

I Told You So!

<i>Text</i>	Jeremiah 52
<i>Readings</i>	Matthew 25:31-47
<i>Theme</i>	The city of Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians in fulfilment of God's prophecies through Jeremiah because of Judah's sin.
<i>Purpose</i>	To warn of the certainty of God's coming judgment and the need for repentance and faith.

How many times have you heard the words, "I told you so!" Don't answer that – because you have probably heard that said more times than you care to remember! It is usually said by someone who has been proved right. He told you that if you did *this*, then *that* would happen, and it did. He was right. What he predicted came true.

"I told you that wouldn't work."

"I told you it would break if you did that."

"I told you they wouldn't come."

"I told you it was too hot."

When someone says this to you it is usually too late. What has happened is often irreversible. You can't turn back the clock. You can't repair the damage. The deed is done.

Jeremiah never spoke these words, but he could have! He was proved right. What he had been predicting for 40 years had come true.

If you or I had been in this position we may have gloated; "See, I told you so! I was right, wasn't I!?"

But this prophet of God did not gloat; he wept. He is often known as the weeping prophet.

Rembrandt has a famous painting of Jeremiah slumped in a chair, with his head bowed, his heart heavy with sorrow for the city of Jerusalem. Yes, God's word had come true, but there was no joy in that for him; only sorrow and weeping and sadness.

All those feelings are expressed in the book that follows this one – the book of Lamentations.

There he poured out his heart to the Lord and expressed his great sorrow for what had happened to the city of God, Jerusalem.

This chapter, however, and chapter 39, describe only the facts of what happened, not all the feelings that went with it. Here we have an objective account of what took place. Much more could have been written, but this is the essential information.

By way of background we should note that Zedekiah became king in 597 BC at the age of 21. He was the son of Josiah. His uncle was Jehoiachin who only reigned for three months before he surrendered to the Babylonians and was taken off to Babylon.

Zedekiah was made king in his place. But he was a weak and feeble king, easily influenced by what others thought and said, and constantly vacillating between various opinions.

On one occasion he secretly called Jeremiah to the palace to ask him for advice about what to do; "Is there any word from the Lord", he asked (37:17).

And on another occasion he called him to a secret meeting at the third entrance to the temple, again to ask for advice (38:14).

Yet when Jeremiah advised him to surrender to Babylon he refused to do it. He lacked the moral strength and personal courage to do what was right and to obey the Lord. He was caught between his fear of Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon on the one hand and the rulers and officials of Judah on the other.

In the ninth year of his reign he rebelled against Babylon. It was a foolish move and it went against the clear command of the Lord. In response the Babylonian army came to attack Jerusalem, arriving outside the city in January of 588 BC.

The city was in a strong position to defend itself because it was located on a ridge. The ground fell away steeply on three sides making the city difficult to attack and capture.

But the Babylonian army was powerful and determined and after a long siege of 18 months they finally broke through the city wall in July 587 BC.

The officials of Babylon seated themselves in the Middle Gate, symbolising their new authority over the city and fulfilling words that the Lord had spoken to Jeremiah 40 years before (1:5).

A month later Nebuzaradan, the commander of the imperial guard, arrived in Jerusalem and began the systematic and thorough destruction of the city.

All this was the **judgment of God**. This is the main lesson of this chapter.

In verse 3 we get an explanation as to why this took place: "It was because of the **Lord's anger** that all this happened to Jerusalem and Judah, and in the end he thrust them from his presence."

God's anger was not fickle. It's not as though he lost his temper or flew into a fit of rage. Rather he was patient and slow to anger. He had forgiven his people again and again and for hundreds of years had

called them back to himself. But eventually his patience ran out and he had to do what he said he would do. This judgment was the final outcome of his settled wrath against his people.

He was angry about the sin of Judah. Neither Zedekiah nor the people had listened to the words of the Lord. They paid no attention. They ignored him and went their own way. They did not turn from their sins of idolatry and immorality and of sacrificing to the gods. They turned their backs on the Lord and refused to repent or to walk in his ways. So finally the Lord acted in judgment.

This also **fulfilled God's word**.

The end of this large book shows that God's word had come true. The dreaded day had arrived. Events had turned out as Jeremiah had predicted. He had been vindicated. He was proved right.

This final chapter does not make a big point of this. This is simply a factual, straight-forward explanation of what happened. Little else needed to be said because everything had been said in the previous 51 chapters, and now it had all come true, it had happened.

God's judgment is **illustrated in two men**, two individuals, both of whom are intimately caught up in this terrible drama.

One man is Zedekiah.

When the Babylonian army broke through the city wall he jumped ship with his soldiers and fled through a secret gate in the city wall near the King's Garden. But he was overtaken and captured and brought to King Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah. The King of Babylon made him watch as all the officials of Judah were killed in front of his eyes. Then his own sons were killed before him. Zedekiah was 32 years old when Jerusalem was taken and so his sons were only boys. Then the king of Babylon "put out Zedekiah's eyes, bound him with bronze shackles and took him to Babylon, where he put him in prison till the day of his death." (vs 11). These were Zedekiah's last visual memories. It was a horrible and terrible punishment, which fits with all we know about the Babylonians who were notorious for their cruelty. It was probably an end even worse than anything he had imagined possible.

In contrast we note what happened to Jeremiah: Nebuchadnezzar told his commander to look after him. We don't know the reason for that. Maybe the king had respect for the prophets of God. Maybe it was because of Jeremiah's message of submission to Babylon. Whatever the reason the commander was told; "Take him and look after him; don't harm him but do for him whatever he asks." (verse 12). So Jeremiah was given over to Gedaliah, who had earlier supported him, and he remained among his own people and was allowed to return to his home.

We'll see that after this, events turned against him again, but in the judgment that fell on Jerusalem these two men illustrated the two sides of God's dealings with men.

That event, and these two men, anticipates what God will do in **the final judgment**.

One day the Lord Jesus Christ will return and he will come as the Judge of all men. That judgment will result in punishment for those who do not believe in Jesus and have not obeyed God's word. That punishment will be worse than people can imagine.

In chapter 53:3 we read; "...in the end he thrust them from his presence." That's what hell will be like – those in hell are forever separated from the love and light of God's presence.

In the Garden of Eden God called out, "Adam, where are you." In hell God won't call out to people anymore; he won't go looking for people. Instead people will call out, in terrible loneliness; "God where are you!?"

C. S. Lewis has said that in the end God will give unbelievers what they want. If, in this life, they don't want to know God and believe in him, then in the end God will say, "Your will be done; have it your way." But these people will spend their time in hell regretting that decision for all eternity.

In contrast, those who have believed in Jesus and obeyed God's commands and loved him from their hearts will be welcomed into the joy of heaven.

"The King will say to those on his right, 'Come you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.'" (Matt 25:34). The joy of heaven will be better than anything we might think of now! It will be more glorious than you can imagine!

"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him." (2 Corinthians 2:9).

"For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal weight of glory that far outweighs them all." (2 Corinthians 4:17).

What happens to you in eternity depends on the decisions you make here and now in this life. This is the day of salvation. This is the time to believe in God and to receive Jesus as Lord and to accept his gift of life.

Do this now. Don't wait until the last minute. Don't put it off. The road to hell, they say, is paved with good intentions.

To quote C. S. Lewis again; "The safest road to hell is the gradual one – the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts."

What road are you on? The broad and easy road that leads to destruction, or the narrow road that leads to life?

But this has another application for those of us who do believe.

Amos wrote about Israel, “You were like a burning stick snatched from the fire” (4:11)

That was true of Jeremiah in the destruction of Jerusalem.

In the New Testament Jude wrote; “Be merciful to those who doubt; snatch others from the fire and save them.”

That phrase is a short and striking description of our task as Christians; this is our evangelistic responsibility – we are to snatch people from the fire of God’s judgment.

Are you doing that? Are you looking for opportunities to save those around you from the fires of hell?

Whether or not that happens does not depend ultimately on us but on the **MERCY OF GOD**.

This book closes with a terrible judgment; yet, if we look carefully and with the benefit of hindsight, there is also mercy and hope.

Verses 17-23 give us a long list of all the **articles of the temple** that were taken away. Much of the temple gold had been removed in earlier invasions by both the Assyrians and the Babylonians. Here the Babylonians clean up all that was left – which was still a great deal. They carried away more bronze than could be weighed!

All this is recorded because it is an inventory of everything that will be brought back when the exiles returned to Jerusalem.

Ezra chapter 1 describes this return from exile 70 years later and informs us that there were 5,400 articles of gold and silver that were returned to the temple. Yes, there was hope!

This is also why we are given a list of the **numbers taken into exile**. These numbers listed in verses 28-30 may only record the adult males. Other lists are much higher.

All in all the total may have been 15-20,000. Many of them may have died on the three month march to Babylon. So, overall, the number of exiles was not large. Yet the future of God’s promise lay with them. The Lord would bring some of them back with their children. From this small group the Lord will build a new nation. There was hope for the exiles!

And God would also give them **a king**.

This book ends with what happened to King Jehoiachin. He was a grandson of King Josiah and had reigned for only three months. He then surrendered to Babylon and was taken away and imprisoned for 37 years! Imagine that! To be in prison for that long! Then, when Nebuchadnezzar’s son became king, he was released from prison and given a position of high honour and a place at the table of the king. This continued till the day of his death.

God was at work in this. Here was a glimmer of hope. Here was evidence of restoration and that God had not forgotten his promise.

Jehoiachin was the father of Shealtiel and Shealtiel was the father of Zerubbabel who was the ruler after the return from exile.

Then another 500 years later, Jesus was born as King of the Jews in this line of the kings of Judah as recorded in the genealogy of the gospel of Matthew.

Jesus came as the fulfilment of all the kings of Israel. All of them had failed in some way or other, even the good and godly kings. But Jesus was the true king of Israel. He is the king and Lord over all.

He holds the past and the present and the future in his hands.

He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.

He is the Head over all things for the sake of his church, which is his body, which is us.

Many terrible things are taking place in our own day and age.

Some of these are known as “acts of God”, natural disasters, like a tsunami or a devastating earthquake or great floods.

Others are the work of evil men and women, like suicide bombers and murder and rape.

Our faith and belief in God must be able to account for all these events – good and bad, tragic and joyful. And we can give some explanation of these.

We know from the Scriptures that nothing happens apart from God’s will and plan and purpose.

We know that God can and does use all the events of this world, even the actions of sinful people, for his great goals and for the salvation of his chosen people.

We know that many of these events are warnings of his final judgment that is coming.

We know that one day all believers will be in a position to say, “I told you so”, as was Jeremiah. We won’t *want* to say that and we will *not* say that; rather we will acknowledge the greatness and power of God and we will praise him.

“O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable his judgments and his paths beyond tracing out...
For from him and through him and to him are all things.
To him be the glory forever. Amen.” – Romans 11:33-36