

August 28

Jeremiah 39, 40, 52

2 Chronicles 36

2 Kings 25

Breaking news across the headlines for us today folks..."JERUSALEM WALL FALLS...KING, BLINDED AND KILLED...TEMPLE, PILLAGED AND BURNED...OFFICIALS ARE EXECUTED...CAPTIVES ARE TAKEN" Can you imagine watching the news on TV in 586 BC? What a monumental day in the history of the nation of Israel! Wow.

We pick up our story when the gates of Jerusalem were finally broken down. Zedekiah, our basket case from yesterday, tried to sneak away. Bad move. For that error he watched his own sons die in front of him. That was the very last thing he ever saw because then the king of Babylon put out his eyes. Pretty terrible huh? What a memory to cherish as the last thing your eyes ever saw. The instant replay must have continued for the rest of his days as he wasted away in prison.

About one month passes and the destruction continues, this time in the form of the burning of the temple, all the houses and every important building in Jerusalem. In addition all "the important people" of the land were executed as well. This means all religious, political, and military leaders were wiped out and the land was left without direction. We further read that over the period of several different deportations, there were 4000 people who were carried into exile. These people were called the "remnant" and the people who God had chosen to save for his own. And not only was God concerned about preserving his people, but the land as well. I wanted to draw your attention to the 2 Chronicles 36:21. What's with the "land enjoying its Sabbath rest?" Well back in Leviticus 26:31-35 we read a warning God gave his people if they did not listen to him and walk in his way. God said in Leviticus that among other things, he would desolate their land and their cities would be put to waste. However, there is irony in this judgment because the desolation of the land would actually bring about rest...not destruction. The land would experience a Sabbath where the soil could recover from it's years of producing...it would, in essence, be made pure once again...restored to a better, more fruitful condition. So you can see now that when the people were exiled from the land, it gave the land a chance to do the very thing the Israelites were supposed to be helping it do all along – taking a Sabbath rest. Now the land would rest for 70 years, recover and be ready to receive the purified Israelites when they returned!

I wish in some ways that the story of Jeremiah ended with the passage we read today. As sad as it is to read about the destruction of the city of Jerusalem and the deportation of virtually the whole population except for some of the very poor and leaderless who were left behind as temporary caretakers, it is kind of exciting to visualize the scene there on the road a few miles outside Jerusalem. Picture this: as the officer of the Babylonian army strides up and down the rows of chained prisoners of war who are about to walk several hundred miles through the wilderness to their new home in Babylon, he carefully checks each identity. Then it happens! He stops and unlocks the chains which bind Jeremiah and says, "King Nebuchadnezzar himself

knows who you are. He has heard about you and about the courage you displayed in bringing true messages from your God to the King. He has heard about the shameful way in which you, a true patriot were treated by your own king and your own people. Go now, you are free to go and do anything you like. If you want to come to Babylon with us, you will not be treated as a prisoner but as a prophet. If you want to stay in your own land, you are free to do so; the king would appreciate it if you would stay close to his new Governor Gedaliah. He could use a man like you to counsel him. That's not an order mind you – just a suggestion. But King Nebuchadnezzar would consider it a personal favor if you would do that..."

If this were a Hollywood script, I can almost guarantee you that this is where the book of Jeremiah would end, but it's not and there is still a good deal of hard work waiting for the prophet who unfortunately is not going to live out his retrial years on that piece of property he bought from his relative. So tomorrow the life and troubles of Jeremiah will continue through reading about his laments, but for today at least he is vindicated and free. If I know anything at all about Jeremiah, even his freedom didn't make him happy because he was crying for his people and his country and his city and for the temple of God. Even as he stood there, his freedom was being dismantled by the troops of Nebuchadnezzar.