

Jer. 34: A Partial Promise for a Weak Leader
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Overview

1. Structure of 34-45:

- a) Punctuated by three promises to individuals who are described in these chapters, making them exceptions to the general rule outlined in 21:7, that the city will be smitten by the sword:
 - 1) 34:1-7, Zedekiah, king of Judah, who wanted to do right, but didn't have the courage to stand up against the people.
 - 2) 39:15-18, Ebedmelech the Ethiopian, one of the king's slaves, who befriended Jer when more important people stood against him.
 - 3) ch. 45, Baruch, Jer's faithful scribe.
- b) Between the first and second of these (ch. 34-39) are five stories about events before and leading up to the fall of Jerusalem. Describes Jer's experiences with *King Jehoiakim* and *King Zedekiah*.
- c) Between the second and third (ch. 40-44) we learn of Jer's experiences under *King Nebuchadnezzar* after the fall of Jerusalem.
- d) *Application*: God will protect his remnant, even in time of persecution. The stories center around the protection of Jer, and emphasize that those who befriend him and protect him also receive divine protection. Judgment must fall; someday there will be restoration; but in the meanwhile, God will watch over those who faithfully serve him.

2. Structure of 34-39

Four stories symmetrically arranged, with an epilog describing the fall of the city:

	King	Subject	Lesson
a) 34	Zed	Covenant	Imperfect obedience
b) 35	J'kim	Rechabites	Perfect obedience
c) 36	J'kim	Scroll	Consistent Persecution
d) 37f	Zed	Prison	Inconsistent Persecution

e) 39 Neb

f) 34-35 emphasize the sinfulness of the people and the justice of their judgment; 36-37 emphasize God's preservation of his word in the face of persecution.

g) *Application*: Zed's inconsistency is contrasted with the stability, either in obedience or persecution, of an earlier generation. And though Zed's life is preserved, it is under

terrible conditions, as we see in ch. 39: his sons slain before his eyes and then he is blinded, to live with that memory for the rest of his life. Don't be a wishy-washy Christian. Recall the risen Christ's message to Laodicea: Because you are neither hot nor cold, I will spew you out of my mouth.

3. Chronological setting

As we work through these chapters, keep in mind the three main phases of the invasion:

- a) Initial invasion and siege; Jer free.
- b) Siege lifted by Egyptian advance (perhaps in response to Jewish request: Lachish III); Jer arrested.
- c) Siege resumed and Jerusalem destroyed; Jer in prison.

A. 34:1-7, The Promise to Zedekiah

The first of three promises of life that we will see; we'll compare them in more detail after we have reviewed all three.

1. The Time:

- a) Neb is actively besieging the city, so either first or third phase.
- b) The Lord can send Jer to Zed. Thus we conclude Jer is free to move about the city, not imprisoned.
- c) Therefore this is the initial part of the siege, when Zed still entertains hope of Egyptian help.

2. The Message: has two parts. Both are unexpected, from Zed's point of view.

- a) 2-3, the city will fall and Zed will be captured. God will not deliver them; the appeal to Egypt will fail. Contrary to the human notion that we can change our own destiny.
- b) 4-5, Zed will not die by the sword, but will be buried with royal honors. Contrast the treatment of Jehoiakim, 22:18-19, and the general treatment of those remaining in the city when it falls, 21:7. We will see that Zed's captivity is not pleasant, but at least he will die in peace. Contrary to the natural expectation that a captive king would never be allowed royal honors at his death.

3. *Application*: Thus God will demonstrate, both in his judgment and by his mercy, that he is in control. Note the final reason: "For I have pronounced the word." When God decrees something, no one can turn aside his purpose.

As with Zed, so in our world, God's purpose includes both judgment and mercy. He will judge those who break his law; they can find no escape. But as well, he will give everlasting life to those who repent of their sin and receive the Lord Jesus, and no one can take them out of his hand.

What could merit such a promise? Zed tries to do right...but he does

not have the courage to carry through. We see the first evidence of this in the rest of this chapter, and more in later chapters.

B. 34:8-22, Incomplete Obedience

We have first Jer's description of the event, then the Lord's interpretation of it, and finally the consequences of their behavior.

1. 8-11, The Event: The people of Jerusalem freed their slaves, and then took them back. Fit it into the likely historical background, which we can deduce from vv. 21-22: This is during the Egyptian attack, when Neb. temporarily lifted the siege of the city.
 - a) Neb. attacks the city, as the first stage in the punishment that God has promised for the sins of the nation.
 - b) Foxhole conversions: the people try to find some way to appease God. The attitude is exactly that of 21:1-2. God has finally got their attention.
 - c) When they take inventory of their conduct, they recall that Moses forbade them to hold Hebrew slaves in perpetuity. They could only be indentured for six years (Exod. 21:1-4). Furthermore, all slaves were to be released at the Jubilee (Lev. 25:10). Perhaps for generations, these commandments had been ignored.
 - d) Zed leads them in covenant to do this. Why a covenant? They are correcting, not just an accidental slip, but years of neglect. Perhaps every slave in the city has to be freed. Zed rightly wants them to make a solemn commitment. Evidence of his good intentions.
 - e) Then the Egyptians come galloping to the rescue, and Neb withdraws from Jerusalem for a while to confront them. v.21, "The king of Babylon's army ... are gone up from you."
 - f) With the threat of siege (as they think) gone, the people of Jerusalem reconsider the cost of their piety. Meanwhile, the former slaves have not been able to support themselves in the impoverished economy, and their owners are able to force them back into servitude.
 - g) *Application:* This episode shows us very clearly the difference between inward and outward submission to the Lord, between obeying in the flesh and in the spirit. The fear of siege forced the Jews into an outward obedience, but in their hearts they never accepted the Lord's authority, and as soon as the threat was gone, they lapsed back into their old conduct. What God wants is yielded hearts that accept his rule without compulsion.

Example: My friend in college. An unbeliever, he was arrested

for receiving marijuana in the mail. All of a sudden, what an interest he had in the gospel. He could hardly learn enough of it. But a clever lawyer got him off the hook, and that was the last we ever heard of him.

Students, are you more regular with your devotions around exam time? Parents, do you give higher priority to spiritual exercises when you lose your job and the mortgage company is knocking on your door? God sometimes does send crises to wake us up, but do we stay awake? Or are we like children around Christmastime, behaving extremely well because of the current crisis, but ready to lapse as soon as we have our presents? We cannot fool God with such hypocrisy. He knows when we are serving him truly, and when it is just a sham, and he will deal with us accordingly.

2. 12-16, The Interpretation

In recounting the facts of the case, the Lord shows that they are guilty on two counts: they have ignored God's Word and polluted (profaned) God's Name.

- a) 13-14, God's Word. In the law of Moses, Deut. 15:12 (quoted here) and Exod. 21 (right after the ten commandments), the Lord commands that Hebrew servants be released after six years of service. Prominent law, because the Hebrews had themselves just been released from bondage in Egypt. But the nation refused to heed.
- b) "Pollute my name"
 - 1) What does this mean?

Another rendering of the same phrase in Lev: "profane my name." Treat it as a common thing. The same sentiment as the third commandment, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain." To invoke God's name carelessly, without regard for the character and majesty of the One to whom it belongs.
 - 2) How have they taken the name of the Lord?
 - a> As Israelites, they are known as the "people of the Lord." The very name "Israel," "Prince with God," proclaims their devotion to him.
 - b> More specifically, they have met in God's house to make a covenant in God's name. They have called him to witness their resolve, and enforce it.
 - 3) How have they taken the name of the Lord in vain?
 - a> As the people of God, they have despised and ignored his covenant with them at Sinai, in neglecting its provisions.
 - b> As parties in the covenant, they have casually turned away from their own commitments before him.
 - 4) The previous point condemns them for ignoring God's Word.

This one condemns them for their own words, by which they have taken the name of the Lord in vain.

- c) *Application*: What does God expect of his people? Certainly, we are to obey his Word. But that is not all. We have taken his name, in calling ourselves "Christians" and in making our faith known to our associates. If we live in a way that dishonors him, it's no defense to say, "But I didn't disobey any specific scripture." In fact, we have taken his name in vain, and disgraced him.

Consider the implications of being members of the body of Christ. What tremendous power and authority is ours...but what a solemn responsibility, to represent him among our associates.

Nor should we think that it's better not to take the name of Christ. That leaves us open to the just wrath of almighty God against our sin. God has made free and abundant provision for our salvation in Jesus Christ, and we would be fools not to avail ourselves of it. But when we do take it, it is not just as "fire insurance." We do not please God by taking the name of Christ, unless we also permit him to create the life of Christ in us. Otherwise we take his name in vain.

3. 17-22, The Consequences

In this section, Jer calls out the consequence of this judgment in four paragraphs, arranged chiastically. The outer two are summary, and deal with the general threats of Lev. 26 and the fall of the city, respectively. The inner two focus on specific groups of people: the masters who have violated the covenant, and the royal court.

a) 17,22: general judgments

- 1) 17, general threat of the curses of Lev. 26 (Sword, plague, famine, exile). Marked off by 2nd person pronouns from the more specific paragraph immediately following.
- 2) 22, general threat to the city. Neb. will return, capture and burn the city, and leave it without inhabitant (because of the results of v.17).

b) 18-20, 21, specific judgments.

These two short sections are very similar: "I will give X into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of them that seek their life." They differ in the definition of the X, and in the outcome that is proposed.

- 1) In 20, the outcome is being slain and turned into birdfood. In 21, it is simply being taken captive, and in fact we know from vv. 1-7 that Zed will not be slain with the sword. Why the distinction? We get an important clue in the different definitions of X, the parties being compared.

- 2) In 21, X is very simple: Zed and his princes. In 18-20, it is elaborated in 18-19, which by the way gives us one of the clearest pictures in the OT of how covenants were made. An animal was slain, the sacrificial offering, and the parties to the covenant walked between the pieces. This is not only a Jewish custom, but common in the ANE, and elsewhere we have preserved the texts of covenants that describe the meaning of this: "just as this calf is cut in two, so may X be cut in two, and may his nobles be cut in two." (Sefire I, translation of Joseph Fitzmyer)

Every level of society is involved in 19: princes, eunuchs, commoners, even the priests, who should have known better. They all had two things in common: they had sworn the covenant, and then transgressed it.

The distinction of 18-20 from 21 sets these people apart from the King. Either Zed. had no illegal slaves to free in the first place, or else, having released them, he did not bring them into slavery again.

- 3) Resolution of the puzzle: Most of the people are deliberately rebellious against the Lord. Zed is a weak man trying to do what is right. In v.8, he is the one who calls the people to the covenant of release. The contrast with 18-20 shows that he did not break the treaty himself. But he is not strong enough to control his people. We'll see further evidence of his character as a weak, fearful man trying to do what's right again in ch. 37-38.

Application: Man looks on the outward appearance; The Lord knows our hearts. The Lord sees through the hypocrisy of the priests who break the covenant. In spite of their outward piety, they will be slain. He also knows Zed's heart. In spite of the king's fear and vacillation, the Lord knows his desire to do right, and promises him a place among the remnant.

Don't be encouraged to be timid like Zed. He will suffer greatly for his sin. The point is, that even when he is timid, the Lord knows his heart.

Summary

1. The dangers of fox-hole conversions. Let us search our own hearts, and be sure that we are serving God, not in the hopes of evading some current crisis, but because we love him and recognize him as our Lord.
2. Guidelines for godly conduct: conform to God's Word, and sanctify his Name.
3. God's penetrating vision. He can see past both the hypocrisy of

the priests and the timidity of Zedekiah.

Hymn: #60, Cleanse Me.

Analysis

- A. 34:1-7: execution p: Zedekiah to be captured (Zed)
Note chiasmus in reference to Neb. at start and end.
Unusual for prophecies to be embedded in execution p's this way.
1. command: quote p
 - a) quote f: chiastic temporal p
 - 1) text-1: 34:1 HA/D.FBFR):A\$ER-HFYFH)EL-YIR:M:YFHW. M"/)"TY:HWFH
 - 2) time: W./N:BW.KAD:RE)C.AR MELEK:-B.FBEL W:/KFL-X"YL/OW W:/KFL-MAM:L:KOWT)EREC MEM:\$ELET YFD/OW W:/KFL-HF/(AM.IYM NIL:XFMIYM (AL-Y:RW.\$FLAIM W:/(AL-K.FL-(FREY/HF
 - 3) text-2: L"/)MOR
 - b) quote ff:
34:2 K.OH-)FMAR Y:HWFH):ELOH"Y YI&:RF)"L HFLOK: W:/)FMAR:T.F)EL-CID:QIY.FHW. MELEK: Y:HW.DFH W:/)FMAR:T.F)"LFY/W
 - c) quote: coordinated quote p's
 - 1) quote p: the city will fall and Zed be captured.
a> quote f: K.OH)FMAR Y:HWFH
b> quote:
 - 1> The city: sequence p
a: HIN/:NIY NOT"N)ET-HF/(IYR HA/Z.O)T B.:/YAD MELEK:-B.FBEL
b: W./&:RFP/FH. B.F/)"\$
 - 2> Zedekiah: Negated Antonym Paragraph w/amplification
a: Thesis: 34:3 W:/)AT.FH LO) TIM.FL"+ MI/Y.FD/OW
b: Antithesis: Though the events are sequential, they are encoded as disjunctive clauses, to emphasize their distinctiveness.
 - 1: K.IY T.FPO& T.IT.FP"&
 - 2: W./B:/YFD/OW T.IN.FT"N
 - 3: W:/("YNEY/KF)ET-("YN"Y MELEK:-B.FBEL T.IR:)EYNFH
 - 4: W./PIY/HW.)ET-P.IY/KF Y:DAB."R
 - 5: W./BFBEL T.FBOW)
 - 2) quote p
 - a> quote f:
 - 1> 34:4)AK: \$:MA(D.:BAR-Y:HWFH CID:QIY.FHW. MELEK: Y:HW.DFH
 - 2> K.OH-)FMAR Y:HWFH (FLEY/KF
 - b> quote: Negated Antonym Paragraph w/amplification
 - 1> thesis: LO) TFMW.T B.E/XFREB
 - 2> antithesis: reason p
a: text: As previously, unexpectedly disjoint.

1: 34:5 B.:/\$FLOWM T.FMW.T
 2: W./K:/MI&:R:POWT):ABOWTEY/KF HA/M.:LFKIYM
 HF/RI)\$SONIYM):A\$ER-HFYW. L:/PFNEY/KF K."N
 YI&:R:PW.-L/FK:
 3: W:/HOWY)FDOWN YIS:P.:DW.-L/FK:
 b: reason: K.IY-DFBFR):ANIY-DIB.AR:T.IY N:)UM-Y:HWFH
 S

2. execution: temporal p

- a) text: 34:6 WA/Y:DAB."R YIR:M:YFHW. HA/N.FBIY)
)EL-CID:QIY.FHW. MELEK: Y:HW.DFH)"T K.FL-HA/D.:BFRIYM
 HF/)"L.EH B.I/YRW.\$FLFIM
- b) time: reason p
- 1) text: 34:7 W:/X"YL MELEK:-B.FBEL NIL:XFMIYM (AL-Y:RW.\$FLAIM
 W:/(AL K.FL-(FR"Y Y:HW.DFH HA/N.OWTFROWT)EL-LFKIY\$
 W:/)EL-(AZ"QFH
- 2) reason: K.IY H"N.FH NI\$:):ARW. B.:/(FR"Y Y:HW.DFH (FR"Y
 MIB:CFR P

B. 34b, The covenant of release (Zed)

v.21 sets the time of this concurrent with 37:5, the approach of the Egyptians and the temporary withdrawal of Neb from Jerusalem. Apparently, the people made the covenant under threat of Neb, but reneged when they thought Egypt had come to their rescue.
 quote p:

1. quote f: chiastic temporal p

- a) text-1: 34:8 HA/D.FBFR):A\$ER-HFYFH)EL-YIR:M:YFHW. M"/)"T
 Y:HWFH
- b) time: double execution p:)AX:AR"Y
- 1) command: comment p
- a> text: K.:ROT HA/M.ELEK: CID:QIY.FHW. B.:RIYT
)ET-K.FL-HF/(FM):A\$ER B.I/YRW.\$FLAIM
- b> comment <BRYT>:
- 1> LI/Q:RO) L/FHEM D.:ROWR (Lev. 25:10, Jubilee)
- 2> purpose p
- a: text: 34:9 L:/\$AL.AX)IY\$)ET-(AB:D./OW W:/)IY\$
)ET-\$IP:XFT/OW HF/(IB:RIY W:/HF/(IB:RIY.FH
 XFP:\$IYM
- b: purpose: L:/BIL:T.IY (:ABFD-B./FM B.I/YHW.DIY
)FXIY/HW.)IY\$
- 2) initial execution:
- a> 34:10 WA/Y.I\$:M:(W. KFL-HA/&.FRIYM W:/KFL-HF/(FM
):A\$ER-B.F)W. BA/B.:RIYT L:/\$AL.AX)IY\$)ET-(AB:D./OW
 W:/)IY\$)ET-\$IP:XFT/OW XFP:\$IYM L:/BIL:T.IY (:ABFD-B./FM
 (OWD
- b> WA/Y.I\$:M:(W.
 c> WA/Y:\$AL."XW.
- 3) subsequent disobedience:
- a> 34:11 WA/Y.F\$W.BW.)AX:AR"Y-K"N
- b> WA/Y.F\$IBW.)ET-HF/(:ABFDIYM W:/)ET-HA/\$.:PFXOWT):A\$ER
 \$IL.:XW. XFP:\$IYM
- c> {WA/Y.AK:B.IY\$W./M} [WA/Y.IK:B.:\$W./M] LA/(:ABFDIYM
 W:/LI/\$:PFXOWT S

c) text-2: 34:12 WA/Y:HIY D:BAR-Y:HWFH)EL-YIR:M:YFHW. M"/)"T
Y:HWFH L"/)MOR

2. quote: nested reason p

a) reason:

1) 34:13 K.OH-)FMAR Y:HWFH):ELOH"Y YI&:RF)"L

2) seq p: The fathers disobeyed Sinai

a> quote p: The Sinai cov't permitted only indentures.

1> quote f: temporal p

a: text:)FNOKIY K.FRAT.IY B:RIYT)ET-):ABOWT"Y/KEM
... L"/)MOR

b: time: B.:/YOWM HOWCI)IY)OWT/FM M"/)EREC MIC:RAYIM
MI/B."YT (:ABFDIYM

2> quote: Deut. 15:1,12.

a: 34:14 MI/Q."C \$EBA(\$FNIYM T.:\$AL.:XW.)IY\$
)ET-)FXIY/W HF/(IB:RIY):A\$ER-YIM.FK"R L/:KF

b: WA/(:ABFD/:KF \$"\$ \$FNIYM

c: W:/\$IL.AX:T./OW XFP:\$IY M"/(IM./FK:

b> response of the fathers

1> W:/LO)-\$FM:(W.):ABOWT"Y/KEM)"L/AY

2> W:/LO) HI+.W.)ET-)FZ:N/FM

3) contrast p: You reversed your good decision.

a> thesis:

1> 34:15 WA/T.F\$UBW.)AT.EM HA/Y.OWM

2> WA/T.A(:A&W.)ET-HA/Y.F\$FR B.:/("YN/AY LI/Q:RO)
D:ROWR)IY\$ L:/R"/("HW.

3> WA/T.IK:R:TW. B:RIYT L:/PFNAY B.A/B.AYIT
)A\$ER-NIQ:RF) \$:M/IY (FLFYW

b> antithesis:

1> 34:16 WA/T.F\$UBW.

2> WA/T.:XAL.:LW.)ET-\$:M/IY

Isa. 48:11

Jer. 7:30

Ezek. 20:9,14,22,39; 39:7

3> WA/T.F\$IWB.)IY\$)ET-(AB:D./OW W:/)IY\$)ET-\$IP:XFT/OW
)A\$ER-\$IL.AX:T.EM XFP:\$IYM L:/NAP:\$/FM

4> WA/T.IK:B.:\$W.)OT/FM LI/H:YOWT L/FKEM LA/(:ABFDIYM
W:/LI/\$:PFXOWT S

b) text: reason p

1) 34:17 LF/K"N K.OH-)FMAR Y:HWFH

2) reason:)AT.EM LO)-\$:MA(:T.EM)"L/AY LI/Q:RO) D:ROWR)IY\$
L:/)FXIY/W W:/)IY\$ L:/R"/("HW.

3) text: chiasitic. Two outer general paragraphs beginning with
HIN:NIY, and two specific inner paragraphs about delivering
people to those who will seek their lives.

a> "You:" general threat of the curses of Lev. 26:

HIN/:NIY QOR") L/FKEM D.:ROWR N:)UM-Y:HWFH

)EL-HA/XEREB)EL-HA/D.EBER W:/)EL-HF/RF(FB

W:/NFTAT.IY)ET/:KEM {LI/Z:WF(FH} [L:/ZA(:AWFH]

L:/KOL MAM:L:KOWT HF/)FREC

b> Those who violated the covenant: death.

1> comment p

a: text: 34:18 W:/NFTAT.IY)ET-HF/):ANF\$IYM ...
34:20 W:/NFTAT.IY)OWT/FM B.:/YAD)OY:B"Y/HEM
W./B:/YAD M:BAQ:\$"Y NAP:\$/FM

b: comment <HF):ANF\$IYM>

1: HF/(OB:RIYM)ET-B.:RIT/IY

2: vb-object:

A. verb:):A\$ER LO)-H"QIYMW.

B. obj-1: comment p

1. text:)ET-D.IB:R"Y HA/B.:RIYT

2. comment:):A\$ER K.FR:TW. L:/PFNFY

C. obj-2: comment p

1. text: HF/("GEL

2. comment:):A\$ER

a) K.FR:TW. LI/\$:NAYIM

b) WA/Y.A(AB:RW. B."YN B.:TFRFY/W

3: 34:19 &FR"Y Y:HW.DFH W:/&FR"Y Y:RW.\$FLAIM

HA/S.FRISIYM W:/HA/K.OH:ANIYM W:/KOL (AM

HF/)FREC HF/(OB:RIYM B."YN B.IT:R"Y HF/("GEL

2> W:/HFY:TFH NIB:LFT/FM L:/MA):AKFL L:/(OWP

HA/\$.FMAYIM W./L:/BEH:EMAT HF/)FREC

c> Zed and his princes: captivity.

34:21 W:/)ET-CID:QIY.FHW. MELEK:-Y:HW.DFH

W:/)ET-&FRFY/W)ET."N B.:/YAD)OY:B"Y/HEM W./B:/YAD

M:BAQ:\$"Y NAP:\$/FM W./B:/YAD X"YL MELEK: B.FBEL

HF/(OLIYM M"/(:AL"Y/KEM

d> General consequences on the city: return of Neb. and defeat.

1> 34:22 HIN/:NIY M:CAW.EH N:)UM-Y:HWFH

2> WA/H:A\$IBOTIY/M)EL-HF/(IYR HA/Z.O)T

3> W:/NIL:X:AMW. (FLEY/HF

4> W./L:KFDW./HF

5> W./&:RFPY/HF BF/)"\$

6> W:/)ET-(FR"Y Y:HW.DFH)ET."N \$:MFMFH M"/)"YN YO\$"B P