
Day 240 - August 28

Judah After Israel's Fall (725-585 BCE)

Fall of Jerusalem

Readings: 2 Kings 25:2-22; 2 Chronicles 36:17-21; Jeremiah 39:2-18; 52:5-30; 40:1-6

Reflections:

- These events around the fall of Jerusalem are obviously rich in significance and so we find it recorded in many different books of the Old Testament. The actual account is brief maybe because of the shame the people felt even telling this part of the story. By the time the walls fall to the Babylonian army, the people of the city have been devastated by famine, drought and disease. All of the judgments had come true.
- The actual walls fell in 586 BCE when Zedekiah and his troops flee the city at night. They are immediately captured. A month later Solomon's temple and the royal palace is burned after the treasures are pillaged. The nobles are killed and almost 5,000 of the remaining people are taken captive to Babylon over the next four years. Every detail of prophetic warning has been fulfilled even with Zedekiah losing his eyes, a horrifying consequence to his ongoing spiritual blindness. "Then [the king of Babylon] put out Zedekiah's eyes, bound him with bronze shackles and took him to Babylon, where he put in him in prison till the day of his death."
- In the destruction of the temple, we see God violently and completely destroy the very heart and symbol of religion that we created. This external place of worship and Torah and sacrifice was burned to the ground under God's direction. Why? Because the facts had been clearly demonstrated. Religion is powerless to change the human heart. Israel had demonstrated that generation after generation. Just as they began their journey with God in Egypt with nothing but their chains binding their lives, so they were not returned into captivity as slaves nothing but shackles and chains. The slavery of their heart to self-centeredness was again completely externalized in their slavery to a foreign power. They had no king but a blind, broken king. They had no temple or tabernacle but a pile of burnt stone and timber. They had no land. They had no freedom or hope. All they were left with was the promise that one day God would send a Messiah, the seed of Eve, who would crush the serpent's head and set them free and transform their hearts from the inside out.
- If the opening of the temple under Solomon was the height of the Old Testament story, the time of greatest hope that having all the rules, having their space free of temptation, having

the best imaginable king and having the certainty of rewarded obedience and punished disobedience, then these passages show us the lowest point in the story of Israel. Death, destruction and devastation has fallen.

- Now in 2 Chronicles 36:20-21 we are told an incredible insight: “The land enjoyed its Sabbath rest; all the time of its desolation it now rested, until the seventy years were completed in fulfillment of the word the Lord had spoken by Jeremiah.” How was the land resting? It was resting from the sin and rebellion of the people. It was resting from cultivation and inhabitation. Creation was restoring itself even as the people of God were held in the prison of their own heart rebellion.
- Before this account ends we see again God’s faithfulness to Jeremiah. For all that Jeremiah had suffered, God rescues him for his covenant faithfulness to his God. God declares to him, “But I will rescue you on that day...; you will not be handed over to those you fear. I will save you; you will not fall by the sword but will escape with your life, because you trust in me...” Jeremiah is rescued by Zebuchadnezzar and is handed over to Gedaliah to be cared for in his home. Jeremiah is now given complete freedom and the blessing of the king of Babylon. “Come with me back to Babylon, if you like, and I will look after you; but if you do not want to, then don’t come. Look, the whole country lies before you; go wherever you please.” Jeremiah goes from being held prisoner and persecuted by his own people to being blessed and released by the enemies of his people. God’s hand was in all of this and revealed again that we can not judge by quick external appearances. God was working through the enemies of Israel. One day, through the Messiah, these same nations would receive the complete mercy and grace of God as all people are welcomed into God’s kingdom, a kingdom that finds its foundations in the power of God to change the human heart through God’s Spirit.
- We learn again that no matter how difficult obedience to God gets, God will be faithful. We are called to trust, endure and wait for God to complete his will!