

A Blinding Vision - The Prophet Jeremiah: 23

(0:02 - 3:04)

Previously, in a chronology conundrum, we learned that the Word of the Lord was simultaneously communicating to two prophets in two different locations. In Jerusalem, to and through Jeremiah ben Hilkiah, and among the exiles in Babylon, to and through another priest, this one, Ezekiel ben Buzi. This class, we're going to continue to follow these two prophets and the Word of the Lord as he communicates to these two prophets, Jeremiah in Jerusalem, Ezekiel ben Buzi in Babylon, and we will show through this study a remarkable and yet often missed overlap, a correlation between the Word of the Lord communicated to the prophet in Babylon, as well as the prophet in Jerusalem.

According to three primary historical sources in the biblical text, 2 Kings chapter 25 verse 1 and 2, Jeremiah chapter 39 verse 1 and 2, and Jeremiah chapter 52 verse 4 and 5, we see that Babylon, the king of Babylon and his troops, laid siege to Jerusalem in the ninth year of Zedekiah on the tenth day of the tenth month. Those happenings in Jerusalem are also shown to Ben Buzi, Ezekiel ben Buzi, in the land of Babylon. In chapter 24 of Ezekiel, we read that Ezekiel is told by the Word of the Lord to mark this very day down, the ninth year, the tenth day of the tenth month, and to underscore the significance of that date and the utter horror and disaster that it brought, we read that Ezekiel's wife, the delight of his eyes, died that very day.

As the Babylonian troops raised the siege against Jerusalem, Jeremiah made the decision to leave the city. We read this in Jeremiah chapter 37. It says that Jeremiah leaves the city en route to go to the territory of Benjamin.

As we understand it from the text, he's going there to receive his portion of a land transaction among his people, and as he reached the Benjamin Gate, he's arrested. He's falsely charged with treason, with desertion to the Babylonian side. Though he objects, he's still placed in prison.

(3:05 - 10:57)

Now it's interesting, the prison compound is located near the Benjamin Gate. We read this in the text, but that's not the only thing that's located near the Benjamin Gate. Attached to the prison is also the residence of the king, King Zedekiah, we read.

The root word there is Yishav. He set, he dwelt near the Benjamin Gate. So we're gonna see that this place is Zedekiah.

Should he choose to consult, to consider, to communicate with the prophet Jeremiah, he's got every advantage to do so, because his residence is near the prison compound. Of course we know from reading the story that he totally ignores the prophetic word that comes to and through Jeremiah. Now as we will see, the word of the Lord during these final days of the Judean kingdom is coming to the prophet Jeremiah in Jerusalem, and we've defined this as prophecies from the pit.

In other words, the word of the Lord is coming to a prophet who is in prison. So in a way, the word of the Lord has to come from the pit. If you look at Babylon, the word is coming to a man in exile, to Ezekiel Ben-Buzi.

What we will show clearly is that the prophetic word that comes to both indicates the same message, that the bad, the immediate bad, is sure to come, and it's certain, and it's soon. But also, both prophets in two different locations are shown that good, that ultimately good will come, but that's far in the future. Now what we're going to do, look at Jeremiah chapter 32.

Jeremiah chapter 32. In this passage, Jeremiah 32 reports an incident that took place in 587 BCE. We're going to learn that this is the tenth year of the reign of Zedekiah, that it's during the siege.

Chapter 32 verse 2 and verse 24 both indicate that the siege is ongoing at the time that these events take place in chapter 32. It is the 18th year of Nebuchadnezzar. Jeremiah is in prison.

Look at verse 1, Jeremiah 32. The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord in the tenth year of King Zedekiah of Judah, which was the 18th year of Nebuchadnezzar, at that time the army of the king of Babylon was besieging Jerusalem, and the prophet Jeremiah was confined in the prison compound attached to the palace of the king of Judah. See, they're both attached.

This is near the Benjamin Gate. They're attached, the prison and the palace. Verse 3, this tells why Jeremiah is imprisoned.

For King Zedekiah of Judah had confined him, saying, How dare you prophesy? Thus said the Lord, I am delivering this city into the hands of the king of Babylon, and he shall capture it. And King Zedekiah of Judah shall not escape from the Chaldeans. He shall be delivered into the hands of the king of Babylon, and he shall speak to him face to face and see him in person.

And Zedekiah shall be brought to Babylon. There to remain until I take note of him, declares the Lord. When you wage war against the Chaldeans, you shall not be successful.

As we continue in chapter 32, what we read is that the very land deal, the transaction to which Jeremiah was making his way when he was arrested at the Benjamin Gate, is now going to come to him. In chapter 32, we read the story. Jeremiah is told that his cousin, Hanamel, the son of his uncle Shalom, is coming to the prison to meet with him.

He is going to offer Jeremiah an opportunity during the days of the siege to purchase, to redeem, a piece of property for which he is entitled as the next of kin. This seems to be based on a rule similar to what we would find in Leviticus chapter 25. And what we read in Jeremiah 32 is that Jeremiah does, in fact, purchase this piece of land for 17 shekels of silver.

Undoubtedly, he gets it for such a bargain because the war is ongoing as the purchase, as the transaction takes place. We read in chapter 32 that Jeremiah wrote the deed, that he seals it in the presence of many witnesses, and that he hands the deed, the completed deed, to his faithful scribe, his friend Baruch ben Neriah ben Maxiah, and he says the following. Look at chapter 32, verse 14.

Thus said the Lord, the Lord God of hosts, the God of Israel, take these documents, this deed of purchase, the sealed text, the open one, and put them in an earthen jar so that they may last a long time. But thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, houses, fields, and vineyards shall again be purchased in this land. And then we reach a white space.

The interesting thing about this passage, first of all, I draw your attention to the fact the manner in which it is preserved. Jeremiah says to place this document in an earthen vessel so that it might last a long time. We know of this practice, a practice very similar to this, because of a discovery made by Bedouin in the winter of 1946 and 1947, when Bedouin tribesmen discovered what came to be called the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Now these scrolls date, by most scholars' reckoning, from a hundred BCE to a hundred CE. So it's in this period that we know that this practice was continued. But it's described as early as the end of the Second Temple period here in the 7th century BCE.

So that is interesting. But what I also want to point out is that this preservation of this document and the transaction of the piece of land during a time of siege is for a very specific reason. What God is trying to show Jeremiah is to go ahead and purchase this place, go ahead and purchase this piece of property, because it symbolizes that in the future, once again, land, houses, fields, vineyards shall once again be purchased in this land.

And then Jeremiah prays. In this particular passage in Jeremiah 32 verse 16 through 25, to summarize, he tells God how much he's praising God for all the good that he's done. The maker of heaven and earth.

Nothing is too wonderful for you. Then he recounts many of the wonderful deeds that God has done on behalf of his people. How he rescued the people from the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, with signs and wonders, etc.

(10:58 - 11:34)

Talks about how he freed them from slavery, and yet ultimately he begins to recount that they did not follow the teaching, follow the Torah. They didn't do what God asked them to do. And then ultimately, listen to verse 24.

He says the following, here are the siege mounds raised against the city to storm it. And the city, because of sword and famine and pestilence, is at the mercy of the Chaldeans who are attacking it. What you threatened has come to pass as you see.

(11:35 - 15:33)

Yet you, Lord God, said to me, buy the land for money and call in witnesses when the city is at the mercy of the Chaldeans. So he's making the point. You who've done wondrously, whose ways have been rejected by the people, now you have me purchase land when the bad that you predicted has come upon the people.

This particular passage is followed by an answer, by a response from God. Look at verse 27. Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh.

Is anything too wondrous for me? Assuredly, thus said the Lord, I am delivering this city into the hands of the Chaldeans and of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. He shall capture it and

the Chaldeans who've been attacking this city shall come and set this city on fire and burn it down. And then God tells Jeremiah the reasons that have brought him to this point, as the writer of Kings and Chronicles describes it, until there is no remedy.

And then, after the list of grievances, God predicts a good time which is to come. Look at verse 37, Jeremiah 32, verse 37. It says, See, I will gather them, talking about the exiles, from all the lands to which I banished them in my anger and wrath and in great rage, and I will bring them back to this place and let them dwell secure.

They shall be my people. I will be their God. I will give them one heart and a single nature to revere me for all time.

And it will be well with them and their children after them. And I'll make an everlasting covenant with them that I will not turn away from them and that I will treat them graciously. And I'll put into their hearts reverence for me so that they do not turn away from me, and I will delight in treating them graciously, and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness with all my heart and with all my soul.

This promise from God is uniquely Deuteronomic, meaning that you find this language not only in Jeremiah but also in the book of Deuteronomy and only in the book of Deuteronomy so far as the Pentateuch is concerned. This idea of for their good, that this is for their good, we find in Deuteronomy 6:24, Deuteronomy 10:13, Deuteronomy 30:9. But it doesn't stop there. We also find an association in verse 40 with this everlasting covenant, the covenant which is described in Jeremiah chapter 31 verse 31 through 34.

This particular passage describes a coming good, a new covenant. Behold, days are coming, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers when I brought them out of the land of Egypt, which my covenant they broke. This covenant that's described in Jeremiah 31, the new covenant, is the everlasting covenant of Jeremiah chapter 32.

And also notice in verse 41, he says, I will delight in treating them graciously and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness with all my heart, with all my soul. This is one of the most beautiful, the greatest promises in all the Bible. Again, employing Deuteronomic language.

(15:33 - 20:14)

In Deuteronomy, in nine places, God tells that there are things which the people should do with all their heart and soul. Nine places, only in Deuteronomy, and here in Jeremiah, suggesting that the restored people will do those things. Ultimately, it will lead to God bringing them back.

He promises to do so with all his heart and all his soul. Meanwhile, back in Babylon, Ezekiel Ben-Buzi is given a similar prophecy. This is the same time chronologically as that which we've discussed in Jeremiah chapter 32.

So if you look with me at Ezekiel chapter 11, Ben-Buzi, the son of Buzi, Ezekiel, is carried in the spirit, we read, to envision, to see what's going on in Jerusalem. And as he watches the events in Jerusalem, the bad that's going on there, he's told to prophesy. And as he is in a vision, in the spirit, in Jerusalem, he begins to prophesy.

And while he prophesies, the following takes place. Look at verse 13. Now as I prophesied, Pelatiah, son of Benaiah, dropped dead.

Ezekiel says in the first person, I threw myself upon my face and cried out loud, Ah Lord God, you are wiping out the remnant of Israel. And then God replied. And among the things that he tells Ezekiel, he says that though they are banished, that ultimately during that banished phase, during that banishment, that he himself, though Jerusalem is destroyed, though ultimately the house of God will be destroyed, that he himself, Jehovah, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, will become, as verse 16 says, a mikdash ma'at, a little sanctuary, that in their place of exile to God they will go to find a holy place.

Now look at verse 17 of Ezekiel chapter 11. Yet say, thus says the Lord God, I will gather you from the people, assemble you out of the countries where you've been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel. They shall return there and do away with all its detestable things, all its abominations.

I will give them one heart, lev echad, and put a new spirit in them. I will remove the heart of stone from their bodies and give them a heart of flesh, that they may follow my laws and faithfully observe my rules. Then they shall be my people, and I will be their God.

But as for them whose heart is set upon their detestable things and their abominations, I will repay them for their conduct, declares the Lord. This passage bears a remarkable resemblance to the prophetic future seen by Jeremiah in prison in Jerusalem. Ezekiel in Babylon sees very similar to what is shown to Jeremiah.

A couple of clear examples. They both see the passage, they hear the words that they will be my people and I will be their God. What we read in Jeremiah 32, 36, we read in Ezekiel 11, chapter 11, verse 20.

What we read in Jeremiah 32, 39, that God says, I will give them lev echad, one heart. We also see that in Ezekiel 11, 19, that God tells the prophet in Babylon, I will give them lev echad. The message is same.

The message from the word of the Lord that comes to Jerusalem to Jeremiah ben Hilkiah also goes to Babylon to Ezekiel ben Buzi. Same message, different people, different places. Remarkable continuity, remarkable overlap and consistency between these two.

(20:15 - 22:11)

It is yet a singular vision of the future. The immediate future is disaster and woe and catastrophe, but ultimately good. A hopeful future as we'll see.

Both promised of a good to come, but the good would not be coming soon. The imprisoned prophet told Zedekiah that he would not escape the Chaldeans. In fact, it was for this very reason that he's put into prison.

He says, rather than escape, you'll be brought, you'll be delivered to the king of Babylon. You will see the king of Babylon face to face and you'll speak to him. In Babylon, Ezekiel ben Buzi says something very similar.

Look at Ezekiel chapter 12. Ezekiel chapter 12. This is what Ezekiel saw.

The word of the Lord came to me, son of man, you dwell among the rebellious breed. They have eyes to see, but don't see. Ears to hear, but don't hear, for they are a rebellious breed.

Therefore, son of man, get yourself gear for exile. Go into exile by day before their eyes. Realize he is in the exile.

He is to act out going into exile. Go into exile from your home to another place before their eyes. Perhaps they'll take note and even though they are rebellious breed, carry out your gear as gear for exile by day before their very eyes and go out again in the evening before their eyes as one who goes out into exile.

(22:12 - 23:39)

Before their eyes, Ezekiel, break through the wall and carry the gear out through it before their eyes. Carry it on your shoulder. Take it out in the dark.

Cover your face that you may not see the land for I make you a portent to the house of Israel. He says, I did as I was ordered. I took my gear by day as gear for exile and in the evening, I broke through the wall with my own hands.

In the darkness, I carried the gear out on my shoulder, carrying it before their eyes. In the morning, the word of the Lord came to me. Son of man, did the house of Israel, that rebellious breed, ask you what are you doing? Say to them, thus says the Lord God.

This pronouncement concerns the prince in Jerusalem and all the house of Israel who are in it. Say, I, Ezekiel, I am a portent for you. As I have done, so shall it be done to them.

They shall go into exile into captivity and the prince among them shall carry his gear out on his shoulder as he goes out in the dark. He shall break through the wall. In order to carry his gear out through it, he shall cover his face because he himself shall not see the land with his eyes.

I will spread my net over him. He'll be caught in my snare. I will bring him to Babylon, the land of the Chaldeans, but he shall not see it and there he shall die.

(23:40 - 24:55)

And all those around him, his helpers, his troops, I will scatter in every direction and I will unsheathe the sword after them. This passage is quite instructive. The question is how accurate was Ezekiel's vision of what was to come to pass? Notice very clearly it does concern the people who are in Jerusalem, but very specifically he is acting the part in front of the exiles in Babylon of the prince of Zedekiah.

So how accurate was it? Ezekiel saw the prince carrying his gear on his shoulder stealthily leaving the city. He also, in order to illustrate this to the people, the exile community, he puts something over his face because he's representing the fact that according to Ezekiel chapter 12, he says he's representing that he will not see the land. Verse 12 and 13 of chapter 12 Ezekiel, that he would not see the land with his eyes.

(24:55 - 28:38)

We're also told according to Ezekiel that Zedekiah's troops, those who are with him, would be scattered and so it happened. One month before the final fall of Jerusalem, 2nd Kings chapter 25 verse 2 through 7, Jeremiah chapter 39 verse 2 through 9, and Jeremiah chapter 52 verse 5 through 11, we read the story in our three primary sources of the final days. Severe famine had taken a stranglehold on the people of the kingdom of Judea, the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

This relentless siege of the Babylonians had food shortages so that the people didn't have anything to eat. On the ninth day of the fourth month of Zedekiah's 11th year, a breach was made in the wall. Look at Jeremiah chapter 52 and we're gonna see how accurate Ezekiel's vision was.

Jeremiah 52 verse 5, the city continued in a state of siege until the 11th year of Zedekiah. By the ninth day of the fourth month, the famine had become acute in the city. There was no food left for the common people.

Then the wall of the city was breached. All the soldiers fled. They left the city by night through the gate between the double walls, which is near the king's garden.

The Chaldeans were all around the city. They set out for the Arava. But the Chaldean troops, the Chaldean troops pursued the king and they overtook Zedekiah in the steps of Jericho as his entire force left him and scattered.

Ezekiel chapter 12 said that the prince would attempt an escape. He did attempt an escape. He was headed towards the Arava.

Ezekiel also saw that the soldiers would be scattered and they were. There's one other piece of information. The question is why did Ezekiel cover his face when he's acting out the prince's sneaking out of the city? Why does he cover his face? Why does he stress that Zedekiah would not see the land? Look at verse 9 of Jeremiah 52.

They captured the king and brought him before the king of Babylon at Rivla in the region of Hamath and put him on trial. The king of Babylon had Zedekiah's sons slaughtered before his eyes. He also had all the officials of Judah slaughtered at Rivla.

Verse 11, then the eyes of Zedekiah were put out. He was chained in bronze fetters. The king of Babylon brought him to Babylon and put him in prison where he remained until the day of his death.

This is a horrible story. The very last thing that Zedekiah saw with his eyes, the death of his sons and all the nobles, then his eyes were put out. When Ezekiel said in chapter 12 that he wouldn't see the land, what he was acting out was that Zedekiah would be blinded.

(28:39 - 29:07)

Now one month later, the ninth day of the fifth month in 586 BCE, the city of Jerusalem, the houses, the king's palace, and even the house of the Lord were put to the torch. They were burned. All but a few of the poorest of the land were left.

(29:07 - 34:08)

Everyone else was carried into exile. Babylon would rule the nations, as God said, for 70 years. It still had years to go.

At the time of the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BCE, Babylon was only in year 47 of a 70-year allotted rule dominion over the nations. Now look at chapter 39 of Jeremiah. Jeremiah chapter 39, beginning in verse 8. The Chaldeans burned down the king's palace and the houses of the people by fire.

They tore down the walls of Jerusalem. The remnant of the people that was left in the city and the defectors who had gone over to him, the remnant of the people that was left, were exiled by Nebuchadnezzar, the chief of the guards, to Babylon. But some of the poorest people who owned nothing were left in the land of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar, the chief of the guards, and he gave them vineyards and fields at that time.

King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had given orders to Nebuchadnezzar, the chief of the guards, concerning Jeremiah. This is interesting. Take him and look after him.

Do him no harm, but grant whatever he asks of you. So Nebuchadnezzar, the chief of the guards, and Nebuchadnezzar, and Rabсарus, and Nargaseretzer, the Rabmag, and all the commanders of the king of Babylon sent, and had Jeremiah brought from the prison compound, they committed him to the care of Gedaliah, son of Ahicham, son of Shethan, that he might be left at liberty in a house. So he dwelt among his people.

So Jeremiah remains in the land of Israel. He had options. He could have gone to other places, but he chose to stay among his people in the land.

He was asked to whom he should go, and he chose to stay with Gedaliah. We know Gedaliah. Gedaliah is the one that's appointed by the king of Babylon as the governor, as the ruler of the place of Judea, the holy family.

Gedaliah was a member of the holy family of Shethan that we talked about in a previous class, so important in the life of Jeremiah. And Jerusalem was left desolate, silent except for sobs and lamentation. Gone were the sounds of mirth and gladness, the voice of bridegroom and bride.

According to Lamentations, it sums it up well, how lonely sits the city, once full of people. And in Babylon, look at Psalm 137. Psalm 137.

By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat, sat and wept as we thought of Zion. There on the poplars we hung up our lyres, for our captors ask us there for songs. Our tormentors for amusement sing us one of the songs of Zion.

How can we sing a song of the Lord on alien soil? If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither, let my tongue stick to my palate, if I cease to think of you. If I do not keep Jerusalem in memory, even at my happiest hour. In Jerusalem, among the poorest of the people who were left in the land, and in Babylon, among the exiles, sadness ruled.

But through the anguish, through the tears, through the mourning, and the woe, the voices who had been proven true in the devastation that they promised also described a hopeful future of happier days, days of joy, a restoration. And what is it that these prophetic voices

said of the days to come? Don't miss the season finale of the world and words of the Prophet Jeremiah.