

CHAPTER 39

INTRODUCTION TO JEREMIAH 39

This chapter gives an account of the taking of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans, according to the several prophecies of Jeremiah concerning it. The time of taking it, and by whom, after a siege of eighteen months, (²⁸⁹¹Jeremiah 39:1-3); several things relating to King Zedekiah; his flight; the taking of him; the bringing him to the king of Babylon, and his sentence on him; the execution of that sentence, slaying his sons and nobles, putting out his eyes, and carrying him in chains to Babylon, (²⁸⁹¹Jeremiah 39:4-7); the destruction of the city is described, by burning the houses in it, breaking down its walls, carrying the people captive, all, except a few poor persons left in the land, (²⁸⁹¹Jeremiah 39:8-10); the preservation of Jeremiah, according to the king of Babylon's orders by his princes; and the committing him to the care of Gedaliah, the governor of the poor Jews, (²⁸⁹¹Jeremiah 39:11-14); and the chapter is concluded with a promise of the protection of Ebedmelech, made by the Lord before the taking of the city, while the prophet was in prison; and which, no doubt, had its accomplishment, (²⁸⁹¹Jeremiah 39:15-18).

Ver. 1. *In the ninth year of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the tenth month,* etc.] The month Tebet, which answers to part of our December, and part of January; so that it was in the winter season the siege of Jerusalem began:

came Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon and all his army against Jerusalem, and they besieged it; provoked by Zedekiah's breaking covenant with him, and rebelling against him, who had set him upon his throne, in the room of his nephew; so that here was a mixture of perfidy and ingratitude, which he was determined to revenge; and being impatient of it, came at such an unseasonable time of the year for a long march and a siege. The king of Babylon came in person at first; but having begun the siege, and given proper orders to his generals for the carrying of it on, and supposing it would be a long one, retired to Riblah in Syria, either for pleasure or for business. The time of beginning the siege exactly agrees with the account in (⁴²³⁰2 Kings 25:1); only there it is more particular, expressing the day of the month, which was the tenth of it; and so in

(²⁵⁰⁴Jeremiah 52:4). The reason of inserting the account of the siege and taking of the city, in this place, is both to show the exact accomplishment of Jeremiah's prophecies about it, and to lead on to some facts and predictions that followed it.

Ver. 2. [*And in the eleventh year of Zedekiah, in the fourth month,* etc.] The month Tammuz, which answers to part of June, and part of July:

the ninth [day] of the month, the city was broken up; or taken by storm; the walls of it were broken by engines and battering rams, so that the Chaldeans could enter it, and take it. This was just a year and a half after it had been besieged, not being able to hold out any longer, because of the famine; (see ²⁵⁰⁶Jeremiah 52:6,7).

Ver. 3. *And all the princes of the king of Babylon came in,* etc.] Into the city: a breach being made in the walls to take possession of it:

and sat in the middle gate; according to Jarchi, this was a gate of the temple; the gate Nicanor, the eastern gate, which was between the gate of the court of the women and the gate of the temple; who observes, that their Rabbins say, the middle gate was the gate in which the wise men made their decrees and constitutions: so that, in "the place of judgment, wickedness was there"; as in (²⁰⁸⁶Ecclesiastes 3:16); and Josephus^{f729} says, that the city was taken in the middle of the night, when the enemies' generals went into the temple; but rather, according to Kimchi, it was one of the gates of the city of Jerusalem; according to Abarbinel, Jerusalem had three walls, and this was the gate of the middle wall; but others take it to be the gate in the middle wall, between the upper and lower city; perhaps it is the same called the second gate, (³⁰¹⁰Zephaniah 1:10); and might be the chief and principal gate where these princes placed their seats in triumph as victors, and so fulfilled the prophecy of Jeremiah, (³⁰¹⁵Jeremiah 1:15); though they might have another reason for it, their own safety; here they sat till the city was well searched and cleared, lest there should be any ambush laid for them, and cut them off as they entered. The names of some of them were as follow:

[even] Nergalsharezer: according to Kimchi, these are two names of two distinct persons; but generally thought to be one name of the same person; so Josephus, who calls him Nergelearus. The first part of the name "Nergal" was the name of an idol with the Cushites, (²⁷³⁰2 Kings 17:30); and it was usual with the Heathens to give the names of their idols to their

kings, princes, and great men. The other part, “Sharezer”, is a name of one of Sennacherib’s sons; and seems to be an Assyrian name, (²³⁷⁸Isaiah 37:38). The next is called

Samgarnebo; though, according to Hillerus^{f730}, this is a surname of the former, to distinguish him from another Nergalsharezer after mentioned, taken from his office: this name signifying the “strict keeper of Nebo”, the temple of the idol Nebo; (see ²³⁶¹Isaiah 46:1). The next is

Sarsechim Rabsaris; for these are not two names of different persons, but of the same person. The first is his proper name, which signifies the “prince of the Scythians”; the other his name of office, and signifies the “chief eunuch”, or the “chief of the eunuchs”. The last name is

Nergalsharezer Rabmag; these names belong to the same person, who is called from his office “Rabmag”, the “chief magician”, or the “chief of the magicians”, to distinguish him from the other Nergalsharezer before mentioned: these,

with all the residue of the princes of the king of Babylon, entered the city and took it.

Ver. 4. *And it came to pass, [that] when Zedekiah the king of Judah saw them, and all the men of war*, etc.] That is, when Zedekiah and his soldiers saw the princes and generals of the Chaldean army enter the city through a breach made in the wall, and take possession of the middle gate; which they might see from some high tower where they were for safety, and to make their observation of the enemy:

then they fled; finding they were not able to keep their posts and resist the enemy:

and went forth out of the city by night; it being the middle of the night, as before observed out of Josephus, that the city was taken; and they took the advantage of the darkness of the night to make their escape: this they chose rather to do than to surrender to the Chaldeans, and lie at their mercy: and they went

by the way of the king’s garden, by the gate betwixt the two walls; which lay either between the wall of the city and the outworks, as some; or between the old wall and the new one Hezekiah built, (¹⁴³⁵2 Chronicles 32:5); as others; or rather between the wall of the city and the wall of the

king's garden; this being a private way, they took it. The Jews have a fable, and which is related both by Jarchi and Kimchi, that there was a cave or vault underground, from the king's house to the plains of Jericho; and by this way the king went that he might not be seen; but God prepared a hind, which the Chaldean army saw, and pursued, and which went into the cave, and they after it; and when they were at the mouth of the cave they saw Zedekiah coming out of it, and took him:

and he went out the way of the plain; on the south side of the which led to Jericho; and on which side the king's garden was; not that he went alone, but his wives, and children, and princes, and men of war with him; (see ~~251~~ Jeremiah 52:7).

Ver. 5. *But the Chaldean army pursued after them*, etc.] Being informed of the flight of them, by those who surrendered to them, as Josephus says; or not finding the king, his family, nobles, and guards, at the palace, where they expected them; and, knowing which way they must take, pursued after them; not the whole army, only a part of it; for some must remain at Jerusalem to demolish the city, and take the spoil of it:

and overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho; not far from it, as Josephus says; and who also observes, that when his friends and generals saw the enemy near, they left him, and shifted for themselves, and only a few were with him when overtook:

and when they had taken him they brought him to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon to Riblah in the land of Hamath: which is generally thought to be Antioch in Syria; whither he had retired from the siege of Jerusalem, having left it to his generals to refresh himself in this pleasant place, as it seems it was; or that he might be nearer his own kingdom, if any troubles should arise in it during his absence; however, here he was, and here the army brought Zedekiah to him, and those they took with him; which must be very agreeable to the king of Babylon to have this perfidious and ungrateful prince in his power:

where he gave judgment upon him: or passed sentence on him, which was to have his eyes put out: or, "spake judgments with him"¹⁷³¹; he severely chide him, and upbraided him for the injury he had done him; the perfidy he had been guilty of in breaking his oath and covenant. So Josephus says,

“after he came to him, Nebuchadnezzar began to call him a wicked man and a covenant breaker, unmindful of promises he had made to

preserve the country for him; he reproached him with ingratitude, in receiving the kingdom from him he had taken from Jehoiakim, and given to him, who had used his power against the giver; but, says he, the great God that hates thy manners has put thee into our hands.”

Ver. 6. *Then the king of Babylon slew the sons of Zedekiah in Riblah before his eyes*, etc.] Not with his own hands, but gave orders to do it: these must be very young, at least some of them; since Zedekiah at this time was but thirty two years of age. This must be a dreadful spectacle for him to behold; and the consideration must be cutting, that it was owing to his own obstinacy in not taking the advice of the Prophet Jeremiah to surrender to the Chaldeans, whereby he and his family would have been saved, (²⁶⁸⁷Jeremiah 38:17);

also the king of Babylon slew all the nobles of Judah; who did not come over to the Chaldean army and surrender themselves; such who advised the king to stand out to the last, and who fled, and were taken with him; as many of them as fell into the hands of the king of Babylon. Jarchi says those were the sanhedrim, who loosed Zedekiah from his oath to Nebuchadnezzar.

Ver. 7. *Moreover he put out Zedekiah's eyes*, etc.] By what means is not certain; however, hereby the prophecy of Jeremiah was fulfilled, that his eyes should see the king of Babylon, as they did, before they were put out, and that he should not die by the sword, (²⁶⁴⁸Jeremiah 34:3,4); and also the prophecy of Ezekiel, (²⁶²³Ezekiel 12:13); that he should be brought to Babylon, and yet should not see it; for his eyes were put out before he was carried there: a full proof this of the prescience of God; of his foreknowledge of future and contingent events; of the truth and certainty of prophecy, and of the authority of divine revelation:

and bound him with chains, to carry him to Babylon; with two brass or iron chains, or fetters, for both his legs; and thus bound he was carried to Babylon, where he remained to the day of his death.

Ver. 8. *And the Chaldeans burnt the king's house*, etc.] His palace: this was a month after the city was taken, as appears from (²⁶²²Jeremiah 52:12,13);

and the houses of the people, with fire; the houses of the common people, as distinct from the king's house, and the houses of the great men,

(~~2523~~ Jeremiah 52:13); though Jarchi interprets of the synagogues. It is in the original text in the singular number, “the house of the people”; which Abarbinel understands of the temple, called, not the house of God, he having departed from it; but the house of the people, a den of thieves; according to Adrichomius^{f732}, there was a house in Jerusalem called “the house of the vulgar”, or common people, where public feasts and sports were kept; but the former sense seems best:

and broke down the walls of Jerusalem; demolished all the fortifications of it, and entirely dismantled it, that it might be no more a city of force and strength, as it had been.

Ver. 9. *Then Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard*, etc.] The Targum is,
 “the captain of those that kill;”

of the soldiers, of the militia. Some render it, the captain of the “cooks”; others, of the “butchers”^{f733}; but no doubt it was a military office he bore; he was captain of the forces that were left in Jerusalem, after the other part went in pursuit of the king and those with him; or the captain of a company, being sent by the king of Babylon to execute a commission of his: the same

carried away into Babylon the remnant of the people that remained in the city; that were left of the pestilence, famine, and sword; and who were found in it when it was taken:

and those that fell away, that fell to him; that fell to the Chaldean army during the siege of the city; and those that betook themselves to Nebuzaradan, and voluntarily surrendered themselves to him afterwards:

with the rest of the people that remained; in other cities in the land of Judah.

Ver. 10. *But Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard left of the poor of the people, which had nothing, in the land of Judah*, etc.] Because they would have been of no service to the Chaldeans, but a burden to them; and because they had nothing to fear from them; they had no arms to rebel against them, nor money to purchase any; and because it would be to their interest to have the land manured, and not lie waste, that they might have some tribute from it:

and gave them vineyards and fields at the same time; as their own property to dress and cultivate, and receive the advantage of them; though very probably a tax was laid upon them; or they were to pay tribute to the king of Babylon; or, however, contribute out of them to the support of the government that was placed over them; and this was a happy incident in their favour; here was a strange change of circumstances with them; though the nation in general was in distress, they, who before had nothing, are now proprietors of vineyards and fields, when the former owners were carried captive: there might be much of the justice of God conspicuous in this affair; such who had been oppressed and ill used by the rich are now retaliated with their possessions. The Targum is,

“and he appointed them to work in the fields and in the vineyards in that day.”

Ver. 11. *Now Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon gave charge concerning Jeremiah to Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard*, etc.] Of whom he had heard, by one or another of his generals or officers; who had been informed, by those Jews that deserted to them, that Jeremiah had prophesied of the taking of the city by the Chaldeans; had advised the people to fall off to them; and had even exhorted the king and princes to surrender up the city, and themselves, unto them; and that he had suffered much on this account; wherefore the Lord put it into the heart of this monarch, otherwise not at all disposed to the prophets of the Lord, to show regard to him; and therefore, when he sent Nebuzaradan upon an expedition to Jerusalem, he gave him a particular charge concerning Jeremiah:

saying; as follows:

Ver. 12. *Take him, and look well to him*, etc.] Take him out of prison; take him under your immediate care; receive him kindly, and use him humanely; provide everything necessary for him, and let him not want for anything: or, “set thine eyes upon him”¹⁷³⁴ look pleasantly at him, and let him be always under your view and inspection; treat him not with neglect and contempt, but see to it that nothing is wanting to him:

and do him no harm; no injury to his person by beating, imprisoning, or starving him; nor suffer any to be done to him by the common soldiers, or by his own people:

but do unto him even as he shall say unto thee: let him have whatever he asks for: this was great favour from a Heathen prince indeed, and more than he met with from his own countrymen.

Ver. 13. *So Nebuzaradan captain of the guard sent,* etc.] When he was come to Jerusalem, one of the first things he did was, he sent a messenger or messengers to the court of the prison where Jeremiah was, to bring him from thence; and this he did not alone, but with the rest of the princes, who had the same charge, and were joined in the commission with him: two of them are mentioned by name,

Nebushasban Rabsaris and Nergalsharezer Rabmag; the latter of these is manifestly one of the princes that first entered Jerusalem, at the taking of it, (see Gill on “^{249B}Jeremiah 39:3”); and perhaps the former is the same with Sarsechim Rabsaris, as Hillerus^{f735} thinks, mentioned at the same time, who might have two names; unless we suppose there were two persons in the same office:

and all the king of Babylon’s princes: so that great honour was done to the prophet, to have them all charged with his commission from the king; and to be sent unto, and for, by them all.

Ver. 14. *Even they sent and took Jeremiah out of the court of the prison,* etc.] Where he was, when Jerusalem was taken, (^{249B}Jeremiah 38:28); and where he remained until this order came:

and committed him unto Gedaliah the son of Ahikam the son of Shaphan; the father of this person seems to be the same who saved Jeremiah from being delivered into the hand of the people, to be put to death by them, in Jehoiakim’s reign, (^{249B}Jeremiah 26:24); and he himself was doubtless a prince of Judah, that deserted to the Chaldeans during the siege, and was in esteem with them, and appointed a governor over those that were left in the land: now what is here recorded was not done immediately after Jeremiah was taken out of the court of the prison; for however it was, whether through the multiplicity of business, or the neglect of inferior officers, who did not attend to the charge the captain of the guard gave them concerning Jeremiah; though he was taken out of prison, he was bound in chains, and carried among the captives to Ramah; where, very probably, Nebuzaradan, looking over his prisoners, to his great surprise finds the prophet among them; when he released him, and, after some discourse with him, sent him to Gedaliah; (see ^{240B}Jeremiah 40:1-5);

that he should carry him home; or, “to the house”^{f736}; either to the house of Gedaliah, as Kimchi; or rather to the house of Jeremiah in Anathoth:

so he dwelt among the people; that were left in the land, being at full liberty.

Ver. 15. *Now the word of the Lord came unto Jeremiah, while he was shut up in the court of the prison*, etc.] This prophecy was before the taking of the city, and after the prophet had been took out of the dungeon by Ebedmelech; though here inserted after the city was taken; and that to show the great regard the Lord has to such who show favour to his prophets; for though we have no account of the accomplishment of this prophecy, there is no doubt to be made of it; and that Ebedmelech was saved from the general destruction, as is here predicted:

saying: as follows:

Ver. 16. *Go and speak to Ebedmelech the Ethiopians*, etc.] Not that the prophet was to go, or could go, out of prison, to deliver this message to Ebedmelech; but that he should, as he had opportunity, acquaint him with it; either by writing to him, or by word of mouth, when he should visit him; for no doubt he sometimes did, having so great a respect for the prophet:

saying, thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; whom Ebedmelech, though an Ethiopian, served; being a proselyte, and a good man; and therefore would listen unto and believe what came from him:

behold, I will bring my words upon this city for evil, and not for good; meaning the prophecies delivered out by Jeremiah, which Ebedmelech was no stranger to, these should be accomplished; not what promised good, on condition of repentance and amendment; but what threatened evil to the city, and the inhabitants of it, even the destruction of them:

and they shall be [accomplished] in that day before thee; signifying that he should live till then, and his enemies would not be able to take away his life; and that he should see with his eyes all that was predicted accomplished, and he himself safe amidst all this.

Ver. 17. *But I will deliver thee in that day, saith the Lord*, etc.] As from the famine and pestilence, so from the sword of the Chaldeans, and from all the evil that shall come upon the city in the day of its destruction:

and thou shalt not be given into the hand of the man of whom thou [art] afraid; for though he was a bold and intrepid man, as appears by his charging the princes and prime ministers of state with having done evil to the prophet, and that in the presence of the king; yet at times he was not without his fears, which is the case of the best of men; and whereas he knew the courtiers owed him a grudge, for the freedom he took with their characters before the king, and for his friendship to Jeremiah, he might fear they would seek to do him a mischief, and contrive his ruin, in some way or another; but here he is assured he should not be given into their hands; or rather, as Jarchi, into the hands of the Chaldeans; for, as he believed in the Lord and his prophet, so he knew that all that was predicted would certainly come to pass; and that the city, with the king, his nobles, and the inhabitants of it, would fall into the hands of the Chaldeans; he might tremble at the righteous judgments of God, and fear that he himself would become a prey unto them; but here he is assured of the contrary.

Ver. 18. *For I will surely deliver thee*, etc.] Or, in “delivering will deliver thee”^{f737}; this is a repetition and confirmation of what is promised in (^{2B97}Jeremiah 39:17), and more fully explains it:

and thou shall not fall by the sword: by the sword of the Chaldeans, when the city should be taken, as he feared he should:

but thy life shall be for a prey unto thee: shall be safe; be like a prey taken out of the hand of the mighty, and be enjoyed beyond expectation, having been given up for lost; and therefore matter of the greater joy, such as is expressed at the taking of spoils:

because thou hast put thy trust in me, saith the Lord. The Targum is, “in my word”; what he had done in serving the prophet, and other good actions, sprung from a principle of faith and confidence in the Lord; and this the Lord had a respect unto; without which works are not right; and without which it is impossible to please God with them; and which faith may be, and be true, where fears are.