

Jeremiah Chapters 38-39 John Karmelich

1. As I normally do, I pray about what to call this lesson and how to start it. I believe God wants me to call it "dealing with change". Chapter 38 deals with those who want Jeremiah dead because of his preaching against Jerusalem's fall. We'll also get the story of a non-Jewish person trying to get Jeremiah "out of the slammer" by appealing to the king. Near the end of Chapter 39, Jeremiah will promise him he'll be rescued because of his stand for God. Chapter 39 has the story of Jerusalem's demise as we've been discussing all through this book so far. Bottom line is we have a number of stories of people who fear change, dealing with change and suffer due their fear of change.
 - a) Gee John, this would be interesting if I cared about Middle East history 2,500 years ago. I assume you're going to lecture us about dealing with change. The main thing to accept of course is that change is a part of life. The biblical question of course is how do we know if it's God's will to accept or deal with that change. We'll deal with that.
 - b) Suppose you say, "I know all of that, I have enough on my plate. Why should I listen to a lecture on dealing with change?" Because life's full of changes whether we accept them or not. The great question to ponder is whether or not changes are His will for our lives. The answer is usually yes. When I have to face a big decision, I'm starting with prayer for His wisdom. Then I make the best decision with the information in front of me. Then I accept it, tough as it may be and move on. Have I made bad decisions? Of course. That is a part of life. Sometimes God teaches us by trial and error. If you're thinking, "I know that", then consider the characters in this chapter. We get a non-Jewish man who discovers he's saved because he took a risk for the God of the universe. We get Jewish people who are killed as they refuse to accept the change that's His will. Then there's Jeremiah himself: Despite all of the death going on around him and literally facing his own death here, he still lives his life based on the assumption that God's guiding his life and he'll be rewarded for it.
2. With that said, let me try to summarize these two chapters here: They take place right before and as the city of Jerusalem fell the Babylonians. One of the things I'm going to get into, in this lesson is why "Babylon" is so significant. Let's just say it is a lot more than the rise and fall of an empire!
 - a) These chapters open with some of the top men in Jerusalem (not the king) saying we need to put Jeremiah to death as his preaching about Jerusalem's fall is discouraging those who are defending this city. The complainers approach the king to tell him in effect, we got to kill Jeremiah. Instead of say, throwing him over the wall, they carefully lower him into a pit, (picture an hourglass type of hole with no way to climb out). What's fascinating to me is the same way he was carefully lowered in the hole is the same way he got pulled out! In a sense he was left there to die. Thus our first "death" section.
 - b) By Verse 7 we get our first hero. A non-Jewish servant in the palace pleads for Jeremiah's life and says in effect, "He's a good man, who you the king knows is preaching what God told him to preach, so let me get him out of there". Anyway ropes were lowered into that pit and Jeremiah got resurrected out of it so to speak.
 - c) The chapter ends with a discussion between the king and Jeremiah. The king asks him in effect, "Jeremiah is there anything we can do differently?" He essentially responds with a message he's been preaching all his adult life, which is this city is a goner. The only way you're life will be spared is literally to give up. The king is full of fear. He thinks that if he gives up those who already defected will hurt him. The king had no idea at this point how bad his actual fate will be. Bottom line is the king feared change even if it's His will!
 - i) The point of course for you and me is when we're guided by our fears, we will lose every time! The king was a weak man. He let his "top dudes" put Jeremiah in that cistern and didn't do anything about it until a non-Jewish person had the boldness to face the king to say in effect, "That's not right! Put an end to it!" The point is if we fear change and His will, we will be guided by our fears and not God Himself.

- d) In fact there's a fascinating little poem that mentions the fact the king is stuck in the mud, which is what Jeremiah's pit was like where he was stuck. That poem's part of another of Jeremiah's predictions. The lines around it tell how the royal family is going down for the count so to speak! It's a prediction about how the city will fall and the walls be burned as well as the city itself. They refuse to accept the change coming and will suffer for it!
 - e) Then in Chapter 39, we get the fall of Jerusalem itself told in detail. It had to be written by someone with first hand knowledge of the event. It names the Babylonian leaders. We'll get the exact place in Jerusalem where the Babylonian leaders made their new base camp, in Jerusalem itself as they organize the destruction and deportation of survivors.
 - f) As I stated in earlier lessons, the king's rule ended with the Babylonians killing the sons of the king right in front of the king and then blinding the king. That's another "death scene" that's common in these chapters. The chapters also imply that a lot of people died there as that war is now pretty much over. A lot of people in Jerusalem back then, heard Jeremiah prophesying about all of death and destruction coming. Now it's right in front of them as I'm guessing bodies are falling "everywhere" in Jerusalem in this chapter.
 - g) Anyway the rest of Chapter 38 focuses on the death and destruction of the king the people in Jerusalem and the city itself. However, that's enough depression for one introduction!
 - h) Chapter 38 ends with a final blessing. The non-Jewish guy who took a stand for Jeremiah's back for an "encore appearance". Let's just say he gets saved for taking a stand for God. In a sense he gets resurrected from this mess as well as Jeremiah himself!
3. What I'd like to do to close out this introduction, is return to my theme of dealing with change.
- a) Let me start with the question of why Babylon? After all, God could have made any place the center of an empire and destroy Israel. Why them? Yes that city goes back to the early chapters of Genesis as the "tower of Babel" was in Babylon. Yes it represents any rebellion against God so by having Babylon itself destroy Jerusalem it indicates the power of those who desire to not have the God rule over our lives. The empire was so full of idols it was what it took for the Israelites to end idolatry. Yet even with all that, the book of Revelation speaks of the death of Babylon. Was it one and the same? It's debated. What scholars will state is the Babylon death in Revelation is about the end of all rebellion in the world that's against God. Therefore, Babylon itself is a symbol of death and God "killing it" shows the end game of God destroying the system that started and ends the rebellion against Him.
 - i) My point of all of this is people hate change so much they'd don't realize it but it is a path to death (that's what Babylon represents), life without God with its pleasure that only lasts for a season. One of the main reasons people refuse to live like God wants them to live is the simple
 - b) Speaking of dealing with change, let's talk about Jeremiah's situation here. He got lowered into a muddy pit. He got resurrected so to speak when he got pulled out the same way he was lowered in. I'm sure Jeremiah gave up at that point and thought God is through with him. He was probably as shocked as anyone when he got pulled out. My point is God can change our lives even when we think there's no hope.
 - c) Then we get the resurrection of a non-Jewish person who stood up to a weak king as he is taking a stand for the Israelite God. Obviously these chapters aren't perfect in their model of living the Christian life, but they're not bad either.
 - d) I don't know about you, but I love a good story that inspires me to be a better person. Yes it should inspire us to be bold in our witness for Jesus and I'll develop that thought some more when we'll be going verse by verse through these chapters.
 - e) For those of you who don't read past the introduction, I hope you can see the importance of taking a stand for Jesus "no matter what" even when facing horrid situations and we do not know the outcome. Being a follower of Jesus will mean God will allow us to wallow in the mud of our own pits until a "lifeline" is sent to pull us through. Hope all that is a help to us as we go through this lesson. OK, then time for the details.

4. Chapter 38, Verse 1: Shephatiah son of Mattan, Gedaliah son of Pashhur, Jehucal son of Shelemiah, and Pashhur son of Malkijah heard what Jeremiah was telling all the people when he said, ² "This is what the LORD says: 'Whoever stays in this city will die by the sword, famine or plague, but whoever goes over to the Babylonians will live. He will escape with his life; he will live.'³ And this is what the LORD says: 'This city will certainly be handed over to the army of the king of Babylon, who will capture it.' "
- a) Let's start off recalling where we left off. We're describing life in Jerusalem soon before the complete fall of that city. For all you date people, the Babylonians started their siege of the city about January of 588 and by July of 587, they had successfully starved out the city and they entered the city with the intent of destroying it. We last read of our hero Jeremiah in a "softer prison" where he was given a ration of bread until it all ran out during the siege.
 - b) The key point is it was tough times for the Israelites. They refused to listen to Jeremiah as they're now suffering because of it. They refused to accept the reality of God's desires.
 - c) With all that said, this chapter opens with a discussion among the top officials there. They were thinking, "This guy Jeremiah has been preaching against Jerusalem for years and it's causing people to defect and lose heart. We need to do something about him". The pattern we'll see in these chapters is people who give God lip service but don't listen even when it is the obvious right thing to do.
 - i) Let me pause to consider a strange thought that I'll connect to these verses. Do the demons in hell believe Jesus is God? Of course, so why aren't they saved and why do they rebel against God? A theory is they rebel because they don't want humans to be the center of God's game plan as they want Satan to rule. My point is they're created by God, rebelled against Him and they're not saved because they refuse to do His will. OK, so what? Consider these top officials here in Jerusalem. Did they believe God exists? Did they believe Jeremiah was right about the Babylonians? I'd say yes as "they're at the gate"! The reason they refused to do what Jeremiah asked was they feared change. They wanted to keep their jobs and not be slaves. That is understandable. The question for us is, are we willing to be "slaves to God's will" or just enjoy this life as if God doesn't exist.
 - ii) To give a famous poem quote, "Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven " (John Milton, "Paradise Lost"). My point of giving all of this is to understand what one is choosing when one chooses "death".
 - iii) OK John, you're getting weird and we're barely warming up. My simple point is a lot of people refuse to obey God because they're too comfortable in their lifestyle. I know most of you know that. That is why most people who give their life to Jesus do so at a young age. Be grateful for any older person who changes at any age! In these chapters we're opening up with the first group of many people who're going to die simply because they refuse to obey God. That's part of living as He desires.
 - d) With that said, we can get back to the verses. We have a handful of names that I'll assume we'll forgot soon, if we haven't already! Think of these guys as the "royal court". With the Babylonian army surrounding the city, my guess is they're sitting around thinking, "What can we do to protect our "phony baloney jobs""? Then they think we need to do something about that Jeremiah guy as he's discouraging the soldiers fighting to protect this place. So they're thinking, what can we do about him? (Not thinking, "He could be right or maybe we should consider what he's saying", but how do we keep the status quo!")
5. Verse 4: Then the officials said to the king, "This man should be put to death. He is discouraging the soldiers who are left in this city, as well as all the people, by the things he is saying to them. This man is not seeking the good of these people but their ruin."
- a) It's not "Let's throw this guy out of the city to the Babylonians. It's not let's put a gag over his mouth. It's "He's got to die so we don't have to hear him preach anymore!"

- b) What we're going to see them ponder is "How do we kill him without violating God's law of "no murder"? First, these guys know that the king considers him to be a prophet that's sent from God, so they decide to approach the king on this matter.
6. Verse 5: "He is in your hands," King Zedekiah answered. "The king can do nothing to oppose you."
- a) The king's historical reputation was he was a weak king who trusted in his advisors more than he stood up for what's right. I picture these advisors ganging up on the king not for a speech on getting more men on the wall, or we need to surrender and listen to Jeremiah, but we've got to deal with Jeremiah as he's a "Tokyo Rose" (if you get that reference). The king watched this gang of advisors stand there and was afraid to stand up against them to do the right thing.
7. Verse 6: So they took Jeremiah and put him into the cistern of Malkijah, the king's son, which was in the courtyard of the guard. They lowered Jeremiah by ropes into the cistern; it had no water in it, only mud, and Jeremiah sank down into the mud.
- a) Let me start by explaining what a "cistern" is. Think of it as a water storage well. There's a narrow opening in top and it widens below. Picture half of a sand dial as that's the best picture of it I can use. In dry climates like Israel they were often "on the property". Yes it is wide enough that a person can get through the opening, but once one is down the hole, one cannot get out. Anyway, that's what Jeremiah was placed into as a prisoner.
- b) What I pondered is, if the "royal family" wanted him dead, why not push him off a cliff or simply push him in the cistern? Why lower him by ropes? If I had to guess, these people wanted to go to synagogue the following Saturday and say they didn't commit murder. It explains their deviousness. Yes the "pushers" will get there's as Jerusalem will fall soon. It shows us how much trouble people will go through to keep the status quo no matter what God says. We'll discuss that some more in a bit.
- c) In the meantime, Jeremiah was placed in this pit. The bottom was muddy, so that made it even more unlikely that he could possibly escape. All we know was this thing was empty for all intents and purposes except a muddy floor and Jeremiah was stuck there. Yes it's a test of Jeremiah's faith. Back in Chapter 1 God told him he'd be a witness for Him all of his life. Yes, Jeremiah will get rescued, but I'm positive he has doubts about how long he will be that witness during that moment.
- d) With that said, it's time to introduce the hero of this chapter:
8. Verse 7: But Ebed-Melech, a Cushite, an official in the royal palace, heard that they had put Jeremiah into the cistern. While the king was sitting in the Benjamin Gate, ⁸ Ebed-Melech went out of the palace and said to him, ⁹ "My lord the king, these men have acted wickedly in all they have done to Jeremiah the prophet. They have thrown him into a cistern, where he will starve to death when there is no longer any bread in the city."
- a) Time for an introduction. The hero of our story is named Ebed-Melech. I'll call him "Ebe" to make it easier on my typing fingers. First he was a Cushite. In our vocabulary, he was from Ethiopia. I'll say "most likely black", and definitely a foreigner. How he got there is not known. What's known is that if he didn't take a stand for God, odds are good since he worked for the royal family he might suffer the same fate as them, which is death, as we'll read in the next chapter.
- b) I also find it interesting that he got access to the king. Since he worked in the king's house, that means he had access to the king without being searched. Even with that, you have to give this guy credit for boldness. As I preach on a pretty regular basis, boldness is the one quality most people lack but it's what God desired and what the disciples prayed for early in the book of Acts (Chapter 3). Anyway, "this outside servant" went up to the king as he said how wrong all his trusted advisors and probably own family members were acting.
- c) Let's be honest, this guy could end up in that same cistern just for preaching this!

- d) Notice we don't get any indication that God told him to preach this. We don't even know if he accepted Judaism. We just know he was a loyal servant in the palace. When all those who wanted Jeremiah dead left the room, he took the opportunity to preach how wrong it is to the king's face. That's boldness, or "Hoospa" as they say in Yiddish.
 - e) Onto the specifics. This foreigner told the king how the royal court lowered Jeremiah into a cistern. This guy said Jeremiah was "thrown in there", so he may have exaggerated that point a little, but he still told the truth that Jeremiah would starve to death unless the king did something about it. I suspect he knew that Jeremiah gave the king messages which is why he didn't have to explain who Jeremiah was to the king.
 - f) Anyway, the speech convicted the king and he decided to do something about it.
9. Verse 10: Then the king commanded Ebed-Melech the Cushite, "Take thirty men from here with you and lift Jeremiah the prophet out of the cistern before he dies."
- a) The standard question here is why 30 men to raise up Jeremiah? I doubt it would require that many people. The most logical answer is protection. If the "royal family" realized the plan going on they might try to stop them. I keep thinking about the story in the book of Acts, when the Jewish leaders wanted to kill Paul. To prevent that, the Romans had a big bunch of soldiers protecting Paul as he was being transferred away. (See Acts 23:20-24.)
10. Verse 11: So Ebed-Melech took the men with him and went to a room under the treasury in the palace. He took some old rags and worn-out clothes from there and let them down with ropes to Jeremiah in the cistern. ¹²Ebed-Melech the Cushite said to Jeremiah, "Put these old rags and worn-out clothes under your arms to pad the ropes." Jeremiah did so, ¹³ and they pulled him up with the ropes and lifted him out of the cistern. And Jeremiah remained in the courtyard of the guard.
- a) I picture Jeremiah sitting in the cistern wondering, "God why aren't you speaking to me at this moment? Why aren't you rescuing me?" After some unnamed timer period, he sees a bunch of old clothes coming down from the opening. Then some ropes get lowered down with instructions to put the rags under his arm pits so the ropes can lift him out of there.
 - b) OK John, this is a cute story, what do we get out of it? For starters, until we actually die, it is not always going to be logical how God will guide our lives. An expression I like is that God doesn't always lead us by the hand, but often provides us a "rope" as to pull us out of our situation. Will He always rescue us in unlikely ways? Of course not. The point is He works in ways that are beyond our knowledge. It's about never giving up hope.
 - c) One of my favorite stories from World War II, is about some men stuck out at sea with the Germans all around them. They single message they got out is, "But if not". It refers to the fact that they were trusting in God to rescue them but if He decides not to, they'll still be a servant of His. My point is that's how I view Jeremiah dealing with being rescued. It may be that God will rescue him, "but if not".
 - d) That leads to my favorite question, "now what". Remember the Babylonian army is still a threat. The royal family still wants him dead. So now what? The answer for the moment is Jeremiah had to remain in the courtyard by the cistern until he knew "what's next".
11. Verse 14: Then King Zedekiah sent for Jeremiah the prophet and had him brought to the third entrance to the temple of the LORD. "I am going to ask you something," the king said to Jeremiah. "Do not hide anything from me."
- a) All of this leads to the next scene. The king confronts Jeremiah again. The king must have figured, "OK Jeremiah owes me as I had him rescued. Maybe he'll "change his tune" after I had him rescued." Anyway, here comes the big "what's next" question:
12. Verse 15: Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, "If I give you an answer, will you not kill me? Even if I did give you counsel, you would not listen to me."
- a) Jeremiah's first logical thought is, "If I tell you the truth again, won't you'll just send me to a pit again? You know what's God's plan for your nation. If you're just willing to accept a bit of truth, everyone around here can still live out a full life!

13. Verse 16: But King Zedekiah swore this oath secretly to Jeremiah: "As surely as the LORD lives, who has given us breath, I will neither kill you nor hand you over to those who are seeking your life."
- Anyway, before we even get to God's message for the king, first we have to establish what is going to happen to Jeremiah after he tells the truth.
 - If nothing else, this shows it's ok to plead for our lives (or say, our health) even while we're trying to do God's will at any one moment.
 - With that understood, Jeremiah got what he wanted, assurance that the king won't let him be killed. Did Jeremiah trust the king probably not, but it'll probably keep him alive for a short period of time until the Babylonians "make it official".
 - OK then, onto Jeremiah's message itself.
14. Verse 17: Then Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, "This is what the LORD God Almighty, the God of Israel, says: 'If you surrender to the officers of the king of Babylon, your life will be spared and this city will not be burned down; you and your family will live. ¹⁸ But if you will not surrender to the officers of the king of Babylon, this city will be handed over to the Babylonians and they will burn it down; you yourself will not escape from their hands.' "
- The first thing that crossed my mind is if God wanted to speak to the king, why didn't He just do it directly? Why work through Jeremiah? For starters the king accepted the fact he is God's prophet. I suspect the king was also scared to approach God Himself as he knows he hasn't been doing God's will. Anyway, time for Jeremiah's message itself.
 - The short version is Jeremiah says, "There's no stopping the invasion. It's God's will so it's going to happen. However, if you (king) surrender, you'll live will be spared and the city won't be burned down".
 - The reason the invasion was inevitable was as I've stated a bunch of times through this book, was it took, the invasion to cure the Israelites of idol worship. That leads to the question, "How far would God go to drive us to Him or get us to live as He's desiring we live?"
 - Anyway with that inevitably certain, the only key question is will the king lead the people peacefully do God's will, or will they suffer even more for disobedience. As most of you know (and will be told in the next chapter) the king's sons are going to be killed in front of the Israel king before he's blinded and taken to Babylon.
 - So if the king believed Jeremiah was God's prophet, why didn't he obey? The truth is he feared change. As we'll read he feared what others would do to him if he did quit. The sad story of this final Israel king is he was a man of fear. He feared what would happen to him if he surrendered, so he suffered for that fate.
 - Before I move on, I've always argued that the opposite of faith is fear. It's fear that makes us afraid of change. It's fear that prevents us from being bold for Jesus. It's fear that prevents us from living as God desires. OK then, back to Jeremiah!
15. Verse 19: King Zedekiah said to Jeremiah, "I am afraid of the Jews who have gone over to the Babylonians, for the Babylonians may hand me over to them and they will mistreat me."
- Speaking of fear, I present Verse 19: Instead of saying, "Jeremiah if God says that I should surrender, hand me a white flag". Instead he's a man of fear. He fears that the Jewish men who have already surrendered will mistreat him. Again, when we live out of fear of what might happen, it's always a bad sign.
16. Verse 20: "They will not hand you over," Jeremiah replied. "Obey the LORD by doing what I tell you. Then it will go well with you, and your life will be spared."
- As most Christians will tell you, God always works on our level. He's well aware that the king is full of fear. Notice God through Jeremiah is trying to work him through it. We get the message that if the king obeys God not only will his life be spared, but no harm will be occurring to the king but his life will be spared. Time to discuss, "what if he won't..."

17. Verse 21: But if you refuse to surrender, this is what the LORD has revealed to me: ²² All the women left in the palace of the king of Judah will be brought out to the officials of the king of Babylon. Those women will say to you: " `They misled you and overcame you-- those trusted friends of yours. Your feet are sunk in the mud; your friends have deserted you.'
- We get a prediction that as women are being led away to Babylon (what the girls say is a poem. Some argue it may be a popular refrain at that time). Anyway, the girls will state that the "friends" of the king let him down. A quick history note. The top advisors to the king were hoping Egypt would rescue them. If you read the last lesson, you know that it didn't work out at all! Anyway the little "ditty" predicts everyone will be led away.
 - I love the fact the little poem mentions, "Your feet are sunk in the mud". We just earlier in the chapter, Jeremiah stuck in the mud with no escape. That can't be a coincidence.
 - The underlying point is there is a too late with God. For most of us, that's at death. What I also find is once people get set in their ways they're less likely to change. That's why the most likely time for people to accept Jesus is early in life. Even if they turn away for some time period, usually that education pays off and they return. Yes some will get it at a later date in life, but most people "get it" when they're young.
 - The underlying point is this king is so afraid of change, afraid of how others could hurt or kill him, he feared doing God's will. The king will suffer horribly because he was a man of fear. Even when Jeremiah tried to reason with him, it's not enough to change someone as they get set in their lifestyle.
 - With that said, let's get back to the conversation.
18. Verse 23: "All your wives and children will be brought out to the Babylonians. You yourself will not escape from their hands but will be captured by the king of Babylon; and this city will be burned down."
- It's amazing to consider with all this information God gave the king he still isn't budging.
 - Again it shows when people fear change, even explaining how it'll affect the family won't be enough to get them to budge.
 - OK we get this, stop pounding it over our head! The application is I'm convinced that no one can say to God on judgment day, "I didn't know better". In today's world where one can read the bible via any smart phone for free, there's no excuses left in any country with free access to His word. For those who die before an age of accountability or those living in a place where bible reading is forbidden, again I trust in a God who judges fairly.
 - With that understood, we're dealing with a person who's so driven by his fears, and a fear of change, we'll see the horrid consequences in the next chapter coming up. First we have a few more verses to go here to deal with Jeremiah and this conversation.
19. Verse 24: Then Zedekiah said to Jeremiah, "Do not let anyone know about this conversation, or you may die. ²⁵ If the officials hear that I talked with you, and they come to you and say, `Tell us what you said to the king and what the king said to you; do not hide it from us or we will kill you,' ²⁶ then tell them, `I was pleading with the king not to send me back to Jonathan's house to die there.' "
- Even with all the talk of death and destruction with the Babylonian army starving out the city, there's still the issue of what to do with Jeremiah in the meantime. The king tells him in effect, "Keep your mouth shut about this and you won't die". If the royal court (the men who put Jeremiah in the cistern) hear of this, they'll want to punish him again. So the king says in effect, "If they ask why you're free, I'll just say you pleaded for your life and I then agreed not to send you back to the house that had that cistern.
 - Keep in mind that Jeremiah probably feared for his own life still. He didn't know if either the Babylonians or the Jewish leadership will kill him, but he had to be worried too. What is the difference is Jeremiah still trusted in God through it all, while the king worried over what could happen to him.

20. Verse 27: All the officials did come to Jeremiah and question him, and he told them everything the king had ordered him to say. So they said no more to him, for no one had heard his conversation with the king. ²⁸ And Jeremiah remained in the courtyard of the guard until the day Jerusalem was captured.
- a) Here we get the epilogue top essentially say, "Jeremiah survived the day and he remained with the residents of Jerusalem until the siege was over". Did Jeremiah suffer nearly death conditions like the rest of the residents? Of course. Being a believer doesn't mean we'll be living in comfort at all times. It means God's with us as we go through whatever it is God wants us to deal with as a witness for Him.
 - b) With that understand, it's time for the actual fall of Jerusalem; Chapter 39:
21. Chapter 39, Verse 1: This is how Jerusalem was taken: ¹ In the ninth year of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the tenth month, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon marched against Jerusalem with his whole army and laid siege to it. ² And on the ninth day of the fourth month of Zedekiah's eleventh year, the city wall was broken through. ³ Then all the officials of the king of Babylon came and took seats in the Middle Gate: Nergal-Sharezer of Samgar, Nebo-Sarsekim a chief officer, Nergal-Sharezer a high official and all the other officials of the king of Babylon. ⁴ When Zedekiah king of Judah and all the soldiers saw them, they fled; they left the city at night by way of the king's garden, through the gate between the two walls, and headed toward the Arabah.
- a) Chapter 39 starts in effect with, "Since I was describing life in Jerusalem shortly before the fall of the city, let me tell you how the actual fall took place.
 - b) Obviously Jeremiah had "front row seats" to this event. He learned the names of the main guys in charge of the siege. For what it's worth "Nergal" and "Nebo" refer to names of the main Babylonian gods. This leads to a couple of questions:
 - i) First, if Jeremiah is really a prophet, how do we know he didn't just write this after all of it took place? Because people going into captivity read his writings and knew he predicted it beforehand. Even if you don't believe that, he did predict the exact length of the captivity and he wasn't around for that closing event. Plus we'll read in later chapters he predicts the Babylonian empire end in detail that includes stuff that can be considered "end time" stuff. We'll get to all that later.
 - ii) The other issue's if "God is God" wouldn't it seem logical to the surrounding world that the Babylonian gods "rule the world" since they just won? How do they argue that the Israel God is greater given all of that? That's why we get the 70-year thing as well as the fact that Israel's the only country in world history to become a nation again after being conquered and scattered. Anyway, that proves that.
 - c) Notice Verse 1 mentions the ninth year of the last Jewish king. Verse 2 says it ended in the 11th year. If you "translate" the months and years in English, the siege lasted 30 months. I would say that's a good time length to starve out a city. I'm sure the disease, starvation as well as other horrid things happened as Jeremiah predicted accurately.
 - d) In the last chapter we had a big bunch of verses about the Jewish king being scared. Here in these verses, we read about the king fleeing out of the city. However, that effort was a futile effort as he was caught and now has to "face the music". We get details of how and when the king escaped so the details must have been reported to Jeremiah somehow. The main thing to grasp is this is the end of Jerusalem for 70 years of being a city. History and archeology verify the fact the city was burned to the ground as well as the other cities that were there at that time.
 - e) So why was Babylon so "thorough" at this? Because the Israelites claims their god was the only god and they wanted to prove who was better! Besides the Babylonians already did a lot of damage on two earlier occasions and still rebelled. The wiping out of that city was a message to other cities considering rebellion against Babylon.
 - f) Anyway, it's time for a Babylonian "victory lap". What happens next is a sad reality:

22. Verse 5: But the Babylonian army pursued them and overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho. They captured him and took him to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon at Riblah in the land of Hamath, where he pronounced sentence on him. ⁶ There at Riblah the king of Babylon slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes and also killed all the nobles of Judah. ⁷ Then he put out Zedekiah's eyes and bound him with bronze shackles to take him to Babylon.
- a) History tells us that Nebuchadnezzar was not actually in Jerusalem leading the army. His headquarters was a hundred miles away (more or less) coordinating "the big picture". He wants to have all of the Middle East "and then some" as part of an empire, so he wasn't in that city for the victory. I don't believe that's on the "final quiz" in heaven. I just wanted to tell who these people were at this moment as they're now in charge of God's land.
 - b) With that said, we're now reading the end of the descendants of King David ruling in the land of Israel. As Verse 6 says, and I've stated a few times, Nebuchadnezzar made a huge example out of Zedekiah for rebelling against him. Realize Nebuchadnezzar put Zedekiah there in the first place. Since that king made this large army "waste 2.5 years" in rebellion, the king had Zedekiah's sons killed right in front of him. Then he was blinded so the final thing he got to see was the death of his sons.
 - c) OK John, this has been an interesting story and I now know more about ancient history in the Middle East than I ever care to know. Why should I care? The first answer is we learn what happens to those who refuse to do God's will. So does this mean people in hell have their eyes put out? No, it's worse. It's about a lifetime separation from God. It's about lots of suffering in ways that never end. What happened to the Jewish king is a lesson on what is our fate when we don't use our lives as a witness for God. We suffer far more than if we never committed our lives to Him in the first place.
 - d) Bottom line, bad news and it's a reminder we're saved to be used by Him, accept it!
 - e) As for the king he was taken probably in a cage to Babylon to live out the rest of his life.
 - f) Meanwhile we still have to discuss the final end of Jerusalem.
23. Verse 8: The Babylonians set fire to the royal palace and the houses of the people and broke down the walls of Jerusalem. ⁹ Nebuzaradan commander of the imperial guard carried into exile to Babylon the people who remained in the city, along with those who had gone over to him, and the rest of the people. ¹⁰ But Nebuzaradan the commander of the guard left behind in the land of Judah some of the poor people, who owned nothing; and at that time he gave them vineyards and fields.
- a) The short version is the Babylonians burned Jerusalem to the ground and took just about everyone there prisoner. They left a few poor people to farm. Why mentioned that fact? I suspect it's the simple thing of "taxing the poor" by making them work the land, and then tax them for the privilege. Some argue it's about God always allowing some of the Jewish people to be there, but who knows. The truth as God allowed some of the poor to stay and try to survive after the Babylonians made a complete mess of things there! As we'll read in the next lesson the poor harvested a good crop after all of this. It shows that not all of that land was damaged and the poor wouldn't starve from this.
 - b) Bottom line, the damage is done, the Davidic dynasty is dead (until Jesus rules) and we're reading of the fall of the end of that kingdom at that time.
 - c) Now think of lesson title, "Dealing with change". Imagine everything you know about the world around us being destroyed and is now run by a government not exactly friendly to the God you and I know. I'm sure the Israelites thought, "This is it, the temple's destroyed and we failed to be a witness for Him". Often we can't explain why major changes happen in our lives, we must simply deal with them as they occur. I'm sure the Israelites thought, "Now we're going to have to live as slaves the rest of our lives. Where is God now? He is still ruling and often we must accept hardships as part of life. God asks that we be a good witness for Him through it all. He never promises success and wealth for Christians. Now that "that's settled" time to deal with Jeremiah and is "bold buddy".

24. Verse 11: Now Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had given these orders about Jeremiah through Nebuzaradan commander of the imperial guard: ¹² "Take him and look after him; don't harm him but do for him whatever he asks." ¹³ So Nebuzaradan the commander of the guard, Nebushazban a chief officer, Nergal-Sharezer a high official and all the other officers of the king of Babylon ¹⁴ sent and had Jeremiah taken out of the courtyard of the guard. They turned him over to Gedaliah son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, to take him back to his home. So he remained among his own people.
- a) Let's be honest the Babylonians could have killed Jeremiah either by accident or simply he could have been taken prisoner along with everyone else who survived. However, we will read in effect that God's not through with him. The Babylonians working in Jerusalem to "clean up the mess" heard about Jeremiah's reputation and they said in effect, "Good news Jeremiah you can go home". You might recall from Chapter 1 that Jeremiah was raised in a small town a few miles away. Now that he had the grant deed to a piece of land there, I think he just wanted to go "check it out" so he could farm it to survive. Yes God had other plans for him as we'll read later. Now, he was free to go to his hometown and at the least not be worried about being thrown in a "waterhole" for awhile or preach to the Israelites about destruction coming.
 - b) I wonder if Jeremiah thought, "My job is done" at this point. In effect, the rest of the book's a reminder that God's not done with us until "He says so". He's got more to preach, which is why we're only four-fifth's done with this book. Meanwhile, one more quick story:
25. Verse 15: While Jeremiah had been confined in the courtyard of the guard, the word of the LORD came to him: ¹⁶ "Go and tell Ebed-Melech the Cushite, `This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: I am about to fulfill my words against this city through disaster, not prosperity. At that time they will be fulfilled before your eyes. ¹⁷ But I will rescue you on that day, declares the LORD; you will not be handed over to those you fear. ¹⁸ I will save you; you will not fall by the sword but will escape with your life, because you trust in me, declares the LORD.' "
- a) The first thing I want you to notice about these final four verses here, is that God told this vision to Jeremiah back when he was confined in the courtyard. If that's true why is it not told until now? Because Jeremiah had "bigger fish to fry". It was important to describe the end of Jerusalem, the end of the king's life and what happened to Jeremiah himself after it was all over. Therefore these last few verses are a final epilogue to show that God doesn't forget those who are bold enough to take a stand for Him.
 - b) Bottom line is "Ebed-Melech the Cushite" (thank God for cut and paste) was told that he'd be spared the destruction. Did that mean he was just taken in captivity? Did it mean he'd go back to Cush (Ethiopia)? Don't know. I just figure he didn't die while Jerusalem did its final suffering. Do I think he's saved for all eternity? Sure and maybe we'll meet one day in heaven. Bottom line is because he took a stand for God, he didn't die like the king or a even more horrid fate of watching his children die in front of him.
26. OK John, I admit these chapters are a good story. However, most of us reading this have already dedicated our lives to serving Jesus. We get the fact that people who aren't willing to use their life in some capacity for Jesus are wasting their time. We knew that coming in? What we should get out of this is how people deal with change. It's inevitable. We can live in fear like the king, or we can trust in God like Jeremiah and even the Cushite fellow here. The lesson is a reminder to us of the importance of using our lives as God intended as a witness for Him. Yes we'll suffer at times. Yes life will be hard at times, but in effect what choice do we have. God created us so we glorify Him with our lives. He created us so we can glorify Him and not vice-versa.
- a) My epilogue is a request that all of don't waste the time God's given us. May we use it to glorify Him with our lives. Those who die young and tragically can still have shorter lives to glorify God. Most of us know of some who die tragically and inspire others to use their lives to make a difference for God. OK, enough tragedy for one day, let's close in prayer.

27. Heavenly Father, As always we thank You that You've given us life and opportunities to use it to glorify You with it. Through Your Spirit, guide us and make it obvious to us what is Your will as we go through our lives for Your glory. Help us not to waste the time You've given us and use it to glorify You in all that we do. Help us to use the talents You've given us and also simply to use our lives for Your glory. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen