declares a prophecy that will be repeated many times and many different ways: “I will bring them back to this place and let them live in safety. They will be my people and I will be their God. I will give them singleness of heart and action, so that they will always fear me for their own good and the good of their children after them. I will make an everlasting covenant with them: I will never stop doing good to them and I will inspire them to fear me, so that they will never turn away from me. I will rejoice in doing good to them and will assuredly plant them in this land with all my heart and soul.” This promise is

followed up with a prophecy specific to Jerusalem: “I will bring health and healing to it; I will heal my people and let them enjoy abundant peace and security. I will bring Judah and Israel back from captivity and will rebuild them as they were before. I will cleanse them from all the sin they have committed against me and will forgive all the sin they have committed against me. Then this city will bring me renown joy, praise, honor before all nations of the earth that hear of all the good things I do for it, and they will be in awe and will tremble at the abundant prosperity and peace I provide for it.” Here we see in these prophetic promises the hope of an actual return to the land and the restoration of the nation under a new covenant. What is interesting is that although the nation will return, the temple rebuilt, and a measure of peace restored, this prophecy is never really fulfilled in a physical sense of the people of Israel. The new covenant of the Messiah will see the essence of this prophecy fulfilled in a more spiritual, expansive sense through the new community of Christ-followers. The church will become the new Israel that lives at peace in the land among all people. They will be the new Jerusalem, the community of peace that will receive God’s blessing of radical forgiveness, inner transformation of their hearts, and a radiation of God’s love and grace through their lives as they become light to all people. As we read this prophecy about God’s heart for his people, we see again a vision for God’s heart for his community, his church. May God enable us to live in the fullness and freedom he has offered us in Jesus!