

Jeremiah 37-39

by Ken Baird

The sermon explores the themes of faithfulness and weakness through the lens of Jeremiah's prophecies and Zedekiah's leadership during Israel's captivity.

Duration: 36:25

Scripture: Jeremiah 37:1-2, Jeremiah 38:1-6, Jeremiah 38:17-18, Jeremiah 39:1-2, Jeremiah 39:18, Matthew 6:33, John 3:16

Topics: "Judgment And Exile", "Faithfulness Of God"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on the sad lesson of the children of Israel being exiled from their land and the judgment of God taking effect. The speaker emphasizes the deep lessons that can be learned from this event and how they can be applied to our own lives. The children of Israel were initially a polytheistic nation, but after their exile in Babylon, they became a monotheistic nation. The speaker highlights the faithfulness of Jeremiah, who warned the people about the Babylonian captivity and did not waver in his message. Despite the people's belief that they had a claim on the land, God's promise to give it to them remained intact.

Transcript

This is indeed a sad lesson today. The children of Israel displaced out of their land, and the judgment of God finally taking effect. This holds some real deep lessons, lessons that I suppose we, in a reduced way, could apply to ourselves.

But, in it all, we see the gracious hands of God. It would seem like judgment without mercy, but God has a way of doing things. The children of Israel, up until this time, were a polytheistic nation.

They had a number of gods. After they went to Babylon, they were a monotheistic nation, ever after that time. They got their seal of idols at that moment.

So, let's not say that something was accomplished by their Babylonian captivity. Now, the lesson really, today, embraces chapters 37, 38, and 39 for the lesson, and I think I shall refer to all of them, and go through them as much as I can, and give us the history. I think that it's important for us to be acquainted with the Old Testament, and we need to, indeed, just go through the history of it.

I want to take us to the lesson this morning in three sections. I want to talk about Jeremiah's faithfulness, Zedekiah's weakness, and the fall of Jerusalem and the final captivity. Jeremiah's faithfulness.

He warned them. He warned them, and warned them, and he did not change the message. He correctly prophesied the Babylonian captivity, and it changed just exactly as he said that it would.

I think we have to learn in this that, at last, God's patience can be exhausted. We'll be talking mostly this morning about Zedekiah. But you remember that the kings of Egypt came up against the king of Babylon.

They met. Israel was almost a battleground. As a matter of fact, Israel is at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea, and it's where three continents join together.

Europe, Asia, and Africa. It's the crossroads of the world, almost. And Israel had the unfortunate position of being a middle ground, an old man's land, the middle ground between Babylon and Egypt, which were warring at this time.

Now the king of Egypt came up in Josiah's time to battle the king of Babylon, and Josiah thought that he came up against him. And the king of Egypt told him that he hadn't. Josiah, which was a good king other than this terrible mistaken judgment, went out against the king of Egypt.

And the king of Egypt defeated him in battle, gave him a severe defeat. And Josiah died. It's a sad, sad thing.

Why did he do that? I don't know. But then his son Jehoiad was made king, and he only lasted for three months, because the king of Egypt took him away, took him to Egypt, and made his brother Jehoiachin king. But he made Jehoiachin king instead of his brother Jehoiad.

Now Jehoiachin lived for 11 years. He was king for 11 years. Now he was a bad king.

As a matter of fact, Josiah was the last good king. It was unfortunate that he challenged the king of Egypt, and he got a good licking in the process. Died.

Now Jehoiachin apparently died a natural death. But then Jehoiachin, or Kin, I suppose we should say, C-H as it's pronounced, and C-H is a K, Jehoiachin, his son, reigned in his stead. But he only reigned for three months, and the king of Babylon now came up to Jerusalem.

And the king of Babylon besieged Jerusalem, going to take it, and took Jehoiachin very wisely. He and his family, his mother, went out to the king of Babylon. And consequently, the king of Babylon did not slay them.

He took them prisoner. He took them to Babylon. And Jehoiachin later was released from the prison in Babylon.

But then after he besieged the city and Jehoiachin came out to him, then he made Zedekiah, which was a brother of his father, Jehoiachin. Three sons of Josiah were king, and then one of his grandsons. But Zedekiah reigned for eleven years.

And he, Zedekiah, was eloquent, and Jeremiah was very, very faithful to Zedekiah. He told him exactly what was going to happen. He told him that it was because of the sons of Manasseh, that, one that succeeded Josiah, and he told him that it was because of his sins, he killed Jerusalem with the blood of the innocent from one end to the other, and God would not pardon his sins.

Although Manasseh was permitted to reign for fifty-five years. He reigned the longest of any king in the nation of Israel. Zedekiah, I think, came second, or no, it was Josiah, came second.

Now he reigned for fifty-five years. Now during the latter part of his reign, Manasseh's reign, he also got a good licking in the back and they treated him rather, rather roughly. And he got restored to the Lord.

And he tried to undo the damage that he'd done. But God never forgot the damage that had been done. And he says very distinctly that his withdrawing of grace from Israel was because of the sins of Manasseh.

But the amazing thing to me was that Manasseh was permitted to reign for fifty-five years. We see the patience of God this way in letting that man reign that long. Perhaps he reigned that long, God gave him an opportunity to make up to some of the evil that he had done.

But the evil that he had done, the scripture says, do not deceive God, if not more. For whatsoever man that study also reads. And so Jeremiah was faithful.

He told Zedekiah, he said, now the Babylonians are going to take you captive. Now, Zedekiah depended on the king of Egypt. As a matter of fact, he was allied to the king of Egypt.

And the king of Egypt came up to help him. And the Babylonians were there and the king of Egypt came up to help him. Now, the Babylonians withdrew.

And the Israelite thought that through the Babylonians, they are afraid of the king of Egypt. Not so. The Babylonians left.

So the king of Egypt left and went back. But the Babylonians came back and Jeremiah told the children of Israel, warned the children of Israel, they'll be back. They thought that the prophecy of Jeremiah had failed.

But it had not failed. And they did come back in the latter part of the reign of Zedekiah, of course. Now, he was faithful in proclaiming the Lord's word.

He never changed his message. He said, no, the king of Babylon is going to come. He's going to capture this land.

He'll destroy the temple. He'll carry the children of Israel away to Babylon. And that's exactly what happened.

Except, as we read in the lesson this morning, he did give some of the poor of the land the authority to reap the crops that nobody would be there to reap. And consequently, they were left. Gadaliah was left, and then fortunately Ishmael, who flew Gadaliah.

And Gadaliah was made a kind of a governor, of course. This was a very, very recent effort. But we have to admire Jeremiah for his faithfulness.

He did not change his tune. He did not change his message. That seems so absolutely foreign to the thinking of the children of Israel.

I suppose they thought that they had a claim on that land, and God had promised to give it to them, and that he would never renege on that promise. They nullified that promise. It was a covenant, and they broke

the covenant, incidentally.

And consequently, the Palestinian covenant. And so consequently, God did allow the king of Babylon to come. Now, in the beginning of chapter 37, we read, And King Zedekiah, the son of Josiah, reigned instead of Taniah, the son of Jehoiakim, whom Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, made king in the land of Judah.

Neither he, nor his servants, nor the people of the land did hearken unto the words of the Lord, that he spake unto the prophet Jeremiah. And Zedekiah the king sent Jehucho, the son of Shalamiah, and Zephaniah, the son of the priest, unto the prophet Jeremiah, saying, Now Jeremiah came in and went out among the people, for they had not put him into prison. Then Pharaoh's army was come forth out of Egypt, and when the Chaldeans had beseeched Jerusalem her tidings of them, they departed from Jerusalem.

Who mentioned this fact? And they thought they were gone for good. Jeremiah said, They'll be back. Then came the word of the Lord unto the prophet Jeremiah, saying, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Thus shall ye say to the king of Judah, That sent you unto me to inquire of me.

Behold, Pharaoh's army, which is come forth to help you, shall return to Egypt into their own land. And the Chaldeans shall come again and fight against this city, and take it, and burn it with fire. Then said the Lord, Receive not yourself, saying, The Chaldeans shall surely depart from us, for they shall not depart, that is, permanently, for heath.

For though ye had smitten the whole army of the Chaldeans that fight against you, and there remain but wounded men among them, yet should they rise up every night in his tent, and burn this city with fire. And it came to pass, that when the army of the Chaldeans was broken up from Jerusalem, for fear of Pharaoh's army, that Jeremiah went forth out of Jerusalem to go into the land of Benjamin, to separate himself then from the midst of the people. And when he was in the gate of Benjamin, a captain of the guard was there, whose name was Elijah, the son of Sheolaiiah, the son of Hananiah.

And he took Jeremiah, the prophet, saying, Thou haulest away to the Chaldeans. Then said Jeremiah, It is false. I haul not away to the Chaldeans, but he hearkened not to him, for he ariseth at Jeremiah, and brought him to the princes.

Wherefore, the princes were wroth at Jeremiah, and smote him, and put him in the prison in the house of Jonathan, and scribed, for they had made that prison. And incidentally the scene shifts from the land of Benjamin. That's where he was apprehended, and where he was put in prison, was in Jerusalem.

Now he had a legitimate right to go out to Benjamin. His purpose for going out there, we read in verse 12, that Jeremiah went forth out of Jerusalem to go into the land of Benjamin, to separate himself since in the midst of the people. Now the New American Standard gives this verse a little different meaning.

And the verse is vague as you read it. And in the King James. To separate himself since.

Now the New American Standard puts it that Jeremiah went out from Jerusalem to go to the land of Benjamin in order to take possession of some property there among the people. That's why he went out. And he was accused of falling away to the Babylonians.

They made a prisoner out of him and put him in the dungeon. Jeremiah had to suffer much for being a prophet. But it never fazed him as far as the putting him in the dungeon and conferring.

Now we also begin to see the vacillations of Zedekiah, his weakness. He was not much of a king. He could not stand up to the princes, the royal princes.

Zedekiah, I feel sorry for Zedekiah in a sense. Because I think that Zedekiah had the conviction that Jeremiah was right. Now when Jeremiah was in prison, the Babylonians came back.

They said they wouldn't come back. But they came back just as fast as Jeremiah said they would. The word of God does not change.

You don't need to revise the Bible. God does not vacillate. It is him, it is they, and only.

It's God that, God does not change his mind. You know I think there are many people in the world today that think that God somehow has changed. They think that because he has not brought in judgment upon their immorality, that somehow God has become endured to it.

God has somehow become used to it. And they think that because God isn't coming in in judgment, that he's changed. God does not change.

He says, I am the Lord, I change not. You know I'm glad for that. Israel should have been glad for that.

Wherefore, I am the Lord, I change not. Therefore the sons of David are not consumed. That's an article David put.

They were not consumed because God didn't change. Now God did not consume them even in Babylon. And there were several, there were actually two displacements of the children of Israel.

One preceded this final one. The first one was the time that Daniel went down to Babylon. And the king of Babylon in those days, Jehoiachin's days, took quite, well took a major portion of the children that were brought up.

This was a weakened situation here with Zedekiah. But he came back just exactly like Jeremiah said. Now we see Zedekiah's weakness in that in verse 17, then Zedekiah the king sent and took him out of this prison, dungeon.

And the king asked him secretly in the house, and said, is there any word from the Lord? Jeremiah said, there is. For, said he, thou shalt be delivered into the land of Canaan. Now he did this secretly.

He did this on the fly so the princes would not know that he was collaborating with Jeremiah. Because that would have gone ill with Zedekiah. He did not have any strength of character.

And you know, the fear of man bringeth us ne'er. Now we might as well make up our minds, and we probably have a Christian experience. We probably have made up our minds already.

Better to trust in the Lord, then, than to trust in man. And the fear of man bringeth us ne'er. Zedekiah was afraid of the princes.

And he should have been afraid of the Lord. And he did this secretly so he could collaborate with Jeremiah and find out and he found out Zedekiah said, no king, you are going to Babylon. And so consequently, we have to go on about this unfortunate man who did not have the strength of character to stand up for what he knew was right.

I think that, remember Zedekiah was the son of Jehoiach. Three of them reigned. Three of the brothers.

It wasn't fast and better the son except in the case of Jehoiachin, and then it went back to the brothers again, just Zedekiah. He had a godly father. And he revered, I think, I feel sorry for Zedekiah.

Really it was his lack of strength of character that got him in trouble. You know, you might as well nail your colors to the map when it comes to the things of God. You might as well nail your colors to the map.

You might as well take the stand. If he had done it, he wouldn't have seen his tongue slain before his eyes. He wouldn't have had his eyes put out.

Jehoiachin, yes, Jehoiachin went out to the king of Babylon. His life was preserved. Later he was, in Babylon, Jehoiachin was restored to a place of respect and honor.

Now, the Jew just was so biased that he couldn't see God using anybody else. They were bigoted. And you know, Jeremiah in his prophecy called the king of Babylon his servant.

And he called he called Cyrus, which was a Persian, his shepherd. The Israelites had a hard time. They were bigoted people.

But they had to learn that God didn't use anybody he cheated. And you see the Lord Jesus in his ministry talking about the same thing, even in Antipas. Now you think of John 3, 16.

And I'm not going to destroy your respect or your love for John 3, 16. But John 3, 16 was not spoken, as the gospel says. John 3, 16 was spoken to a bigoted Jew by the name of Rome.

I sent it a while ago. I had a metal block, I guess. He sent it to a man named Nicodemus.

For God so loved the world, Nicodemus, that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. Nicodemus, you haven't got a corner on that. Let me tell you and me, you and I haven't got a corner on it either.

God is abroad in the world today. And he is moving through the other groups. Now I am where I am.

Don't misunderstand me. I am where I am out of deep conviction. But let's not get the idea that there is a whole court.

There is not. God is God. And a Jew had to learn that.

Nicodemus had to learn that through John 3, 16. But of course that lovely, lovely verse, he spoke the truth, the Lord spoke the truth. And he spoke the truth that is particularly interesting to the Gentiles.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever, oh what a lovely, lovely verse. Nicodemus needed that. And the Lord spoke it to him.

That is the primary application of John 3, 16. But all the secondary and I will go on. That for me, it's just as true that it is for me, as it was that it should have reduced me to demons.

Now, these Jewish people were so absolutely sure that there was unsafe there, they held up. And therein they made him safe. God had ordained this.

They just couldn't believe Jeremiah that God's word did not change. Now, he permitted, in chapter 38, verses 1 to 6, he permitted the princes to return Jeremiah to the dungeon. We read about it.

This shows his vacillation. This shows his weakness of character. Then Shephatiah the son of Naphan, and Gedaliah the son of Paschal, and Jupital the son of Shalamiah, and Paschal the son of Melchizedek, heard the word that Jeremiah had spoken unto the people, saying, Thus saith the Lord, he that remaineth in this city shall die by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence, but he that goeth forth with the colony in it shall live, and he shall have his life for a price, shall live.

Thus saith the Lord, this city shall surely be given unto the hand of the king of the Babylonian barons, that shall take it. Therefore the king, the prince, said unto the king, We beseech thee, let this man be put to death. For thus he weakeneth the hands of the men of war that remain in this city, and the hands of all the people, and speaketh such words unto them.

For this man seeketh not the welfare of this people, but the curse. Then Zedekiah the king said, Behold, he is in your hands. For the king is not he that can do anything against you.

Then they took Jeremiah and cast him into the dungeon in El-Triumph, the son of Hamelot. And he was in the court of the prison. And they let down Jeremiah with cords.

And in the dungeon there was no water but mire. So Jeremiah sank in the mire. I pitted our horse off last spring when it was very deep in mud.

But here's Jeremiah in a situation like this. Now when Eben-Melech, the Ethiopian, one of the units which was in the king's house, heard that they had put Jeremiah in the prison, the king then sitting in the gate of Zedekiah, Eben-Melech went forth out of the king's house and spake to the king saying, My lord the king, these men have done evil in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet. And they have cast him into the dungeon.

And he is like to die from hunger in the place where he is, for there is no more bread in the city. Then the king commanded Eben-Melech, the Ethiopian, saying, Take from him thirty men with thee and take up Jeremiah the prophet out of the dungeon before he dies. It seems like anybody that got anything out of Zedekiah was the last person there.

He was that kind of a character. He didn't say no. He responded.

So they took the prophet Jeremiah out. Now in verse 14 we read, Then Zedekiah the king sent, after he had had a little bit of this experience in the dungeon, in verse 14, Then Zedekiah the king sent and took Jeremiah the prophet unto him to the third entry, that is in the house of the Lord. And the king said unto Jeremiah, O last dear thing, hide nothing from me.

Then Jeremiah said unto Zedekiah, If I declare unto thee, wilt thou not surely put me to death? Then if I give thee counsel, wilt thou not hearken unto me? So Zedekiah the king declared secretly, naturally, unto Jeremiah saying, That the Lord hath made us this soul, I will not put thee to death, neither will I give thee unto the hands of these men that seek thy life. Then said Jeremiah unto Zedekiah, Thus saith the Lord, the God above, the king of Israel, If thou wilt assuredly go forth unto the king of heaven and earth, then thy soul shall live, and this city shall not be burdened with fire. Thou shall live, and thine house.

But if thou wilt not go forth to the king of heaven and earth, then this city shall be given unto the hand of the Chaldeans, and they shall burn it with fire, and thou shalt not escape out of his hand. Then Zedekiah the king said unto Jeremiah, I am afraid of the Jews that are following the Chaldeans, and I am afraid that they will deliver me into their hand, and they He said, If I go out now, if I go out to the king of Babylon, they'll take me to Babylon, and they'll spare my life. But the Jews that were forcibly deported to Babylon before, they will say, You gave us the ship.

And they did. The Jewish people did. Again, we see Zedekiah, the fear of men.

He should have listened to the word of the Lord. He says, If I go out now, they'll accuse me of giving up the ship. They'll kill me in Babylon.

In spite of the fact that Jeremiah had told him, No you won't. God is in this thing. And by this time, the prophecies that Jeremiah had spoken had all been verified.

And he should have listened. But he didn't. Now, later we see a little more of his character showing through in the 24th verse.

Then said Zedekiah unto Jeremiah, Let no man know of these words, and thou shalt not die. But if the princes hear that I have talked with thee, they come unto thee, and pray unto thee, declare unto us now what thou hast said unto the king, I did not say much, and they will not put thee to death, also what the king said unto thee. Then thou shalt pray unto them, I presented my supplication before the king, and that he would not cause me to return to Jonathan's house, to die there.

Then came all the princes unto Jeremiah, and asked him, and he told them according to all these words that the king had commanded. So they left off speaking with him, for the matter was not received. Now, Jeremiah might have made that request, I don't know.

He might have. I'm inclined to think that in the conversation with Zedekiah, that he had previously asked Zedekiah, not put him back. I'm giving Zedekiah the benefit of the doubt, because it would look like deception on the part of Zedekiah.

If they ask you what we talked about, tell them that you made your petition to me not to go back to the temple. And you know, they drew not, he anticipated it correctly. Then came all the princes unto Jeremiah, and asked him, and he told them according to all these words that the king had commanded.

So they left off speaking with him, for the matter was not received. So Jeremiah abode in the court of the prison, until the day that Jerusalem was taken, and he was there when Jerusalem was taken. I feel sorry for Zedekiah, the poor man.

Why wouldn't he stand up to the words of the Lord? He feared them. He feared the princes, he feared those that were already in Babylon, who would accuse him of giving up the ship, that he had capitulated. He was afraid of them.

He was afraid of everybody but the Lord, and that's where he needed to stay. Because Jerusalem was deceived for 18 months. They ran out of food.

The king of Babylon was deterred. And I think God had given him his orders. For the benefit of the children of Israel, that they might learn something more in Babylon.

Now unfortunately in Babylon, they not only changed from a polytheistic nation to a monotheistic nation, but they took on their insatiable greed for materialistic things. They became, instead of a nation of shepherds, they became a nation of merchants. And that took place when they were in Babylon.

And they are merchants, incidentally, to this day. Now in the 11th year, verse 2 of chapter 39, which we've already read together, in the 11th year of Zedekiah, that is, in the fourth month, the ninth day of the month, the city was broken up. All the princes of the king of Babylon came in and sat in the middle gate, even Nergal, the reader, Samgar, Nebo, Tarshikin, Bansar, Nergal, the reader of that rabbinical version.

They came and Israel, the king of Israel, escaped between two sections of the wall and tried to make a getaway. But the Babylonians, including, I suppose, that they had all the food that they had ever needed, and they were up to full strength, and the children of Israel were very weakened by the long siege and by the famine. They overtook them in Jericho.

The result was that Jeremiah lost two of his sons. The last memory that he had, seeing with his eyes, was the death of his own son in the midst of his men. A sad, sad ending for a man who feared man instead of God.

He took them too much into his heart. You and I are, I think, probably facing the same position sometimes. Perhaps not as dramatically as those of Zedekiah, but we need to nail our colors to the mast, stand up for what we know as right, believe the law and the church as our own final decision in the matter of our lives.

He did not gain a thing by Zedekiah. He lost everything. Jeremiah was treated right.

He was spared. I suppose maybe the king of Babylon thought Jeremiah was a demon ally because he had made this prediction that the king of Babylon would prevail and take over Israel. But actually it was all a joke.

And Jeremiah was a leaping prophet. All you have to do is read the book of Lamentations. He took a walk around Israel, around Jerusalem, after that city had been sacked.

He left Lamentations. He left. He didn't want the king of Babylon to do it, but God had said it would be done and he accepted.

Shall we pray? Our Father, we do give thanks in the name of the Lord Jesus for these lessons that you have preserved for us. And we do pray that we might indeed stand up for what we know as right and take our place firmly with the Lord and not indeed vacillate in any degree at all. These things we ask you to give thanks in our Savior's precious name.

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