

Jeremiah 52:12-23 Hope Despite the Loss of The Temple Falls Ch,AM,9/24/2023

To appreciate the loss in today's passage, and the next Book of Lamentations, we need a reminder of the splendor of the ancient temple, built by King Solomon. It was truly glorious, became world-famous, was made of gold, silver, bronze and copper. Let me describe one aspect, so you get a sense of it all.

Inside the temple was a 12,000-gallon giant basin of water. (see 1 King 7:23-26) (That is about 2/3 the amount of water in an average suburban swimming pool.) It was 15 feet around in diameter, and 8 feet tall. This religious basin was raised high off the ground, made of solid bronze, and there were 12 statues of oxen made of bronze to hold it up. It was magnificently and beautifully decorated on all sides. The water basin was so big, it was called the Sea. It held the water for the many required religious cleansing and purifications of the priests in the temple. It symbolized God's cleansing for our sin. It symbolized God's grace!

**God provided hope despite loss of the city and loss of temple, through His promised restoration of both.**

### **1. The burning of the city. (v.12-16)**

In verse 12, the army of Babylon entered Jerusalem. In verse 13, the captain gave the order to burn the palace of the king of Jerusalem. The burning of the king's house publicly signified the end of his kingship. Continuing in verse 13, the burning of every great house, the homes of every official of importance, and in verse 14, the breaking down of the walls around Jerusalem signified the end of the city and the end of the nation. Verse 15, some of the poorest people were carried away captive, and in verse 16, some farmers were left there to care for the fields. The stage would be set for the new thing that Babylon was preparing to do. The stage would be set for the new thing that the LORD was preparing to do!

### **2. The dismantling of the temple. (v.17-23)**

In verses 17-23, there is a concentration in the last chapter of Jeremiah on a detailed report of the dismantling of the temple.

Remember, this is not chronological. When back in verse 13, the commander from Babylon set about burning Jerusalem, where did he start? Let me go back and read verse 13, "*And he burned the house of the LORD, and the king's house...*" Where did the commander of Babylon start? With the temple. But did he burn the temple right away? No.

Now here in verses 17-23, we are given the understanding of what happened before the temple was burned. The commander could burn the temple, but why lose the valuables inside the temple? Did you notice that there was a delay of a month from verses 6-7, when they breached the wall of Jerusalem in the fourth month, to verse 12, when in the fifth month, they entered Jerusalem in order to burn it? Look at verse 6, "*On the ninth day of the fourth month, the famine was so severe in the city that there was no food for the people of the land. (v.7) Then a*

*breach was made in the city...*” Now look at verse 12, “*In the fifth month, on the tenth day of the month...*” There was one month between when they breached the city wall, to when they burned everything.

What were they doing for a month? They were dismantling the temple!

This month was not spent on mindless partying. Instead, this month was a well-planned operation. Starting here in verse 17, we are told what they were doing: the commander was methodical in packing up the valuables of the temple for shipping back to Babylon. The gold and silver in verses 17-23, and the people in verses 28-30. Both the things from the temple and the people from the city were taken back to Babylon. Babylon had been planning/organizing this for a long time!

Verse 17, the pillars, the bronze, and the stands and the bronze sea. The Babylonians broke these up into pieces and carried all the bronze to Babylon.

Verse 18, they took away the pots, shovels, snuffers (to snuff out candles), and basins and dishes for incense, and vessels of bronze used in the temple service – all were packed up to be taken away to Babylon.

Verse 19, the small bowls, the fire pans, the basins, the pots, the lampstands, the dishes for incense, the bowls for drink offerings – all were packed up to be taken away to Babylon. Special mention is made in verse 19 that whatever was gold was recognized not as the special temple part used in the worship of the God of all creation, but instead was recognized as gold and taken away, and whatever was silver was recognized as silver, and taken away. Everything was monetized with the value system of this world and Babylon-centric view, and God was ignored, and the worship of God was ignored, while the temple of God was being dismantled as loot.

Verse 20, two pillars, one sea, 12 bronze bulls under, and that stands which Solomon king had made for the house of the LORD, there is no mention of the significance, just the amount of bronze was “beyond weight.” There was more bronze than they could effectively weigh and carry! Imagine the wagon train it took to take all of this treasure of bronze, gold, and silver over to Babylon!

Verse 21, there is more. Pillars, this high, this big around, and this thick.

Verse 22, on the top each pillar was a top of bronze. What did each bronze top look like? A network and pomegranates, all made of bronze were expertly made and decorated all the way around the top of each pillar. How many? Verse 23 tells us that there were 96 pomegranates on the sides. A hundred pomegranates all around. All were taken down, packed up, and carried off to Babylon.

Silence. This was the Good Friday of the Temple! Think of good Friday. All seems lost. Even the sky went dark. The death of the Temple Jesus!

The loss was not about the money. It was not about the loss of workmanship.

It was about the loss of worship of God. It was about the loss of relationship with God.

Fascinating that this last chapter of Jeremiah has so many verses about basins and pots and snuffers and shovels of gold and silver. So many of those items were broken up into scrap metal, melted down, and used for other things in Babylon. But some of the items remained as they were and were used in Babylon as they were. Some of the items lasted the 70 years in exile. In fact, when we fast-forward to the time of the returning exiles – it is amazing what God did - they did get to take home more than 5,000 items of gold and silver. God revealed this to us over in Ezra 1:7-11, *“Cyrus the king also brought out the vessels of the house of the Lord that Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from Jerusalem and placed in the house of his gods. 8 Cyrus king of Persia brought these out in the charge of Mithredath the treasurer, who counted them out to Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah. And this was the number of them: 30 basins of gold, 1,000 basins of silver, 29 censers, 30 bowls of gold, 410 bowls of silver, and 1,000 other vessels; all the vessels of gold and of silver were 5,400. All these did Sheshbazzar bring up, when the exiles were brought up from Babylonia to Jerusalem.”*

If we put it all together, what does this mean? Yes, the temple was dismantled. Yes, the valuables were carried off by the enemy. But because we know the end of the story, we consider our verses in Jeremiah 52, and there is something encouraging about our God here. Under the sovereign hand of our God, the valuables of His temple were only checked out, like library books on loan to Nebuchadnezzar, and later in Ezra chapter 1, some of the valuables were returned and checked back in, to the place where they belonged. Why? Because those valuables because they would be temporarily used again for the worship of the living God, in Jerusalem, in a re-built temple, for 500 more years before Jesus would come.

Later, even the 2<sup>nd</sup> temple, and these very same valuable vessels would all be rendered obsolete by the once-for-all sacrifice of the Temple of God Himself, the LORD Jesus Christ. Jesus was the Temple of God, and also the Priest of God, and the Lamb of God. It is the LORD God of Israel whom we now worship, and He is God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. We worship God just like the exiles did during their stay in Babylon, worshipping in personal, loving, trusting obedient contact with the living God that is not restricted to one particular holy place, one holy building, or one holy land. We worship God anywhere that we His people gather with His Word and His Spirit, proclaiming His message of grace. We worship God through the temple Jesus. We worship God based on the destruction and rebuilding of the temple Jesus. We worship God through the death and resurrection of the Temple Jesus. We worship God through the exile and return of, the Lord Jesus, who did more than chastise us of our sins, but has cleansed us of all of our sins forevermore, and we are fit to enter the New Jerusalem of heaven! Listen to what God says about the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21:22-24, where

the Apostle John wrote, “...*I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the LORD God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it...*”

The temple dismantling prefigured the dismantling of Jesus on the cross.

Jesus rose again, rendering the entire previous glorious temple: obsolete!

### **3. Learning to live like an exile means waiting for both the city and the temple to be rebuilt, different and better than before.**

The temple valuables were not being taken away to Babylon in order to make the Jerusalem exiles feel more at home during their stay in Babylon. No, the temple vessels were being taken away to be used by Babylon’s officials to symbolize their victory. Meanwhile, for the next 70 years, the LORD’s people would have to figure out how to worship their God without all these gold and silver pieces that they had been taught were necessary to approach God correctly in worship. They also had to worship far from the place on which the LORD had set His name, the place where God had said, ‘This place is where you and I are going to meet in worship in My temple.’

The temple was destroyed, yet, at the same time the era of the temple was not over. Just as the exiles would later eventually return to their own land, and the city would rise again, so too the temple would be rebuilt. They would not have a political king again. There would be no King of Israel of the line of David until the coming of Jesus. Only with Jesus will the new kingdom arrive. But significantly, the day of the Jerusalem temple was not over after the exile. Until Jesus came, and until the new covenant was established, the temple and its sacrifices started up again after the exile!

That is so crucial for us to understand, that we have Jeremiah chapter 52. What it means is that the exiles needed to do a lot of new thinking. Because of their many past and recent sins, God was chastising them. The exiles needed to learn to repent. They were surprised to learn that God was so serious about holiness that God was willing to destroy the temple. The captives had yet to learn that God would rebuild it, as He promised.

The Jerusalem prisoners of war over in enemy work camps had to learn that something about the temple was necessary, and something about the temple was not necessary. While in exile, they were deprived of the temple building and the gold and silver vessels. What do we learn from the fact that the whole time they lived in Babylon for 70 years, they were deprived of the temple. For 70 years, they learned that they could know the presence and blessing of the covenant LORD God of Israel in a remote and foreign land, without temple building, without priests, without altar, without sacrifice.

One of those exiles was a godly man named Daniel. Daniel never forgot the LORD and His temple, and Daniel prayed 3 times a day facing Jerusalem and the LORD's temple precincts. In all of those times of praying, Daniel never had a sacrifice, a priest, or an altar. Why is that important? It is important because of what God was teaching Daniel. Daniel was learning the lesson of all exiles... that personal loving, trusting, obedient contact with the living God is not restricted to one particular holy place, and to one particular religious ritual of animal sacrifice. God was the One who had required all of that, but the deeper lesson and truth was that the entire temple system had always been a pointer beyond itself.

The people forgot the deeper lesson, and started to trust in the Temple of the LORD, the Temple of the Lord, the temple of the LORD. (See the famous Templer sermon in Jeremiah chapter 7) The main point of that chapter was that the people had failed by making a subtle error – by trusting in the Temple of the LORD, instead of the LORD of the temple!

The time of the exile gave them 70 years to think about that – and to re-learn to seek The LORD of the temple, while God in His wisdom deprived them of The Temple of the LORD. The chastisement of the exile was profoundly instructive for God's people to get back to basics more important than the temple building.

We fast forward to the fulfillment in The New Testament, in the words of Jesus, *“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”* (Mark 1:15) It is Christ the King who would fulfill the promises of the new covenant through His own death. Jesus spoke of that at a ceremony celebrating His kingship and the new covenant in Luke 22:20, *“The cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood.”* Everything takes on a new dimension in the New Testament, the new covenant. New king, new temple, new Jerusalem, new worship, new cups of blessing. Everything is made new!

**Conclusion:** One application. Grace in the end! Let me fill that out.

To think and live like an exile means that in moments of apparent loss, we must be confident in Christ's resurrection victory.

The story of God with His people has grace in the end. Exiles always keep in mind how our story ends – with grace. In our study today, we stood in the temple and watched with our mind's eye as soldiers took apart the ancient temple. We felt the loss. Over the last few decades, we have heard of various denominations turning away from the Scriptures. We feel the loss. This month I saw a bridal party taking pictures, and it was a few moments until I realized that there were two brides, and no groom. We feel the loss. Our missionaries in Haiti had to leave the field because of so much violence in that country. We feel the loss.

Chiefly, all losses point to the foot of the cross, the biggest loss. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were written so that we would stand on Calvary's hill and

watch with our mind's eye as soldiers took apart the precious life of Jesus our eternal temple. We feel the loss. That loss and all other losses were reversed in Christ's resurrection! His resurrection is our only source of confidence and living hope!

When it seems that the church and missions are being opposed by our culture, and our nation is morally crumbling, take heart. Be confident that Christ has overcome the world. Remember the dismantling of the temple, and the preserving of the gold vessels for 70 years. Remember the later homecoming of those same gold vessels, to again be used in the worship of God. Remember the captivity of the captives, and how they were brought home again. What today looks like loss of temple, defeat and dismantling of the things of God, will uniformly turn out to be victory for the risen Lord Christ. Remember when we read of suffering Christians in the time of the book of Acts or in the early church or in the time of The Reformation, or Christians today being persecuted, that Christ will get the victory. We sing these words in our closing hymn, "Be still, my soul: thy God doth undertake To guide the future as He has the past. Thy hope, thy confidence let nothing shake; All now mysterious shall be bright at last." In moments of apparent loss, be confident of Christ's resurrection victory. For us, as those who place our faith and hope in Jesus, there is always grace in the end.