

Jeremiah 52:1-11 Hope Despite Loss Falls Church AM 9/17/2023

Our ancient brothers and sisters lost the city of Jerusalem, its king, officials, royal houses, the temple, people (except a few exiles), and even the promised land.

It was a total loss, yet the exiles still have solid basis for hope, because of God's new covenant promises. The seed form of those promises were in chapter 1, and the fuller expression was in chapters 31-33. That brings us to our main point. **God provides us with hope despite loss, by reminding us of the fulfillment of His Words of judgment (ch.1:10) in the fall of Jerusalem, which proves that we can trust His words of restoration!**

Why chapter 52? The last words of chapter 51 say that "*the words of Jeremiah*" were ended as of 51:64, so why is there one more chapter? 4 reasons.

1. Chapter 52 provided closure to the reporting of the story. Yes, the preaching ministry of the preacher Jeremiah lasted only 40 years, but the time span of the events addressed is longer – the Book of Jeremiah spans 67 years of time. The preaching of Jeremiah can dramatically end with the rock tied to the scroll of God's Word at the end of chapter 51, sinking to the bottom of the river, and saying thus shall Babylon sink to rise no more! That is a dramatic ending for the preaching of the Weeping Prophet, but we cannot end the reporting there, because the story of God's people did not end there. Down went Babylon, but what about the exiles? What about Jerusalem? How did it all end? Chap. 52 provides closure.

2. Chapter 52 provided context for Jeremiah's other book: Lamentations. This chapter is a necessary and excellent bridge from our study of The Book of Jeremiah to our study of the Book of Lamentations. We are slowing down to absorb this chapter, so that we can understand the sad songs of Jeremiah's weeping and grief over the Fall of Jerusalem. When you see someone crying, you say, why are you crying? When we hear Jeremiah is the weeping prophet, we ask, Why is he called the weeping prophet? Chapter 52 gives us an understanding.

3. Chapter 52 proved that Jeremiah was a true prophet. Because the reporting on the preaching of Jeremiah ended, but now it must be shown to be true preaching. God's criteria for a true prophet, stated in Deuteronomy 18:22, was that if the prophet predicted an event, that event must come true. Jeremiah predicted the loss of Jerusalem, and it must be shown to come true! That is why the last chapter of Jeremiah closely resembles 2 Kings 25, a reporting of factual events.

4. Chapter 52 shows a God's basic relationship to the people in the new covenant was spiritual, and no longer as the statehood of a nation. By Jeremiah's preaching, the wrong things for Israel to trust, have been torn down. They lost their over-confidence in being God's chosen people, to show that their trust in God is not nationalistic. God sent Nebuchadnezzar to demolish the physical realities of the nation – the king, the law, the temple, and even to drive them out of the city of God and out of the promised land! There was nothing left of the statehood of

God's nation – no city, no temple, no royal palace, no army, and above all, no holy land! In what way could they conceive of Israel being a nation anymore? Chapter 52 shows that they could lose their nation, and still be God's people, prefiguring God's covenantal relationship to His people in the Church and even in heaven, the new Jerusalem, where our citizenship already is.

1. The loss of personal holiness. (v.1-2)

Verse 1, the account about the loss of Jerusalem started with the coronation of the king, named Zedekiah. Don't be thrown off by the mention of a different Jeremiah in verse 1. Our prophet is named Jeremiah from Anathoth, but verse 1 the King's grandpa was Jeremiah from Libnah. We have many Jeremiahs, even today.

Verse 2 told us how we lost Jerusalem was just like how we lost the Garden of Eden: when Adam lost personal holiness. King Zedekiah lost personal holiness. In case you wonder whether Zedekiah was really that bad, here is a direct quote of what verse 2 actually says that Zedekiah did, and according to whom, "...*he did EVIL, in the sight of the LORD...*" It was God's assessment.

Because the book of Jeremiah is organized to make Jeremiah's points, and not organized in a timeline, this King Zedekiah we already studied, way back in chapters 34, 37 and 38. We learned one way he was evil, was by being unstable. This was the king who let slaves go, but then enslaved them again.(ch.34:8,16, 21)

How did Zedekiah become king? It is a little complicated, so pay attention now, and I'll clear it up in about 9 sentences. There was a prior bad king in Jerusalem named Jehoiakim, who rebelled against the occupying force of Babylon. Babylon wanted to put down the rebellion. By the time Babylon's representatives arrived in Jerusalem to put down the rebelling bad king in Jerusalem, that bad king had already been replaced by his own son, another bad king named Jehoiachin. So, Babylon put down the rebellion and took that younger king, Jehoiachin off to Babylon into exile. However, Babylon still wanted a local king as a vassal king to rule over the Jews on site from within the city of Jerusalem, and keep the Jews obedient to the occupying force of Babylon. So, Babylon then put on the Jerusalem throne the uncle of that exiled king Jehoiachin – now guess who that uncle was - Zedekiah. Babylon apparently thought that Zedekiah would cooperate with Babylon. That is how Zedekiah became king! How did that work out? First, look at verse 1, "*Zedekiah was 21 years old when he became king.*" Young, but not necessarily bad in itself. Now continue reading in verse 1, "*Zedekiah reigned 11 years in Jerusalem.*" Went okay for a while! Lastly, look at the start of the next paragraph, just before verse 4, where we read the start of the problem, "*And Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon.*"

So, Zedekiah, 11 years into his kingship, turned out to be just like Jerusalem's recent king Jehoiakim, both Jehoiakim earlier, and Zedekiah 11 years later, rebelled against the King of Babylon. Jehoiakim and later Zedekiah had

another thing in common. They both were evil! We find that in verse 2, Zedekiah “...*did evil in the sight of The LORD, according to all that Jehoiakim had done.*”

So, we know that Zedekiah was not consistent in following The LORD. Already back in chapter 21, our prophet Jeremiah was not pleased with King Zedekiah’s policies. The reason was clear: because The LORD was not pleased with the evil of King Zedekiah. Jeremiah is explaining God’s verdict.

2. The loss of God’s presence. (v.3)

When we read that the LORD cast them out from His presence, it reads synonymously with Babylon taking them captive.

We will study next time, Lord-willing, verses 12-23, about the destruction of the temple. The temple represented the presence of the LORD. But we are not told in verse 3 that they were cast out of the Temple. Rather, we are told that the people were cast out from God’s presence. Why? Because of the anger of The LORD had been ignored so long by the people, that it finally reached a point when God decided it was necessary to cast them out.

Adam and Eve enjoyed the presence of God in the Garden, without sin! What happened? Genesis 3:6, of the forbidden fruit, she ate, and he ate. Then just two verses later, it stands out what God told us about what happened next. Genesis 3:8, “...*they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife HID THEMSELVES from the presence of The LORD God among the trees of the garden.*” Verse 23, “...*the LORD God sent him out from the Garden of Eden...*”

What we lost in the very first sin of our very first human leader, was our access to the presence of the LORD God! Similarly, what the people of God in Jerusalem lost was the presence of God, when His anger came to a point that He cast them out.

3. The loss of the king. (v.4-11)

Verse 3 told us that Zedekiah rebelled against the King of Babylon. The result? The King of Babylon ordered his army to surround the city of Jerusalem, and not allow anyone to go in our out. They blocked off the city of Jerusalem in order to starve them out, and they continued the blockade for 18 months! In verse 4, the start was during “*the ninth year of his reign,*” and in verse 5, it lasted “...*till the eleventh year*” of his reign. It is unlikely that Nebuchadnezzar himself stayed there the whole time, because it was boring work, just waiting in a big circle around Jerusalem, while the blockaded city’s food supply slowly dwindled.

Verse 6 the blockade around Jerusalem finally reached the desired effect when the city entirely ran out of food, putting them in jeopardy. Some of the suffering resulting from lack of food is described by Jeremiah in his other book, The Book of Lamentations, chapters 2 and 4. Continuing here in verse 7, the food shortage resulted in food-weakness, which brought stage two of Babylon’s war

tactic. It was this moment when Babylon broke through the city wall of Jerusalem, while the people in the weakened condition were unable to defend their city walls. Jerusalem's starving soldiers were so depleted that they could not fight effectively. Apparently, they had enough energy to run. Verse 7 showed that they found an opening in the Babylonian circle around the city, and managed to slip out near the king's garden. They ran away by night, and fled for their lives toward the Arabah, which was a dry desert place to the east. Verse 8 revealed that guess who was in the group of runaway soldiers? It was none other than King Zedekiah himself. Lamentations 4:9, "*Happier were the victims of the sword than the victims of hunger, who wasted away, pierced by lack of the fruits of the field. The hands of compassionate women have boiled their own children; they became their food during the destruction of the daughter of My people.*" But the Babylonians chased, and they caught up with King Zedekiah, in the plains of Jericho, which tells us that they did not reach the Jordan River to cross it. We are not told their full escape plan, and their potential destination. We are only told that before they could reach safety, the Babylonians overtook Zedekiah, and all his hungry army was scattered from the king. No one stood by their evil King to defend him from the evil enemy.

Verse 9 showed that Babylon did not execute Zedekiah on the spot, but took some interest in him. Since Babylon was now overtaking the city of Jerusalem, they also took an interest in the family of Zedekiah, and the officials of Zedekiah. His army had scattered, but his family and his nobles were being gathered. The King of Babylon was now back on the scene, and we are told in verse 9 that Zedekiah was taken to the location where the King of Babylon was - an ancient preferred army staging area, a place called Riblah in the land of Hamath, which today is Syria in the Middle East. It was also at Riblah that the Pharaoh of Egypt had taken a king from Jerusalem. (see 2 Kings 23:33). The King Zedekiah was taken there to see the King of Babylon. Does that remind us of something? It reminds us of the exact fulfillment of God's prediction in Jeremiah chapter 34:3, where God said to Zedekiah, "*...you shall surely be captured and delivered into His hand. You shall see the king of Babylon eye to eye and speak with him face to face. And you shall go to Babylon.*" We are seeing that prophecy fulfilled here in chapter 52, verse 9, where we read that the King of Babylon "*passed sentence*" on King Zedekiah. What a moment! What a statement! Verse 10 reported that it was there in Riblah that the Babylonians slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and then slaughtered all the king's officials. The cruel Babylonians blinded him. In verse 10, the eyes of Zedekiah are mentioned as watching the slaughter of his sons, and then in verse 11 the eyes of Zedekiah are put out. The last thing evil Zedekiah saw with his eyes was the slaughter of his sons by the Babylonians. But Zedekiah himself was not killed. Verse 11, they "*...bound [Zedekiah] in chains,*

and the king of Babylon took [Zedekiah] to Babylon...” where he was in prison until his death.

Jer. 52:11, Zedekiah lost his throne, he lost his freedom, he lost his posterity, and he lost his sight, and eventually lost his life. Whatever interest in God he may have once had, he had long ago lost that, too. The loss of the king leaves us needing a king, but apparently not a leader with a statehood as a nation. God’s faithfulness in bringing judgment shows that God will also be faithful in bringing His promised restoration. The exiles can know that God will restore.

4. Despite the losses, the exiles retained a living hope, because of the promised sequel – the restoration of holiness, God’s presence, and the kingship.

God’s wrath on Jerusalem was completed. However, as God’s Word in the Book of Ezra and in the Book of Nehemiah demonstrate, even though The LORD’s wrath did come climactically upon Jerusalem in the time of the exile, His wrath continued upon His people even after their return from Babylon. For example, Nehemiah 13:18, “*Did not your fathers act in this way, and did not our God bring all this disaster on us and on this city? Now you are bringing more wrath on Israel by profaning the Sabbath.*” Not until the death of the true Israel, Jesus Christ, was The LORD’s wrath against His people completely exhausted and propitiated. Romans 3:25, God put Jesus Christ “...*forward as a propitiation (a propitiation is a protective covering like a shield) by His blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in His divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.*” How can Jesus shield us from God’s wrath?

Galatians 3:13, “*Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us – for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree’...*”

Jesus Christ brought the entire book of Jeremiah to maximum fulfillment. God promised to send and then did send His Son to die for us, showing God was faithful to all that He had said that He would do. Romans 8:32, “*He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things?*” Since we get Christ, we get everything else.

In Jeremiah, God demonstrated the inability of the old covenant to overcome the power of our sin. In God’s gracious and redemptive purpose, He ordained His judgments to land on Christ so that He might establish a new and better order. The wrecking ball needed to come first to clear away the old building, and in Jesus’s death, the old covenant order has come to an end. Ephesians 2:14-15, Christ “...*Himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in His flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that He might create in Himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross...*”

Since the old covenant is abolished, there is room for a new covenant. In Hebrews 8:13, *“In speaking of a new covenant, [God] makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.”*

Now, through Christ’s resurrection and the gift of the Holy Spirit, a new building is going up in place of the old. Jesus has established the new and better covenant, which has better promises. Hebrews 8:6, *“Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant He mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises.”* In place of Old Testament prophets, Christ calls New Testament ministers, listen to how the apostle explained this in 2 Corinthians 3:6, Christ *“...has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant...”* And in place of a cup of wrath for us to drink, we get a new covenant cup of mercy instead, in the wine of The Lord’s Supper. Listen to Luke 22:20, *“This cup is the new covenant in My blood.”*

We were like Adam, and we were like King Zedekiah, stuck in our sins. One of the new covenant promises in the New Adam, and our true King Jesus is that everyone who believes in Christ will be freed from their bondage to sin Romans 6:14, *“sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.”* Romans 6:18, *“having been set free from sin, [you] have become slaves of righteousness.”* God has accomplished all that is necessary for permanent union and communion with His people! No more loss of king. No more loss of land. No more loss of temple. No more loss of our heavenly city, our home, the New Jerusalem. We are safe from the evil of Babylon, safe from the evil of our own personal evil. We were exiled and restored. In Christ we were exiled. In Christ we were restored.

God’s Word can be trusted in times of loss, and we can hope in Him through Christ. We can rejoice in having received so great a salvation. Through faith in Christ, we now have the joy of living in the new covenant. Let us walk in righteousness, with the very law of God written on our hearts! Hope despite loss.

Conclusion: two applications.

1. Keep your New Covenant hope glasses on as you look around at loss.

Jeremiah chapter 52 shares a crucial point of Old Testament truth that we need for our hope glasses. Jeremiah looked around and saw in his day Jerusalem destroyed and Babylon triumphant. But Jeremiah could put on New Covenant hope glasses and as he looked around through hope glasses, Jeremiah could envision a new day soon to come, a day of reversal, a day of Judgment in which Babylon would be destroyed, and simultaneously a day of salvation in which Jerusalem would be triumphant. Those same New Covenant hope glasses enabled Jeremiah to look into the future and picture of Christ’s reversal from death to life in His resurrection. Those same New Covenant hope glasses enable the apostle John to

envision God's day of victory and write down a picture for us in the Book of Revelation of Babylon destroyed, and Jerusalem victorious. Babylon became the Bible's symbolic name for evil that sets itself against God and His people. Meanwhile, Jerusalem became the Bible's symbolic name for God's New Covenant people, which now is the church of Christ. The message of Jerusalem is the only message that can overcome this world's evil. This is how Paul could write in Romans 12:21, "*Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*" It was not in finding one statehood, not in finding even one nation under God, in which we could place our hope. The New Covenant hope glasses are not focused on an earthly nation anywhere in any generation. Rather, the new covenant hope glasses are focused on the restoration provided to His people in His New Testament church, by Christ through His Word, His Spirit. Paul wrote in Galatians We are the Israel of God. The story of Israel is our story. Ephesians 2:12-13, "*remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.*" New Covenant fulfillment is in a Christian church, not a Christian nation. Galatians 6:16, "*peace and mercy be ...upon the Israel of God.*"

2. Be encouraged that God's Spirit is present with us now to cheer us, to guide us all the way home.

We the church are the sanctuary of God. How is that? The Spirit of God dwells within every heart and life of every Christian, and so much more in our collective gatherings in worship! 1 Peter 2:9, "*...you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.*" We are the sanctuary of God, where God dwells by His Spirit. We are also the dominion of God, the place where God rules over us as our King in His Kingdom and as Head Shepherd in His Church, the fold of God.

Just as the people of God in the desert, after they were called out of Egypt, was a time of God providing wonderfully for them, so also we the people of God, traveling through the desert of this world, after we were called out of slavery to sin by the cross and resurrection of Christ, enjoy a time of God providing wonderfully for us. The best thing that God provides is His own dear presence by His Spirit, to cheer us and to guide us all the way home. God did not give us His Son, only to have us crumble and die part-way through our journey to heaven. Romans 8:32, "*He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all, how will He not*

also with Him graciously give us all things?” He gives His Son to you, so He gives forgiveness to you, He gives His Spirit to you, He gives His presence to you, He gives His love to you. Nothing can cast you out of God’s presence. The wrath of God at the cross and the empty tomb secures that. So, while you are an exile on earth keep in front of yourself the words of Romans 8:35-39, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? 36 As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”