

Jeremiah 39:1-18; Jeremiah 52:16-34; 2 Kings 25:22-26

The Fall of Jerusalem

The destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. was such a monumental tragedy for Israel that it is recorded in three different places in the scriptures.

The Talmud also has additional details recorded in the tradition it transmits.

The fall of the city took place just as Jeremiah had foretold.

The siege lasted about two and a half years. The Talmud says that the walls of Jerusalem were first breached on the 17th of Tammuz, and after three weeks of fighting, the Temple itself was burned on the 9th of Ab.

These two dates are fasting days for Jews, and the intervening three weeks are referred to as being "between the straits."

Effects of the siege were terrible. Jeremiah describes it in the Book of Lamentations.

- Lamentations 2:20 - "Arise, cry out in the night: in the beginning of the watches pour out thine heart like water before the face of the Lord: lift up thy hands toward him for the life of thy young children, that faint for hunger in the top of every street. Behold, O LORD, and consider to whom thou hast done this. Shall the women eat their fruit, and children of a span long? shall the priest and the prophet be slain in the sanctuary of the Lord?"

- Lamentations 4:10 - "The hands of the pitiful women have sodden their own children: they were their meat in the destruction of the daughter of my people."

The aftermath was even worse:

- Lamentations 5:10-13 - "Our skin was black like an oven because of the terrible famine. They ravished the women in Zion, and the maids in the cities of Judah. Princes are hanged up by their hand: the faces of elders were not honoured. They took the young men to grind, and the children fell under the wood."

The sages said that those who mourn the destruction of Jerusalem will merit seeing it rebuilt with the coming of Messiah. Or, put another way:

And the Sages say: Whoever performs labor on the Ninth of Av and does not mourn for Jerusalem will not see her future joy, as it is stated: "Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad with her, all who love her; rejoice for joy with her, all who mourn for her" (**Isaiah 66:10**). From here it is stated: Whoever mourns for Jerusalem will merit and see her future joy, and whoever does not mourn for Jerusalem will not see her future joy. (Talmud, Taanit 30b:4)

But conversely, in the days of Messiah these fast days will be transformed into feast days.

- **Zechariah 8:19** - "Thus saith the LORD of hosts; The fast of the fourth month, and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, shall be to the house of Judah joy and gladness, and cheerful feasts; therefore love the truth and peace."

Seeing how idolatry and self-seeking led to this tragedy should cause us to examine ourselves:

- **2 Corinthians 13:5** - "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?"

At the same time, we can rejoice as citizens of the New Jerusalem (**Revelation 21**) living in the days of Messiah, as we see the fast turned into a feast.

The Keys

According to the Talmud (Taanit 29a), as the fighting entered the Temple courtyard, the Levites were singing a song and standing on their platform. And what song were they singing? They were singing the verse: "And He brought upon them their own iniquity, and He will cut them off in their own evil" (**Psalms 94:23**). And they did not manage to recite the end of the verse: "The Lord our God will cut them off," before Gentiles came and conquered them. And likewise, the same happened when the Second Temple was destroyed.

The Sages taught: When the Temple was destroyed for the first time, many groups of young priests gathered together with the Temple keys in their hands. And they ascended to the roof of the Sanctuary and said before God: "Master of the Universe, since we did not merit to be faithful treasurers, and the Temple is being destroyed, let the Temple keys be handed to You." And they threw them upward, and a kind of palm of a hand emerged and received the keys from them. And the young priests jumped from the roof and fell into the fire of the burning Temple.

The Death of Zedekiah

Jeremiah 39:2-3 - "And in the eleventh year of Zedekiah, in the fourth month, the ninth day of the month, the city was broken up. And all the princes of the king of Babylon came in, and sat in the middle gate, even Nergalsharezer, Samgarnebo, Sarsechim, Rabсарis, Nergalsharezer, Rabmag, with all the residue of the princes of the king of Babylon."

Seeing that the defenses of the city have failed, Zedekiah tries to break out and escape with his palace guard.

Jeremiah 39:4 - "And it came to pass, that when Zedekiah the king of Judah saw them, and all the men of war, then they fled, and went forth out of the city by night, by the way of the king's garden, by the gate betwixt the two walls: and he went out the way of the plain."

But this was a pointless act of desperation.

Jeremiah 39:5 - "But the Chaldeans' army pursued after them, and overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho: and when they had taken him, they brought him up to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon to Riblah in the land of Hamath, where he gave judgment upon him."

First the king experienced the horror of seeing his sons killed as he watched. The princes of Judah, who Zedekiah had feared, were killed next.

Jeremiah 39:6 - "Then the king of Babylon slew the sons of Zedekiah in Riblah before his eyes: also the king of Babylon slew all the nobles of Judah."

Next, Zedekiah was blinded, a condition that matched his spiritual condition.

Jeremiah 39:7-8 - "Moreover he put out Zedekiah's eyes, and bound him with chains, to carry him to Babylon. And the Chaldeans burned the king's house, and the houses of the people, with fire, and brake down the walls of Jerusalem."

The defensive walls of the city were dismantled. The Temple was also burned (**Jeremiah 52:13**). Zedekiah remained a prisoner in Babylon "until the day of his death" (**Jeremiah 52:11**).

Exile

After the war, the long siege and the final desperate fighting, there were not many Jews left alive, especially among the higher classes.

Jeremiah 39:10 - "Then Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carried away captive into Babylon the remnant of the people that remained in the city, and those that fell away, that fell to him, with the rest of the people that remained."

While most were carried away to exile, some of the poor were allowed to stay and keep up production of the fields and vineyards on behalf of the new Babylonian rulers.

Jeremiah 39:10 - "But Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard left of the poor of the people, which had nothing, in the land of Judah, and gave them vineyards and fields at the same time."

The Fate of Jeremiah

Jeremiah 39:11-12 - "Now Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon gave charge concerning

Jeremiah to Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard, saying, Take him, and look well to him, and do him no harm; but do unto him even as he shall say unto thee."

Nebuchadrezzar knew that Jeremiah had been counseling submission to Babylon, so he basically said let him go wherever he wants. Jeremiah asked that his disciple Baruch also be spared, and he agreed.

A Word for Ebed-Melech the Eunuch

Jeremiah 39:15-18 - "Now the word of the LORD came unto Jeremiah, while he was shut up in the court of the prison, saying, Go and speak to Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will bring my words upon this city for evil, and not for good; and they shall be accomplished in that day before thee. But I will deliver thee in that day, saith the LORD: and thou shalt not be given into the hand of the men of whom thou art afraid. For I will surely deliver thee, and thou shalt not fall by the sword, but thy life shall be for a prey unto thee: because thou hast put thy trust in me, saith the LORD."

The Temple is Stripped and Plundered

Jeremiah 52:17 - "Also the pillars of brass that were in the house of the LORD, and the bases, and the brasen sea that was in the house of the LORD, the Chaldeans brake, and carried all the brass of them to Babylon. The caldrons also, and the shovels, and the snuffers, and the bowls, and the spoons, and all the vessels of brass wherewith they ministered, took they away. And the basons, and the firepans, and the bowls, and the caldrons, and the candlesticks, and the spoons, and the cups; that which was of gold in gold, and that which was of silver in silver, took the captain of the guard away. The two pillars, one sea, and twelve brasen bulls that were under the bases, which king Solomon had made in the house of the LORD: the brass of all these vessels was without weight."

This detailed list of stolen furniture and service vessels - all used in worship - is placed here for a reason.

The rabbis insisted that those who mourned for the destruction of the Temple would be somehow mystically participating in its restoration.

The vessels taken into Babylon, melted down and made to serve idols, would be transformed, returned and replaced into their proper use and position, according to tradition. This in fact is what has happened in the New Jerusalem, which is made up of each of us as living stones in this new Temple.

The Seething Blood

The High Priest Seraiah and other Temple leaders were brought to Nebuchadrezzar and killed, along with other high ranking officials in Zedekiah's court. Josephus says their heads were cut off.

It was at this point that the Talmud says Babylonian general Nebuzaradan confronted the seething blood in the Temple courtyard.

The Talmud relates the story: When he reached the Sanctuary, he saw the blood of Zechariah the priest boiling. It had not calmed since he was killed (250 years before) in the Temple (see **2 Chronicles 24:20–22**). Nebuzaradan said to the priests there: What is this? They said to him: It is the blood of offerings that was spilled. Nebuzaradan said to them: Bring animals and I will test to determine if the blood of the animals is similar to the blood that is boiling. He slaughtered the animals and their blood was not similar to the boiling blood. Nebuzaradan said to the priests: Reveal the source of that blood to me, and if not I will comb your flesh with an iron comb.

The priests said to Nebuzaradan: This blood is the blood of a priest and a prophet who prophesied for the Jewish people with regard to the destruction of Jerusalem and whom they killed. He said to the priests: I will pacify the blood so the boiling will stop. He brought the Sages and killed them over the blood and its boiling did not cease. He brought schoolchildren and killed them over the blood and its boiling did not cease. He brought young priests and killed them over the blood and its boiling did not cease. He continued killing until he killed 940,000 people over the blood, and its boiling did not cease.

Nebuzaradan approached the blood and said: Zechariah, Zechariah, the worthy among them I killed on your behalf. Is it satisfactory for you that I kill them all? Immediately the boiling ceased. Nebuzaradan contemplated repentance. He said: If they, who caused only one person to perish, gained atonement only after all this killing, then with regard to that man, referring to himself, what will be required for him to gain atonement? He deserted his army and dispatched a last will to his house and converted.

The scriptures say nothing about Nebuzaradan's conversion. Over the years he carried away into captivity 4,600 people of Judah (**Jeremiah 52:30**).

Gedaliah Made Governor

2 Kings 25:22 - "And as for the people that remained in the land of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had left, even over them he made Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, ruler."

But many people were unhappy with this arrangement with the hated Babylonians, and were plotting against the newly named governor.

2 Kings 25:24 - "And Gedaliah sware to them, and to their men, and said unto them, Fear not to be the servants of the Chaldees: dwell in the land, and serve the king of Babylon; and it shall be well with you."

Gedaliah was considered a collaborator with the enemy.

2 Kings 25:25-26 - "But it came to pass in the seventh month, that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, the son of Elishama, of the seed royal, came, and ten men with him, and smote Gedaliah, that he died, and the Jews and the Chaldees that were with him at Mizpah. And all the people, both small and great, and the captains of the armies, arose, and came to Egypt: for they were afraid of the Chaldees."

When they fled to Egypt, they took Jeremiah along with them, against his will.

Fulfillment of Ezekiel's Prophecy Against Zedekiah

Nebuchadnezzar arranged that the last thing Zedekiah saw were his sons being killed in front of him, before his eyes were put out and he was blinded. He spent the rest of his days in darkness.

This punishment fulfilled a mysterious prediction by Ezekiel.

Ezekiel was probably born during the time of Josiah's reforms, had prophesied in Judah but had already gone into exile along with King Jehoiachin years before, where he continued his prophetic ministry until about 16 years after the destruction of Jerusalem.

Five years before the destruction of Jerusalem, Ezekiel had also predicted this particular judgment on Zedekiah.

Zedekiah was always spoken of by Ezekiel as "prince," never as king. Jehoiachin was regarded as the true king (**Ezekiel 17:13**), which is affirmed by tablets found in Babylon. Zedekiah was merely a puppet of Babylon, until he rebelled.

- Ezekiel 12:10-13 - "Say thou unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; This burden concerneth the prince in Jerusalem, and all the house of Israel that are among them. Say, I am your sign: like as I have done, so shall it be done unto them: they shall remove and go into captivity. And the prince that is among them shall bear upon his shoulder in the twilight, and shall go forth: they shall dig through the wall to carry out thereby: he shall cover his face, that he see not the ground with his eyes. My net also will I spread upon him, and he shall be taken in my snare: and I will bring him to Babylon to the land of the Chaldeans; yet shall he not see it, though he shall die there."

"I am your sign: like as I have done, so shall it be done unto them" - Ezekiel was in exile, and they would be too.

Zedekiah snuck away at twilight, covering his face in disguise. He "did not see the ground with his eyes" after he was blinded, and was brought into Babylon, "yet he did not see it, although he would die there."

None of this would have made any sense until it was fulfilled.

Postscript: The Fate of Jehoiachin

King Jehoiachin (Zedekiah's predecessor) was described as evil, and was cursed by Jeremiah, but he at least did one smart thing. When Jerusalem was besieged by Nebuchadnezzar, he "went out to the king of Babylon, he, and his mother, and his servants, and his princes, and his officers" (**2 Kings 24:12**). That saved his life, although he was taken as a prisoner to Babylon.

Now we learn that, 37 years later, Nebuchadnezzar is succeeded by the king Evil-merodach who "did lift up the head of Jehoiachin king of Judah out of prison."

2 Kings 25:28-30 - "And he spake kindly to him, and set his throne above the throne of the kings that were with him in Babylon; And changed his prison garments: and he did eat bread continually before him all the days of his life. And his allowance was a continual allowance given him of the king, a daily rate for every day, all the days of his life."

Last week we talked about how "leaving the city" was not only relevant to this time in history but also in New Testament times - to leave the "Jerusalem that now is" in exchange for the New Jerusalem.

I believe this postscript is included here to emphasize between Jehoiachin, who left the city to submit to Nebuchadnezzar, and Zedekiah, who would *NOT* leave the city and go out to Nebuchadnezzar in submission, as God had commanded, and paid the price for it.

One Last Question

What happened to the Ark of the Covenant after Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians?

One school of rabbinical thought maintained that the Ark was carried into exile along with the other sacred vessels.

Another interpretation said the Ark was buried, somewhere under the Holy of Holies at the behest of King Josiah who was warned of the coming destruction, and wanted to save it from desecration by evil kings who succeeded him.

Rav Nahman said that a Sage taught in the Tosefta: And the Rabbis say that the Ark of the Covenant was buried in the Chamber of the Woodshed. Rav Nahman bar Yitzhak said: We, too, have learned in a mishna: There was an incident involving a certain priest who was occupied with various matters, and he saw a floor tile in the woodshed that was different from the others. One of the marble floor tiles was higher than the rest, suggesting it had been lifted out and replaced. He came and informed his friend of the uneven tile, but was unable to finish his report and provide the exact location of the tile before his soul departed from his body. And consequently they knew definitively that the Ark was buried there, but its location was meant to be kept secret. (Yoma 54a)

On the other hand - or perhaps in addition - **2 Maccabees 2:5-8** describes how before the city fell, Jeremiah retrieved the Ark (from where Josiah had hidden it) as well as the tent of the Tabernacle, which had been rolled up and stored somewhere in the Temple after the Temple had been inaugurated by Solomon, and hid them both somewhere on Mount Nebo.

- 2 Maccabees 2:4-8,13 - "...the prophet, having received an oracle, ordered that the tent and the ark should follow with him, and that he went out to the mountain where Moses had gone up and had seen the inheritance of God. Jeremiah came and found a cave-dwelling, and he brought there the tent and the ark and the altar of incense; then he sealed up the entrance. Some of those who followed him came up intending to mark the way, but could not find it. When Jeremiah learned of it, he rebuked them and declared: "The place shall remain unknown until God gathers his people together again and shows his mercy. Then the Lord will disclose these things, and the glory of the Lord and the cloud will appear, as they were shown in the case of Moses, and as Solomon asked that the place should be specially consecrated. ...The same things are reported in the records and in the memoirs of Nehemiah, and also that he founded a library and collected the books about the kings and prophets, and the writings of David, and letters of kings about votive offerings."

But the Ark was not found or installed in the rebuilt Second Temple.

Instead "there was a rock in the Holy of Holies from the days of the early prophets, David and Samuel, who laid the groundwork for construction of the Temple, and this stone was called the foundation rock." Sacrificial blood was sprinkled on this rock since there was no Ark.

"It was three fingerbreadths higher than the ground, and the High Priest would place the incense on it. After the High Priest left the Holy of Holies, he took the blood of the bull sacrificed as a sin-offering from the one who was stirring it, so it would not coagulate. He entered into the place that he had previously entered, the Holy of Holies, and stood at the place where he had previously stood to offer the incense, between the staves. And he sprinkled from the blood, one time upward and seven times downward."

So in Jesus' day, the Holy of Holies was empty - God's presence had departed, and only returned with the incarnation of Jesus, and in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the disciples at Pentecost.

Jeremiah saw the days of Messiah:

- Jeremiah 3:16 - "And it shall come to pass, when ye be multiplied and increased in the land, in those days, saith the Lord, they shall say no more, 'The ark of the covenant of the Lord:' neither shall it come to mind: neither shall they remember it; neither shall they visit it; neither shall that be done any more. At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the Lord; and all the nations shall be gathered unto it, to the name of the Lord, to Jerusalem: neither shall they walk any more after the imagination of their evil

heart."