

August 2, 2009
Sunday Morning Service
Series: *Living Above Life's Circumstances*
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
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PROMISE FULFILLED

Jeremiah 39

Jeremiah was also a historian. He recorded God's messages and he also recorded God's actions. One of the great events in all history is summed up in the simple observation, "A breach was made in the city" (Jeremiah 39:2). These words introduce the fulfillment of God's warnings and prophecies through the faithful preacher Jeremiah. For forty years he warned that overthrow was going to be the result if the people did not change their attitude toward and relationship with God.

Now an entire generation had been born, lived, and some had died while Jeremiah kept promising this result. It has often been said that "the mill of God's wrath grinds slow, but it grinds mighty fine." That would certainly be a fitting conclusion in light of the fact that God waited forty years to bring about the fulfillment of His promises.

However, the fact that a powerful enemy had breached the city walls after forty years of warning that it would happen is rather insignificant compared to the fact that God had also made this same promise when He created the nation of Israel 854 years earlier. At the inception of Israel, God had warned that if they refused to obey His Law, if the people rejected His Word, if they chose to live like their idolatrous neighbors, He would allow their idolatrous neighbors to destroy them.

In Deuteronomy chapter twenty-eight, God promised things like:

"If you will not obey the voice of the LORD your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes that I command you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you" (Deuteronomy 28:15).

"The LORD will cause you to be defeated before your enemies. You shall go out one way against them and flee seven ways before them. And you shall be a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth" (Deuteronomy 28:25).

"A nation that you have not known shall eat up the fruit of your ground and of all your labors, and you shall be only oppressed and crushed continually, so that you are driven mad by the sights that your eyes see" (Deuteronomy 28:33-34).

"The LORD will bring you and your king whom you set over you to a nation that neither you nor your fathers have known. And there you shall serve other gods of wood and stone" (Deuteronomy 28:36).

"You shall father sons and daughters, but they shall not be yours, for they shall go into captivity" (Deuteronomy 28:41).

"The LORD will bring a nation against you from far away, from the end of the earth, swooping down like the eagle, a nation whose language you do not understand" (Deuteronomy 28:49).

"They shall besiege you in all your towns, until your high and fortified walls, in which you trusted, come down throughout all your land. And they shall besiege you in all your towns throughout all your land, which the LORD your God has given you" (Deuteronomy 28:52).

Those were quite specific promises. Now, eight centuries later, the posterity of the very people who heard those promises rehearsed the day God made them were experiencing the full completion of the promises.

But not all of God's promises were promises of judgment. In Deuteronomy 28, God also promised to care for His people if they obeyed His Word. God assured the people, "And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the voice of the LORD your God" (Deuteronomy 28:2). Then for the next twelve

verses God listed blessing after blessing that He will give to His obedient people.

Those were like the promises God made to care for His messenger Jeremiah. When God called Jeremiah to serve Him, He promised: “Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, declares the LORD” (Jeremiah 1:8). Furthermore, “The LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth. And the LORD said to me, ‘Behold, I have put my words in your mouth. See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant’” (Jeremiah 1:9-10). “And I, behold, I make you this day a fortified city, an iron pillar, and bronze walls, against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests, and the people of the land. They will fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, declares the LORD, to deliver you” (Jeremiah 1:18-19).

In the same setting where we observe wave after wave of God’s long-promised judgment against sin sweeping over His terrified people, we also see Jeremiah receiving protection and tender care from a most unlikely source. What a coincidence! No, what perfect fulfillment of God’s promises. The God who made promises to Old Testament Israel, who affirmed those promises through Jeremiah, who promised to care for His messenger is the same God who has given us promises. God promises eternal life to be lived in His presence to everyone who is born again through faith in Jesus Christ. He also promises eternal punishment in hell with Satan to each person who chooses not to believe Him unto salvation.

Will God keep these promises? You can be as sure as a terrified citizens of Jerusalem who saw the Babylonians sitting in the town square, or a confident Jeremiah who was cared for by those same strangers. There is no doubt about it. God who promises does what He promises.

God Fulfilled His Promise of Judgment Against Sin (vv.1-10).

In the first ten verses there are two clear examples of God fulfilling promises He had given. The first promise is that the city of Jerusalem fell (vv.1-3; 9-10). A simple statement of fact appears in verse two: “A breach was made in the city.” The statement follows verse one which reminds us that this came to pass after eighteen months of siege. Some time equivalent to our month of January in the year 588 B.C., the Babylonian army set up a siege around God’s city. Except for a short respite when the army chased the Egyptians back to their fortresses, the siege lasted from then until the breach was made in a time equivalent to our July 587 B.C.

By the time the siege came to an end, the famine in Jerusalem was so severe that people resorted to cannibalism. Jeremiah lamented, “The hands of compassionate women have boiled their own children; they became their food during the destruction of the daughter of my people” (Lamentations 4:10).

Finally, after years of threatening, the enemy entered the city (v.2). The ancient historian Josephus gave this account of the overthrow: “This siege they endured for eighteen months, until they were destroyed by the famine, and by the darts which the enemy threw at them from the towers. The city was taken about midnight, and the enemy’s generals . . . entered into the temple.” A month later, according to 52:12-30, total destruction ensued. “And now it was that the king of Babylon sent Nebuzaradan, the general of his army, to Jerusalem, to pillage the temple; who had it also in command to burn it and the royal palace, and to lay the city even with the ground, and to transplant the people into Babylon.” (Josephus. Antiquities of the Jews, X, VIII, 1)

While such accounts make for interesting historical readings, it is more significant that these events simply proved that God’s many warnings came to pass. Morgan observed, “At last the long-delayed stroke fell. Babylon took possession of Jerusalem. Idolaters burned the house of God with fire. A people of strange tongue, filled with abominations, carried into captivity the people of the living God.” (G.

Campbell Morgan. *Studies in the Prophecy of Jeremiah*. Old Tappan New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1969 reprint, 240.)

How shocking it must have been for the citizens of Judah. Foreigners, officials of a foreign king, who spoke a different language, served different gods, lived in a different culture were sitting in the middle gate. Foreign leaders sitting in your living room is a stark reminder of God's wrath. God was angry with the people's sins, told them repeatedly that He was angry, and warned them that He would punish them in His anger. God's anger against sin is a well substantiated doctrine, but it doesn't seem too serious as long as it is viewed as a theoretical matter.

God's anger against an individual because of sin is a little more difficult to accept. God's anger against my sin is easy to deny. I prefer to believe that God is not angry with me. He might be angry at others, but not at me. So, I ignore His warnings. I excuse my sin against Him as something I inherited, something I cannot help, something that is not so bad. I refuse to acknowledge that my very existence is an offense to the Holy God and that He is continually angry with my sinful condition. I cannot fathom the idea that God would actually punish me in hell. So I dismiss the messages, the warnings, from my mind!

In like manner, the people rejected Jeremiah and his message because he was negative, intolerant, and apparently opposed to the well being of the nation. The people refused to believe that God would actually punish His own people. They, not the pagans, had God's promises and law. They had God's temple. They kept some celebrations at the temple. They even prayed and sometimes asked Jeremiah to pray in their behalf. No, God really did not intend to punish them for sin. After all, they were not nearly as wicked as those people in other lands.

But there the foreign officials sat in the middle gate. Jeremiah wrote that "Nergal-sar-ezer, Samgar-nebu, Sar-sekim the Rab-saris, Nergal-sar-ezer the Rab-mag, with all the rest of the officers of the king of Babylon," sat right down in the town square (Jeremiah 39:3). Notice that Nergalsarezer appears twice in this statement. First his

name appears at the beginning of the verse. Then it appears again later with the title "Rabmag" which refers to an important official. Probably he was a very important official. His name means "Nergal protect the king." Ironically, this is almost certainly Nerglissar who ruled on the throne in Babylon (559-556 BC) after Nebuchadnezzar was dead. In order to get the job, he had to kill off Neb's son Evil-Merodach (Amel-Marduk). And there he sat with his peers in the middle of God's city.

Jeremiah had faithfully proclaimed God's warnings and messages. He repeatedly begged the kings, priests, and people to abandon their sins, to abandon this road to certain judgement. The kings, priests, and people thought Jeremiah was a radical enthusiast. Now look! God fulfilled His promised judgment in detail. He had promised that a nation from the north would overthrow them (1:14; 4:6;6:22). Babylon came from the north. God promised that a strange foreign nation would attack (5:15). Babylon was a strange foreign nation. God promised that the enemy would besiege Jerusalem (4:17; 6:3). Babylon laid siege for eighteen months. God promised that there would be famine in Jerusalem (14:1-6). Many people in Jerusalem died of hunger before the enemy breached the walls of this city. God promised that the whole land would be laid waste (25:11). The whole land was laid waste. God promised that Zedekiah and his household would be taken captive (39:21-23). Zedekiah was captured along with his wives and children.

We can fairly make two pointed and important applications with this information. God will fulfill promises of judgment in a personal sense. In other words, God will bring your sin into judgment. He promised to do so. It is certain that He will. Therefore, we are wise to confess sin and forsake it.

An application can be made nationally also. While the United States is not equivalent to Israel, in that we are not God's chosen nation, still a society of people who reject God is bound to face some kind of judgment. It is quite possible that we Americans should not be concerned that our current administration will bring God's judgment on America. Rather our current administration **is** God's

judgment on the nation. Men and women who think contrary to our founding principles, who are idolaters, who have long ago rejected the God of our forefathers, are sitting in the middle gate of America. And probably this is only the beginning.

As part of that judgment, the people were carried away just like God promised they would be (vv.9-10). They who had worked hard to establish society left it all behind. They had labored diligently for many years to build their businesses which were destroyed or which they left behind. They abandoned their beautiful homes. Everything they counted valuable in life was forsaken. As they were herded out of town, the people must have wailed to see all that they labored for in life gone in an instant. Now the proud people of God were slaves to a godless pagan because God keeps His promises.

Ironically, the people who had not been successful, for any number of reasons, now inherited the fruits of the diligent man's labor. It is quite unlikely that such people would be able to take over the farms and businesses and make them prosper. They didn't. The record shows that 70 years later Jerusalem was still in disrepair. How sad are the consequences of sin. How encouraging to know that God keeps His promises.

There was a second major promise of God fulfilled at this time. Zedekiah was captured and mistreated (vv.4-8). The wavering king thought he could escape the completion of God's promises (v.4). When he saw the details of Jeremiah's prophecy beginning to be fulfilled, he tried to escape. He and his family made their way from the palace, snuck down the streets of the city headed southeast, walked past the Pool of Siloam, through the King's Garden, and out through the Fountain Gate. Zedekiah's plan, according to 2 Kings 25:5, was to go to Jericho, cross the Jordan River, and then head out into the Arabah east of the Jordan River.

No doubt Zedekiah hatched this plan in an effort to circumvent the fulfillment of God's promises in his life. Ironically, even as he engaged in this futile attempt, he fulfilled God's promises. This was King Zedekiah, the guy who heard God's warnings personally from God's prophet. In spite of the privilege, Zedekiah couldn't decide

what to do. The man wavered. He was the man whose conscience cried out that there was something to Jeremiah's messages, but whose fear of fellow men kept him from believing it. Now he was sneaking out through the broken walls just like Ezekiel had illustrated he would do so many years before (Ezekiel 12:12-13).

The wavering king was wrong to have any hopes that his plan would succeed (vv.5-8). God had already promised that Zedekiah would not escape. Through Ezekiel God had promised, "And I will spread my net over him, and he shall be taken in my snare. And I will bring him to Babylon, the land of the Chaldeans, yet he shall not see it, and he shall die there" (Ezekiel 12:13). God kept His word about judgment against this particular individual. Someone told the commander, and the army chased down Zedekiah and company (v.5). They took Zedekiah and his family to Nebuchadnezzar who was stationed far to the north in Riblah (v.5b). At that spot, without deliberation, Nebuchadnezzar killed the nobles who also tried to escape (v.6). He also slaughtered Zedekiah's sons in his presence. Then he gouged out Zedekiah's eyes and sent him to Babylon where he died (v.7). He destroyed the king's palace and the king's city (v.8). Zedekiah, who would not believe God's promise of judgment, believed it now that it was too late to change.

God also has a promise about judgment for each individual sinner. His promise is true and bound to come to pass in spite of public policy or popular opinions to the contrary. His promised judgment will come in spite of the fact that scoffers will dismiss His promises in the last days. Peter warned, "Knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. They will say, 'Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation'" (2 Peter 3:3-4).

God's judgment against the individual because of sin is as sure as His judgment for Zedekiah. John wrote, "Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead,

great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:11-15).

But fun-loving, wise Americans don't believe it. They mock the idea—for now!

God Fulfilled His Promise to Care for Jeremiah (vv.11-18).

Here is an interesting story about how God used unexpected people to care for His servant (vv.11-14). Nebuchadnezzar's army had overrun Jerusalem, carried away many of the people as captives, and destroyed the temple, the palace, and the nice homes. Then Nebuchadnezzar commanded the officers to treat Jeremiah well (vv.11-13). That sounds odd. Essentially, he told the officials to treat Jeremiah like they would treat a seer (prophet of the false gods) in Babylon. Apparently, Jeremiah's reputation had preceded him even to the king. How strange that Jeremiah received better treatment from the enemy than he did from his own people. Of course, that precedent was already set when some days earlier Jeremiah had received better treatment from an Ethiopian foreigner than from his own people (38:7-13). Why did such strange things happen? Because God promised to take care of Jeremiah.

Because he trusted God's promise of care, Jeremiah chose to live in the land (vv.14). He was given a choice of going to Babylon or living in Judah, or anywhere he wanted to live (40:2-6). Jeremiah chose to live with the people he loved in the land he loved. It would have been easy for him to conclude that the work of tearing down and

overthrowing was over. Now it was time to rebuild (or so he hoped). In fact, Israel would not be a bonafide nation again until 1947.

Jeremiah illustrates the kind of people who chose to believe God's promises. Like Jeremiah, we will enjoy the fulfillment of positive promises. Jeremiah believed God. It wasn't always easy. But God rewarded him. God also promises eternal life to everyone who trusts His promise that Jesus' sacrifice on the cross is sufficient to cover our offenses against Him. Through Jesus we learn, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Eternal life is a marvelous promise. God also wrote, "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). Through John we learn, "And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son" (1 John 5:11). The promise of eternal life is fulfilled through faith in Jesus Christ. Will God be true to His promise? He always is.

God also promised to care for the man who cared for Jeremiah (vv.15-18). The Word of the Lord came to Jeremiah previously (v.15-16). That means that the information given in these verses was before the breach of the walls. In other words, God gave His promise before the fact (which was typical). God promised to bring destruction to the city and the people (v.16). But in the midst of the promise, God also promised to deliver the man (vv.17-18). Ebed-melech was a real person just like you and me. God promised that particular individual that he would not fall into enemy hands (v.17). Rather God promised that He would give the man life (v.18). Listen to those precious words: "*I will surely save you . . . because you put your trust in Me.*"

That is the kind of promise God still gives. Yes, it is true that God has promised judgment against sin. Will He carry out His promise of judgment? He always does. God has also promised eternal life to everyone who believes Him. What would keep a person from trusting God's promises? If you must wait to see if they will come to pass, you will receive only the promise of judgment, not the promise of life.