
JEREMIAH 34: 1 The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD, when Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and all his army, and all the kingdoms of the earth that were under his dominion, and all the peoples, were fighting against Jerusalem, and against all the cities of it, saying:

This chapter contains two prophecies: the first, delivered during the siege of Jerusalem, predicts to Zedekiah the taking and burning of the city, with his own peaceful death and honorable burial, Jer 34:1-7. The second was delivered when the Chaldeans had for some time broken up the siege. It reproves the Jews for their conduct towards their brethren of the poorer sort, whom they released, by a solemn covenant, from bondage, in the extremity of their danger; but compelled to return to it when they thought that danger over, Jer 34:8-11. For this God threatens them with the sword, pestilence, and famine; and with the return of the Chaldeans, who should take the city, destroy it and the other cities by fire, and make an utter desolation of the whole land of Judea, Jer 34:12-22.

Verse 1

The word which came unto Jeremiah - This discourse was delivered in the tenth year of the reign of Zedekiah. The chapter contains two discourses; one, Jer 34:1-7, which concerns the taking of the city, and Zedekiah's captivity and death; the other, Jer 34:8-22, which is an invective against the inhabitants of Jerusalem for having Hebrew male and female slaves. These, having been manumitted at the instance of the prophet, were afterwards brought back by their old masters, and put in the same thralldom; for which God threatens them with severe judgments.

Nebuchadnezzar - and all his army, and all the kingdoms of the earth of his dominion - That is, his army was composed of soldiers gathered out of Babylon, and out of all his tributary dominions: one hundred and twenty provinces.

JEREMIAH 34: 2 Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, Go, and speak to Zedekiah king of Judah, and tell him, Thus says the LORD, Behold, I will give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire:

Verse 2

He shall burn it with fire - This was a newly-added circumstance. Among many ancient nations they burned the bodies of the more illustrious dead. Odours were used in the burning: they then gathered the ashes, and put them into an urn or pitcher, sometimes into a strong vessel, and buried them. Many of these have been digged up in different parts of England, where the Romans had stations.

JEREMIAH 34: 3 and you shall not escape out of his hand, but shall surely be taken, and delivered into his hand; and your eyes shall see the eyes of the king of Babylon, and he shall speak with you mouth to mouth, and you shall go to Babylon.

Verse 3

Thou shalt not escape - This, however, he had attempted, but was taken in his flight. See Jer 39:4, and Jer 52:7, etc.

JEREMIAH 34: 4 Yet hear the LORD's word, O Zedekiah king of Judah: thus says the LORD concerning you, You shall not die by the sword;

JEREMIAH 34: 5 you shall die in peace; and with the burnings of your fathers, the former kings who were before you, so shall they make a burning for you; and they shall lament you, saying, Ah Lord! for I have spoken the word, says the LORD.

Verse 5

Thou shalt die in peace - Thou shalt not die a violent death; and at thy death thou shalt have all those funereal solemnities which were usual at the demise of kings. See 2Chr 16:14.

So shall they burn odours for thee - Scented wood and other odoriferous substances are placed on the funeral pile of the rich Hindoos, and burned with the body.

And they will lament thee, saying, Ah lord! - They will recite the funeral dirge that begins with those words. See the note on Jer 22:18 (note).

JEREMIAH 34: 6 Then Jeremiah the prophet spoke all these words to Zedekiah king of Judah in Jerusalem,

Verse 6

Spake all these Words unto Zedekiah - He delivered this message at the hazard of his life. Jeremiah feared God, and had no other fear.

JEREMIAH 34: 7 when the king of Babylon's army was fighting against Jerusalem, and against all the cities of Judah that were left, against Lachish and against Azekah; for these alone remained of the cities of Judah as fortified cities.

Verse 7

Against Lachish, and against Azekah - These were two cities of Judah of considerable importance: they had been strongly fortified by Rehoboam, 2Chr 11:9-11; 2Chr 32:9.

JEREMIAH 34: 8 The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, after that the king Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people who were at Jerusalem, to proclaim liberty to them;

Verse 8

The word that came unto Jeremiah - Here the second discourse begins, which was delivered probably a short time, even a few days, after the former.

Zedekiah had made a covenant - We find no account elsewhere of this covenant: "Every man should let his man-servant and his maid-servant go free;" i.e., as we learn from Jer 34:14, on the sabbatical year; for the seventh year was the year of release. See Deu 15:12.

JEREMIAH 34: 9 that every man should let his male servant, and every man his female servant, who is a Hebrew or a Hebrewess, go free; that no one should make bondservants of them, of a Jew his brother.

JEREMIAH 34: 10 All the princes and all the people obeyed, who had entered into the covenant, that everyone should let his male servant, and everyone his female servant, go free, that no one should make bondservants of them any more; they obeyed, and let them go:

JEREMIAH 34: 11 but afterwards 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.

Verse 11

But afterward they turned - They had agreed to manumit them at the end of the seventh year; but when the seventh year was ended, they recalled their engagement, and detained their servants. This, I believe, is what is here meant.

JEREMIAH 34: 12 Therefore the LORD's word came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying,

JEREMIAH 34: 13 Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: I made a covenant with your fathers in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage, saying,

JEREMIAH 34: 14 At the end of seven years you shall let go every man his brother who is a Hebrew, who has been sold to you, and has served you six years, you shall let him go free from you: but your fathers didn't listen to me, neither inclined their ear.

JEREMIAH 34: 15 You had now turned, and had done that which is right in my eyes, in proclaiming liberty every man to his neighbour; and you had made a covenant before me in the house which is called by my name:

JEREMIAH 34: 16 but you turned and profaned my name, and caused every man his servant, and every man his handmaid, whom you had let go free at their pleasure, to return; and you brought them into subjection, to be to you for servants and for handmaids.

Verse 16

Ye - polluted my name - Had made the covenant in my name, calling me to witness it; now ye have dishonored my name, by breaking that covenant, and acting contrary to my law.

JEREMIAH 34: 17 Therefore thus says the LORD: you have not listened to me, to proclaim liberty, every man to his brother, and every man to his neighbour: behold, I proclaim to you a liberty, says the LORD, to the sword, to the pestilence, and to the famine; and I will make you to be tossed back and forth among all the kingdoms of the earth.

Verse 17

I proclaim a liberty for you - Ye proclaimed liberty to your slaves, and afterward resumed your authority over them; and I had in consequence restrained the sword from cutting you off: but now I give liberty to the sword, to the pestilence, and to the famine, and to the captivity, to destroy and consume you, and enslave you: for ye shall be removed to all the kingdoms of the earth. The prophet loves to express the conformity between the crime and its punishment. You promised to give liberty to your enslaved brethren; I was pleased, and bound the sword in its sheath. You broke your promise, and brought them again into bondage; I gave liberty to the sword, pestilence, and famine, to destroy multitudes of you, and captivity to take the rest. Thus you are punished according to your crimes, and in the punishment you may see the crime. Sword, pestilence, and famine are frequently joined together, as being often the effects of each other. The sword or war produces famine; famine, the pestilence.

JEREMIAH 34: 18 I will give the men who have transgressed my covenant, who have not performed the words of the covenant which they made before me, when they cut the calf in two and passed between its parts;

Verse 18

When they cut the calf in twain, and passed between the parts thereof - This was the ancient and most solemn way of making a covenant.

1. A calf as sacrifice was offered to God to secure his approbation and support.
 2. The victim was then exactly divided from the nose to the rump; the spinal marrow being divided longitudinally, in the most careful manner, that the half of it might remain on each side.
 3. These divided parts were laid opposite to each other, a passage being left between them.
 4. The contracting parties entered this passage at each end, met in the middle, and there took the covenant oath; adjudging themselves to death should they break this covenant.
 5. Then they both feasted on the victim. In reference to this last circumstance, God says he will give their bodies for meat to the fowls of heaven and to the beasts. This is a farther conformity between the crime and the punishment. See my notes on Gen 15:9-17 (note).
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JEREMIAH 34: 19 the princes of Judah, and the princes of Jerusalem, the eunuchs, and the priests, and all the people of the land, who passed between the parts of the calf;

JEREMIAH 34: 20 I will even give them into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of those who seek their life; and their dead bodies shall be for food to the birds of the sky, and to the animals of the earth.

JEREMIAH 34: 21 Zedekiah king of Judah and his princes will I give into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of those who seek their life, and into the hand of the king of Babylon's army, who have gone away from you.

Verse 21

The king of Babylon's army, which are gone up from you - Nebuchadnezzar, hearing that there was an Egyptian army coming to the relief of Jerusalem, raised the siege, went out, and met and defeated the Egyptians. It was in the interim this prophecy was delivered.

JEREMIAH 34: 22 Behold, I will command, says 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 inhabitant.

Verse 22

I will - cause them to return - They did return; re-invested the city; and, after an obstinate defense, took it, plundered it, and burned it to the ground, taking Zedekiah and his princes captive.