

The Fall of Jerusalem

Jeremiah 39:1-14 and 52:4-27;

2 Kings 25:1-21 and 2 Chronicles 36:15-21

DIG: Imagine living in the City of David during the twenty-month Babylonian siege (Second Kings 25:1-3). What would you fear the most? Jeremiah had been predicting the fall of Tziyon ever since ADONAI first called him as a prophet some forty years earlier. Who were the kings that heard his message since then (see Ai, Bm, Ca, Du, Dz)? What violence is Zedekiah forced to endure, which he would sooner have not seen (verses 5-9)? Do you feel sympathy for him? Why or why not? Who does the king of Babylon (and God) spare and why? Why did Babylon deport the ruling class and leave the poor people to tend the land (Second Kings 24:12-14)? Why does Nebuchadnezzar treat Jeremiah so well? Why did Ha'Shem spare Ebed-Melech? What did a foreign language have to do with the fall of Jerusalem?

REFLECT: Why have you been in a "no win" situation, as was Jeremiah? Whom did God use to get you out of that tough spot? Have you ever picked a fight with someone, only to find out too late that you had bitten off more than you could chew? What happened? How do you think Yirmeyahu and ADONAI felt when Zion finally fell (see the book of Lamentations)? To whom could you show kindness and help out of a tough spot?

Tisha B'Av 586 BC at the very end of Zedekiah's eleven-year reign

The prophet had long since made clear that Jerusalem had only two choices: surrender and live, or resist and die. Under the leadership of Zedekiah, Judah exercised its choice, and made the wrong choice. It resisted Babylon. In 38:1-6 it is clear that this policy had the militant support of the princes. In so doing, according to the prophet, Y'hudah resisted YHVH and therefore died. This chapter describes the result of that disastrous choice.³⁴⁹

ADONAI, the God of their ancestors, sent word to them through His messengers the prophets again and again, because He had pity on His people and on His dwelling place the Temple. But they mocked and scoffed at His prophets, and despised His words until the anger of ADONAI rose up against His people to the extent that there was no longer any remedy (Second Chronicles 36:15-16; also see Jeremiah 5:10-13 and 7:12-15). Jeremiah had consistently detailed to Zedekiah the deep costs of the defiance of Babylon. Now all the threats had come to fruition. In this account, there is no mention of the prophet nor of the God whom he bore witness. Only judgment.

This is how Jerusalem was taken: In the ninth year of Zedekiah's reign, on the tenth day of the tenth month (Tevet or December/January) in 588 BC, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon marched against Jerusalem (under God's leading) with his whole army. **This date marked the beginning of the siege.** They encamped outside the City built siege works all around it and laid siege to it. The City was kept under siege for twenty months, until the eleventh year of King Zedekiah's reign.

By the ninth day of the fourth month in 586 BC, the famine in Jerusalem had become so severe that there was no food for the people to eat. Then, about a month later, the City wall was broken through and what was left of the Jewish army fled. Nebuchadnezzar then killed hundreds of thousands with the sword in the Sanctuary, and did not spare young men or young women, the elderly or the infirm (Jeremiah 39:1-2, 52:4-7a; Second Kings 25:1-2; Ezekiel 24:1-2; Second Chronicles 36:17).

Then the City wall was broken through and all the officials of the king of Babylon came and took seats in the Middle Gate: Nergal-Sharezer of Samgar, Nebo-Sarsekim a chief officer, and Nergal-Sharezer a high official and all the other officials of the king of Babylon (Jeremiah 25:3). There were two generals/officials named Nergal-Sharezer. The first one is Nergal-Sharezer lord of Sin-Magir the Rabsaris. He came from the town of Samgar-Nebo, which was sometimes known in Babylonian literature as Sin-Magir. So he was a mayor of a specific city in Babylonia and he also had the military title of Rabsaris. The second man was also known as Nergal-Sharezer. He is known in Babylonian writings as Neriglissar, the Rab-mag or chief of princes (it was not unusual for the Babylonians to have more than one name). He was married to the daughter of Nebuchadnezzar and would later murder Nebuchadnezzar's son, Evil-Murdock, and reign as king of Babylon from 559 BC to 556 BC.

The prophecies of Yirmeyahu were beginning to be fulfilled very quickly. When Zedekiah king of Judah and his soldiers saw the Babylonian dignitaries sitting in the Middle Gate, they realized that the City had fallen. Then the king, his family and the whole army fled at night (so they wouldn't be easily seen) and slipped through the gate between the two walls by way of the king's garden near the Pool of Siloam. The royal family and a small group of ragtag soldiers were in the steep ravine near where Hinnom and Kidron Valleys unite. Climbing over the Mount of Olives they fled toward the Arabah, which is also known as the Jordan Valley in the area of Jericho (Jeremiah 39:3-4; 52:7b; Second Kings 25:4). Zedekiah tried to escape through an eighteen-mile long tunnel, but **enemy soldiers who, while chasing a deer, saw him emerging captured him** on the plains of Jericho.

Zedekiah was trying to get across the Jordan River at the very same location that **Isra'el** crossed over coming *into* Canaan (**Joshua 3:1-17**). Now **Zedekiah**, the last king of **Isra'el** was trying to *escape* the land of Canaan the same way! **The king** was without courage, resolve, or resource. **He** neither resists nor surrenders, but jumps ship in a disgraceful way. **He** abdicated his royal office and his royal responsibility, leaving the people in the lurch.

The king came very close to his goal of escaping, coming up short only a mile or two from the Jordan River. **But the Babylonian army pursued Zedekiah and his little entourage, and overtook them on the plains of Jericho. All Zedekiah's soldiers were separated from him and they scattered** trying to save themselves (**Second Kings 25:5**). **The Babylonian army captured Zedekiah and took him to Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah (his field headquarters) in the north at Hamath just south of Syria. There the Babylonian King waited while his generals conducted the sieges of Jerusalem and Tyre (Jeremiah 52:8-10 and 26-27; Lamentations 4:19-20; Second Kings 25:6, 20-21).** In like manner Pharaoh-Necho after his victory over the **Babylonians** at Carchemish in 609 BC, returned to **Riblah** and summoned Jehoahaz from **Jerusalem** before him (**Second Kings 23:33**).

Therefore, **the Jewish puppet king** was captured after fleeing 25 miles from **Jerusalem** to Jericho, then **he** was taken another 25 miles back to **Yerushalayim** and then another 180 miles north to **Riblah**. This would have taken several days. One wonders the thoughts going through **his** mind being as **he** was transported in chains with **his** family. Did **he** fear the worst, or did **he** hold out hope that **Nebuchadnezzar** would be merciful towards **him**. What would happen to **his** family? What would happen to **the nobles** captured with **him**? **He** would soon find out. Those who were associated with **Zedekiah** were **killed**.

Evidently **the king's daughters (Jeremiah 38:23, 41:10, 43:6)** were allowed to live. It seems strange that **the Babylonians** did not round up such politically significant people. But **they** might have been young girls because **Zedekiah** was only 32 at that time. **The Babylonian garrison at Mizpah** must have known about them. Surely, then, this must have been a generous gesture to gain the goodwill of the Jewish population.³⁵⁰

Jeremiah's prophecy had been fulfilled to the letter. **Zedekiah** did not die by the sword (**39:18**), but **he** was disgraced. **The Babylonian king pronounced judgment on him. He had the sons of Zedekiah killed before his eyes and also killed all the nobles of Judah.** This would be the last thing **Zedekiah** would see as long as **he** lived. The thing **he** could never forget. Then the **Nebuchadnezzar** put out **Zedekiah's** eyes and bound him with bronze shackles to take him to **Babylon**, where he put the Jewish king in prison until the day of his death (**Jeremiah 39:6-7, 52:8-11; Second Kings 25:7**). **The eyes' being gouged out was a common form of punishment in ancient times. It is mentioned in the Code of Hammurabi.** The Septuagint text of **52:11** specifies that **Zedekiah** was put in the "house of

milling" until the day of his death, that is, he did women's work, which calls to mind Samson's fate: Then the Philistines seized him, gouged out his eyes and took him down to Gaza. Binding him with bronze shackles, they set him to grinding grain in the prison (Judges 16:21).

So Zedekiah's defiance ended in Babylon. It was as though there was never an option for the king except Babylon. Either he would go willingly (as the prophet had urged) or violently (as finally happened). Zedekiah was the second king of Y'hudah in Babylon (see [Du - Jehoiachin Ruled For 3 Months in 598 BC](#)). One, Jehoiachin, was taken willingly; the other, Zedekiah, defiantly. Jehoiachin was treated humanely . . . Zedekiah brutally. Babylon was the place where the Judean kings congregated and died. How they went influenced their treatment in exile.³⁵¹

The Mormons teach that Zedekiah's son Mulek escaped death and traveled across the ocean to the Americas, where he founded a nation that later merged with another Israelite splinter group, the Nephites. However, anthropologist Dr. Thomas W. Murphy concluded in his groundbreaking article *Lamanite Genesis, Genealogy and Genetics* in 2013 that DNA research lends no support to the traditional belief about the origins of the Native Americans, and he likens the Book of Mormon to inspirational fiction. In fact, not one single pot, or artifact of any kind has ever been found from the three Indian tribes, the Lamanites, Jaredites and Nephites, supposedly spread out over North, Central and South America. The book of Mormon has no maps and no credibility. A warning from YHVH is given in **Second Peter 2:1: There will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies.**

The valuable treasures of the Temple were looted and the Sanctuary itself was burned and reduced to rubble, along with the palaces. On the tenth day of the fifth month of Av, in the nineteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, the whole Babylonian army under Nebuzaradan commander of the imperial guard came and broke down the walls around Jerusalem. Every important building was burned down. They set fire to the royal palace, which Solomon had spent more time building than the Temple (First Kings 7:1, 2 Chronicles 8:1), and the Temple itself was burned, God's Temple (52:12-14).

Perhaps the most noticeable thing in the report of the destruction is the restrained understatement. The narrative offers no interpretive comment about the calamity. No didactic point is scored. No moral explanation is offered. No theological connection is proposed, not even a reference to the prophet Jeremiah. It is as though the narrative wants us to attend only to the dread and brutality present in the scene.³⁵²

Jeremiah survived to see the sad accomplishment of all his darkest predictions. He witnessed all the horrors of famine, and, when that had done its work, the triumph of the enemy. He saw the strongholds of the City torn down; the palace of Solomon, The

Temple of God, with all its courts, the roofs of cedar and gold, leveled to the earth, or burned up; the sacred vessels, the ark of the covenant itself, with the cherubim, pillaged by profane hands. Never did a city suffer a more miserable fate; never was a city lamented in language so pathetic.

Second Kings 25:8 has **the seventh day** of the month of Av. Jews around the world observe a day of mourning on **the ninth day** of the month of Av, or Tisha B'av because of the destruction of **the Temple** (see Gc - **The Destruction of Solomon's Temple on Tisha B'Av in 586 BC**). **The rabbis teach that Nebuzaradan entered Jerusalem on the seventh day, then set it on fire on the ninth day and it burned until the tenth day. Since the destruction of the Second Temple, a Jewish fast is kept on the ninth of Av. So the siege lasted 20 months, from the 10th of Tevet 588 BC to the 9th of Av 586 BC.**

Tziyon was then destroyed. Yirmeyahu's prophecies continued to be fulfilled. **The Babylonian soldiers broke up the two bronze pillars, twelve bronze bulls under the bronze basin, which the priests used for washing, and the ten moveable stands, which held the waster for rinsing the things used for the burnt offerings (Second Chronicles 4:4-6). Each pillar was eighteen cubits high and twelve cubits in circumference (27 feet high and 18 feet around), and each was four fingers thick and hollow. The bronze basin measured ten cubits in diameter and five cubits high (7 feet high). Each of the ten movable stands were four cubits long, four wide and three high (about 6 feet long and wide and about 4 ½ feet high). The Babylonians carried the bronze to Babylon.**

The two pillars were named Yachim, which means, "He will establish," and boaz, which means "in His strength." Together they represented, "He will establish in His strength." The bronze capital on top of one pillar was five cubits high (7.5 feet) and was decorated with a network and pomegranates of bronze all around. Pomegranates were a common ancient decoration (Exodus 28:33-34). The other pillar with its network was similar. There were ninety-six pomegranates on the sides. The total number of pomegranates above the surrounding network was a hundred. Each capital had two rows of pomegranates so there were 200 pomegranates of brass on each capital. Then there were two pillars for a total of 400 pomegranates.

They also took away the pots (used for the removal of fats and ashes of the sacrifices), shovels (to move the ashes from the bronze altar to the pots), wick trimmers (of the lamps), sprinkling bowls (used to sprinkle blood at the base of the bronze altar), dishes (used for burning incense) and all the bronze articles used in the Temple service. The commander of the imperial guard simply packed up and took away the censers and sprinkling bowls - all were made of pure gold or silver (Jeremiah 39:8, 52:13-14 and 17-23; First Kings 7:15-37, 42-44 and 48-51; Second Kings 25:8-10, 13-17; Second Chronicles 3:15 and 36:15-19). This fulfilled the prophecy in 27:19-22.

There is a hint here about the fate of **the ark of the Covenant** (see the commentary on **Exodus Fr - The Ark of the Covenant in the Most Holy Place: Christ at the Throne of Grace**). If **Yirmeyahu** would have hidden the ark, the Bible would have said something about it. Also, there were Jews living when the **Second Temple** was rebuilt seventy years later and if the ark had been hidden they would have known about it. It was a tendency of the Babylonians to strip gold, silver and brass from anything valuable and burn the rest. **As Ha'Shem had declared, Nebuchadnezzar removed the treasures from the Temple of the LORD and the royal palace, and cut up the gold articles that Solomon king of Isra'el had made for the Temple of God (Second Kings 24:13)**. If the ark was stripped of its gold and wood burned, why didn't **YHVH** protect it as **He** had done in the past? The **Shechinah** glory of **ADONAI** had departed from **the Temple** and from **Isra'el** signifying **God's** divine protection had been removed.³⁵³

Five national calamities are remembered on Tisha B'av with a famous Jewish fast. First, the rabbis teach that during the time of Moshe, Jews in the desert accepted the slanderous report of the ten spies, and the decree was issued forbidding them from entering the Land of Isra'el (1312 BC). Second, the Babylonians, led by Nebuchadnezzar, destroyed the First Temple. One hundred thousand Jews were slaughtered and millions more exiled (586 BC). Third, the Romans, led by Titus, destroyed the Second Temple. About 1.1 million Jews died, and another 97,000 were exiled (70 AD). Fourth, the Roman Emperor Hadrian crushed the Bar Kochba revolt. The city of Betar - the Jews' last stand against the Romans - was captured and liquidated. Over 100,000 Jews were slaughtered (135 AD). Fifth, the Roman general Turnus Rufus plowed under the Temple area. Jerusalem was rebuilt as a pagan city - renamed Aelia Capitolina - and access was forbidden to Jews.

The third deportation: Nebuzaradan commander of the imperial guard carried into exile to Babylon the remnant of people who remained in the City and who had escaped the sword; along with the rest of the populace and those who had deserted to the king of Babylon. They became servants to him and his successors until the kingdom of Persia came to power. The Babylonians always took the best and the brightest back to Babylon, like Dani'el and Ezeki'el. But Nebuzaradan the commander of the guard left behind in the land of Judah some of the poorest people to work the vineyards and fields because they were no threat to Babylon. The Land enjoyed its seventy sabbath rests; all the time of its desolation it rested, until the seventy years were completed in fulfillment of the word of the LORD spoken to Jeremiah (Jeremiah 39:9-10, 52:15-16; Second Kings 25:11-12; Second Chronicles 36:20-21).

The commander of the guard took as prisoners Seraiah the chief priest, Zephaniah the priest next in rank and the three doorkeepers to prevent them from leading another revolt. Of those still in the city, he also took the officer in charge of the fighting men, and royal advisors for the same reason. He also took the secretary who was chief officer in charge of conscripting the people of the land. Sixty common people were

found in the City. The residents of Jerusalem were treated more harshly than those outside of Zion. In other words, the poorest in Yerushalayim went into captivity, while the poorest outside the City did not. Nebuzaradan the commander took them all and brought them to the king of Babylon at Riblah where his field headquarters were located; where he had those leaders executed. So Judah went into captivity, away from her land (Jeremiah 29:24-32 and 37:3, 52:24-27; Second Kings 12:9-16, 22:3-7, 23:4, 25:18-21; Second Chronicles 6:13-15). Notice that it does not use the figure of seventy years here, and for good reason (see Gt - [Seventy Years of Imperial Babylonian Rule](#)).

Now Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had given special orders about Jeremiah through Nebuzaradan commander of the imperial guard, "Take him and look after him. Don't harm him but do for him whatever he asks." We don't know how Nebuchadnezzar knew about Jeremiah, but he obviously did. So Nebuzaradan the commander of the guard, Nebushazban a chief military commander, Nergal-Sharezer a high official (who would eventually become king of Babylon), and all the other officers of the king of Babylon sent and had Jeremiah taken out of the courtyard of the guard. They turned him over to Gedaliah son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan (who would become the next king of Judah after Zedekiah) to take him back to his home (Jeremiah 39:11-13). The fact that these important men were given the responsibility of releasing Jeremiah from jail shows how important God's prophet was to Nebuchadnezzar.

No doubt there is some irony in the fate of Zedekiah and the destiny of Jeremiah, the two treatments reported back to back. The defeated Zedekiah is brutalized. Yirmeyahu is found by the Babylonians in a royal prison, an enemy of the king. Jeremiah, however, is recognized as a friend of the empire and treated well. The narrative makes nothing of the irony of Jeremiah's position. He had been accused of being a traitor. Now his preferential treatment by Babylon would seem to vindicate him from the false charges of the citizens of Zion. Once again the narrative passes over the obvious issue in silence. Jeremiah had urged the Judeans to "submit and live." Now, as one who "submitted," he was permitted to "live."³⁵⁴

Isaiah had been told: Very well then, with foreign lips and strange tongues God will speak to this people (Isaiah 28:11). The foreign lips and strange tongues He was referring to were the Assyrians. Because the Jewish religious leaders did not believe the prophet's message, the Assyrian army would invade the northern kingdom of Isra'el. And when they heard those strange tongues, it would be a sign of their own unbelief (see the commentary on [Isaiah Fm - With Foreign Lips and Strange Tongues God Will Speak to This People](#)). The northern Kingdom fell to the Assyrians in 722 BC.

The final blow was dealt a hundred and thirty-six years later when the same thing happened to the southern Kingdom. People of Judah, declares ADONAI, I am bringing a distant nation against you - an ancient and enduring nation, a people whose language you do not know, whose speech you do not understand (Yirmeyahu 5:15). **The hearing of the Babylonian tongue would be a sign of their own unbelief.**

This passage is referred to in the New Covenant where Rabbi Sha'ul quotes from **Isaiah** and says: **Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers, but for unbelievers**, specifically unbelieving Jews, the unbelievers of this people (1 Cor 14:21-22). The purpose of tongues in a church or synagogue is not to bring unbelievers to faith. It has the same purpose it had in **Isaiah 28. It is a sign of Jewish unbelief.** It is not to bring them to Messiah, because Paul, quoting from this verse says, that even then **they will not listen (First Corinthians 14: 21b). Therefore, tongues are a sign of cursing** because of Jewish unbelief, **a sign of blessing** because the Dispensation of Grace had begun (see the commentary on **Hebrews - The Dispensation of Grace**), and a sign of **authority** (from apostles, prophets, or a nation, authenticating that it was **God** who was speaking). **Peter**, for example, had the keys to the Kingdom and would be responsible for ushering in the three major ethnic groups to the faith in the first century, **Jews, Samaritans, and the Gentiles (Acts 10:44-46).**

Moses said that if the **Israelites** did not serve **God** joyfully and gladly then they would serve the enemies of the **LORD**. **Isra'el's** enemies would put an iron yoke around their necks until they were destroyed (**Deuteronomy 28:32**). He continued to say: **Yes, ADONAI will bring a nation against you from far away, from the ends of the earth, like an eagle swooping down, a nation whose language you will not understand (Deuteronomy 28:49).** If **Judah** had believed **Jeremiah's** message there would not have been any invasion. **Therefore, just as Isra'el's disobedience in Deuteronomy led to the use of tongues as a sign of Jewish disobedience in the Land, so Isra'el's disobedience in the rejection of the Messiah led to the use of tongues as a sign of Jewish disobedience in the Church Age.**

The last phrase is telling: **So he remained among his own people (Jeremiah 39:14).** Of course, **Jeremiah** was not a deserter. **He** was the one who cared the most about his people and risked the most for them. In the end, there is perhaps an ironic reversal of positions. **The king** who should have cared about the survival of his people was then removed from his people and incapable of helping them. While **Yirmeyahu**, who seemed a defeatist, was the one who then lived in solidarity with the people who survived in **the City**. Without any obvious didactic message, the narrative bears witness to the truth, validity and effectiveness of **Jeremiah's** message. **Jeremiah's power had been made perfect in weakness (First Corinthians 12:9).**³⁵⁵