

Jer. 34:1 ¶ 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,

Jer. 34:2 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:

Jer. 34:3 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.

This chapter begins with a word from the LORD that Jeremiah received when Judah was under attack and Jerusalem under siege by the armies of Babylon. Point is made that Neb's armies were composed of the peoples of many nations that he had conquered.

Jeremiah is given a message for King Zedekiah that is once again not what he would want to hear, yet it is once again boldly delivered by the prophet. The LORD is declaring that Jerusalem will be conquered by Nebuchadnezzar and destroyed by fire, and King Zedekiah would be captured and taken to confront Nebuchadnezzar about his rebellion before being taken on to Babylon as a captive. The background is recorded by the Chronicler.

2 Chronicles 36:9–13 “Jehoiachin was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned three months and ten days in Jerusalem: and he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD. And when the year was expired, king Nebuchadnezzar sent, and brought him to Babylon, with the goodly vessels of the house of the LORD, and made Zedekiah his brother king over Judah and Jerusalem. Zedekiah was one and twenty years old when he began to reign, and reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD his God, and humbled not himself before Jeremiah the prophet speaking from the mouth of the LORD. And he also rebelled against king Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear by God: but he stiffened his neck, and hardened his heart from turning unto the LORD God of Israel.”

Jer. 34:4 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:

Jer. 34:5 But thou shalt die in peace: and with the burnings of thy fathers, the former kings which were before thee, so shall they burn odours for thee; and they will lament thee, saying, Ah lord! for I have pronounced the word, saith the LORD.

Jeremiah did have a bit of good news to go with the bad. Zedekiah would die in peace in Babylon and would be honored in death in accord with previous kings of Judah. Jeremiah is to declare this message as a promise from YHWH.

This prophecy basically mirrors Jeremiah's prophecy in chapter 32.

Jer. 34:6 Then Jeremiah the prophet spake all these words unto Zedekiah king of Judah in Jerusalem,

Jer. 34:7 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.

Again, Jeremiah records that this message from the LORD was delivered to Zedekiah in Jerusalem during the siege. Jerusalem is identified as one of the last three cities to be conquered; the other two were Lachish (23 miles SW of Jerusalem) and Azekah (in the border region between Judah and Philistia north of Lachish).

Jer. 34:8 ¶ *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;*

Jer. 34:9 *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.*

It seems that Zedekiah and the people had made a covenant with God to release all the Hebrew slaves in Judah—both men and women. According to the law, no Jew was to be held as a slave to another Jew. This was in accordance with the law recorded by Moses in the book of Leviticus.

Leviticus 25:39–43 “And if thy brother that dwelleth by thee be waxen poor, and be sold unto thee; thou shalt not compel him to serve as a bondservant: But as an hired servant, and as a sojourner, he shall be with thee, and shall serve thee unto the year of jubile: And then shall he depart from thee, both he and his children with him, and shall return unto his own family, and unto the possession of his fathers shall he return. For they are my servants, which I brought forth out of the land of Egypt: they shall not be sold as bondmen. Thou shalt not rule over him with rigour; but shalt fear thy God.”

Jer. 34:10 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.

Jer. 34:11 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.

Initially, the people acted in accordance with the covenant; but it did not take long for them to change their minds and force the freed slaves back into servitude.

Some commentators connect this action to the reprieve that resulted from the attack of the forces of Pharaoh-Hophra of Egypt and wrong conclusion of the people that God had spared Jerusalem.

Jer. 34:12 Therefore the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying,

Jer. 34:13 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,

Jer. 34:14 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.

The LORD immediately declares a message to the people through Jeremiah in light of their decision to renig on the covenant they had made. He begins with identifying provisions of the covenant that He had made with their ancestors—and that they had subsequently ignored.

Deuteronomy 15:12–15 “And if thy brother, an Hebrew man, or an Hebrew woman, be sold unto thee, and serve thee six years; then in the seventh year thou shalt let him go free from thee. And when thou sendest him out free from thee, thou shalt not let him go away empty: Thou shalt furnish him liberally out of thy flock, and out of thy floor, and out of thy winepress: of that wherewith the LORD thy God hath blessed thee thou shalt give unto him. And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the LORD thy God redeemed thee: therefore I command thee this thing to day.”

The implication is that the person had sold himself into slavery because he could not meet his own or his family’s needs.

Jer. 34:15 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:

Jer. 34:16 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.

This latest covenant made by the people to free their Hebrew slaves had been ratified in the Temple, implying that they were doing so in obedience to God. Instead, their public repudiation of that covenant profaned God’s name and revealed the true condition of their rebellious hearts.

Jer. 34:17 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.

Jer. 34:18 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,

Jer. 34:19 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;

Jer. 34:20 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.

At this point Jeremiah delivers the LORD's message of judgment in light of the broken covenant. Because they had purposely chosen to break the covenant recently made before God at the Temple and refuse liberty to their fellow Hebrews, God is going to *liberate* them from His protection and provision. Their liberation will result in their destruction. Evidently, the people had even employed the sacred ritual of cutting the covenant—the same ritual as God had used with Abraham (see Genesis 15). Their disobedience would result in captivity and death.

The wording in this section seems to imply that faithfulness to the covenant would have resulted in mitigation of the consequences suffered from the Babylonians.

Jer. 34:21 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.

Jer. 34:22 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.

Jeremiah records that Zedekiah and the royal princes would be given into the hands of the enemy armies of Babylon. Though they had left to confront the forces of Egypt, the LORD declares that He will cause them to return and destroy the cities of Judah and burn down the city of Jerusalem. This prophecy is given in a bit more detail in chapter 37.

Jeremiah 37:5–10 “Then Pharaoh's army was come forth out of Egypt: and when the Chaldeans that besieged Jerusalem heard tidings of them, they departed from Jerusalem. Then came the word of the LORD unto the prophet Jeremiah, saying, Thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel; Thus shall ye say to the king of Judah, that sent you unto me to enquire 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. Thus saith the LORD; Deceive not yourselves, saying, The Chaldeans shall surely depart from us: for they shall not depart. For though ye had smitten the whole army of the Chaldeans that fight against you, and there remained but wounded men among them, yet should they rise up every man in his tent, and burn this city with fire.”