**BCM Bible Study Jeremiah 34-39**

**November 15 & 16: The Failure of Judah’s Leaders and the Fall of Jerusalem**

**Background**: In chapters 34 – 39, there is a lot going on. The chapters don’t happen chronologically, but are specifically organized in a way to communicate a specific story about the fall of Jerusalem. Chapter 34 begins with a prophecy to Zedekiah about the fall of Jerusalem and his own fate. Then, in the middle of the narrative of the fall of Jerusalem, Jeremiah interjects two things that happened in the past that communicate Judah’s disobedience and the failure of the leaders to save their people through repentance. Chapters 37-39 then describe the specific events that happened in the actual fall of Jerusalem on the day that Babylon stood in the courts and took over.

**Read Jeremiah 34:8-22 [Zedekiah and the slaves]**

* What did Zedekiah covenant with the people of Judah in v. 8-9? Then, what happens to this decree in vs. 10-11?
* What is God’s response to the actions of the Judeans?

*Note: There are a few speculations as to why Zedekiah declared that Judeans set their slaves free – but there were likely several motives in place. For one, the freed slaves were more likely to be able to fight the Babylonians alongside of the people of Judah, and two, it was a possible act of repentance, or a last-ditch effort from the people of Judah to get God to spare from the attack of the Babylonians. However, at this point in the Babylonian attack, Egypt has advanced toward Jerusalem which caused a break in the siege from Babylon and the people of Judah thought they might be safe and reclaimed their slaves.*

* In a place of desperation, have you ever promised God that you would do x in order to be freed from the evil or suffering at hand? What was the result?
* What is the problem with making promises to God in the midst of desperation? Is there really repentance at play here – why or why not?
* How can we be sure that we’re really in a place of repentance, and not just suffering the consequences of sin and making future empty promises?

**Read Jeremiah 35: 1-2, 5-10, 12-17 [Jeremiah and the Rechabites]**

* What is the contrast that God is making through the actions that God instructs Jeremiah to carry out in v. 5-10?
* Right now, do you think the world views Christians as more similar to the Rechabites who are perceived by others as outwardly dedicated to teachings of their ancestors or more like the Judeans who you wouldn’t know are supposed to be God’s chosen and holy people by the actions they’re committing?
  + Why do you feel this way? How can your individual life choices make a difference in this grand scheme?
* Similarly, if Christians lived out in faith in the same way that pro athletes dedicate their lives to their sport, what would look different about the world?

**Jeremiah 36: [A Disregard for the Word of God]**

*This is an earlier episode that Jeremiah put in this section. He’s recounting a time when the Lord asked him to write prophecy on a scroll in the reign of Jehoakim and then read it out loud in the temples for the people of Jerusalem to hear. Baruch does this at Jeremiah’s commands and catches attention of the Jehoakim’s attendants, who eventually bring it to read to him. Keep in mind, the scroll contains the prophecy of destruction of Israel and the command to repent.*

**Read 36: 20-32**

* What is the king’s response to hearing the word of God (v.23)?
* What do you think the king is communicating through the burning of the scroll?
* What are some ways that you’ve seen God’s word responded to in the world today (either positively or negatively)?
* Have you ever attempted to “burn” God’s word in your own life (i.e. blatantly ignore it or disregard it)? What was the result?
* How should God’s Word be treated? What should response to the Word look like?

“Any king who thinks he can silence God with a knife and a fire has a very high opinion of himself and a very low opinion of God.” – Warren Wiersbe

**Jeremiah** **37-39: The Fall of Jerusalem [Zedekiah Case study]**

*When the Babylonians withdraw from Jerusalem to engage the Egyptian army (588 BC), Jeremiah warns King Zedekiah that Babylon will return to destroy Jerusalem (37:1-10). During this reprieve Jeremiah leaves Jerusalem for his hometown but is arrested as a deserter (37:11-21). He is thrown into a cistern (large hole in the ground with no escape) and left to die (38:1-6), but Ebed-melech (whose name means “servant of the king”) rescues him and moves him to the court of the guard (38:7-13). Despite a final warning from Jeremiah (38:14-28), Jerusalem is destroyed and King Zedekiah is captured (39:1-10). Jeremiah is vindicated and given the choice of either going into exile or remaining in the land (39:11-18). – Matthew Harmon*

**Read 37:3-10, 16-17, and 38:14-28**

* What actions, characteristics and behaviors do you see from Zedekiah and his interactions with Jeremiah?
* What excuse does Zedekiah give Jeremiah when Jeremiah tells him to surrender?
* “Next to Pontius Pilate (John 18-19), no ruler in Scripture reveals such indecision and vacillation as does King Zedekiah. These two chapters record occasions when Zedekiah made contact with Jeremiah but rejected the word that the prophet gave him.” - Wiersbe
* Which do you think is worse: having the word of God brought to you and burning it, or seeking it out and making excuses of why not to follow it? Why do you feel this way?

**Conclusion:**

“As we share our faith, we will also find those who, like Zedekiah, are willing to listen, but hesitate to act on our words. Others, like Jehoakim, may oppose us directly. In such situations, we cannot compromise the truth, but must remain patient. Instead of arguing and fighting, we should pray the Lord will lead these people to repentance (2 Tim 2:24-26)”

* Discuss: how does this encourage you in sharing your faith with others? Share people in your life that have been on your heart and pray for these people together.

**Resources**: Warren Wiersbe’s Bible Commentary, ESV Study Bible, Crossway Jeremiah Bible Study by Matthew Harmon, Encountering the Old Testament