

EPILOGUE

JEREMIAH 52

Zedekiah is taken prisoner

¹Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he began to reign; he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Hamutal daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah. ²He did what was evil in the sight of YHWH, just as Jehoiakim had done. ³Indeed, Jerusalem and Judah so angered YHWH that he expelled them from his presence.

Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon. ⁴And in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, on the tenth day of the month, King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon came with all his army against Jerusalem, and they laid siege to it; they built siege-works against it all around. ⁵So the city was besieged until the eleventh year of King Zedekiah. ⁶On the ninth day of the fourth month the famine became so severe in the city that there was no food for the people of the land.

⁷Then a breach was made in the city wall; and all the soldiers fled and went out from the city by night by the way of the gate between the two walls, by the king's garden, though the Chaldeans were all around the city. They went in the direction of the Arabah.

⁸But the army of the Chaldeans pursued the king, and overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho; and all his army was scattered, deserting him. ⁹Then they captured the king, and brought him up to the king of Babylon at Riblah in the land of Hamath, and he passed sentence on him. ¹⁰The king of Babylon killed the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and also killed all the officers of Judah at Riblah. ¹¹He put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him in fetters, and the king of Babylon took him to Babylon, and put him in prison until the day of his death.

The material recorded in this final chapter of the Jeremiah scroll has already been recounted in a briefer form in Jeremiah 39:1-10, and is based on 2Kings 24:18 - 25:30.

Zedekiah was made king by Nebuchadrezzar when the Babylonian forces captured Jerusalem in 597.

The siege began in January 588 (see verse 4), and the wall was breached in July or August 587 (verses 6-7).

Riblah is on the Orontes, north of Damascus.

See the parallel accounts in Jeremiah 39:8-10 and 2Kings 25:8-12.

¹²In the fifth month, on the tenth day of the month—which was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadrezzar, king of Babylon—Nebuzaradan the captain of the bodyguard who served the king of Babylon, entered Jerusalem.

¹³He burned the house of YHWH, the king's house, and all the houses of Jerusalem; every great house he burned down. ¹⁴All the army of the Chaldeans, who were with the captain of the guard, broke down all the walls around Jerusalem.

Jeremiah 52:30 recounts the numbers deported by Nebuzaradan. There were two previous deportations (see 52:28-29).

¹⁵Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carried into exile some of the poorest of the people and the rest of the people who were left in the city and the deserters who had defected to the king of Babylon, together with the rest of the artisans. ¹⁶But Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard left some of the poorest people of the land to be vinedressers and tillers of the soil.

The temple is looted

¹⁷The pillars of bronze that were in the house of YHWH, and the stands and the bronze sea that were in the house of YHWH, the Chaldeans broke in pieces, and carried all the bronze to Babylon.

¹⁸They took away the pots, the shovels, the snuffers, the basins, the ladles, and all the vessels of bronze used in the temple service. ¹⁹The captain of the guard took away the small bowls also, the firepans, the basins, the pots, the lampstands, the ladles, and the bowls for libation, both those of gold and those of silver.

²⁰As for the two pillars, the one sea, the twelve bronze bulls that were under the sea, and the stands, which King Solomon had made for the house of YHWH, the bronze of all these vessels was beyond weighing. ²¹As for the pillars, the height of the one pillar was eighteen cubits, its circumference was twelve cubits; it was hollow and its thickness was four fingers. ²²Upon it was a capital of bronze; the height of the one capital was five cubits; latticework and pomegranates, all of bronze, encircled the top of the capital. And the second pillar had the same, with pomegranates. ²³There were ninety-six pomegranates on the sides; all the pomegranates encircling the latticework numbered one hundred.

Compare the parallel account in 2Kings 25:13-17.

The focus here on the loot taken from the temple appears to want to underline the fulfilment of the 'prediction' found in Jeremiah 27:19-22.

For verses 24-27 compare the parallel text in 2Kings 25:18-21.

²⁴The captain of the guard took the chief priest Seraiah, the second priest Zephaniah, and the three guardians of the threshold; ²⁵and from the city he took an officer who had been in command of the soldiers, and seven men of the king's council who were found in the city; the secretary of the commander of the army who mustered the people of the land; and sixty men of the people of the land who were found inside the city.

The final sentence in verse 27 seems to be a claim that the real Judah went into exile. Those left behind don't count!

2Kings 24:12 has king Jehoiachin taken prisoner in the 'eighth year' (not the seventh) of Nebuchadrezzar's reign. 2Kings 25:8 places this second deportation in the 'nineteenth year' (not eighteenth). The difference could be explained by the fact that the Babylonian Chronicle distinguishes between Nebuchadrezzar's 'accession year' and the 'first year of his reign'.

The numbers deported (verses 28-30; note 2Kings 24-25 record only the figures for 597), when added to those killed in battle, starved, executed, as well as those who fled to Egypt, would have led to a severe breakdown in the condition of those who stayed behind in Judah.

²⁶Then Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard took them, and brought them to the king of Babylon at Riblah. ²⁷And the king of Babylon struck them down, and put them to death at Riblah in the land of Hamath. So Judah went into exile out of its land.

²⁸This is the number of the people whom Nebuchadrezzar took into exile: in the seventh year, three thousand twenty-three Judeans;

²⁹in the eighteenth year of Nebuchadrezzar he took into exile from Jerusalem eight hundred thirty-two persons;

³⁰in the twenty-third year of Nebuchadrezzar, Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard took into exile of the Judeans seven hundred forty-five persons; all the persons were four thousand six hundred.

³¹In the thirty-seventh year of the exile of King Jehoiachin of Judah, in the twelfth month, on the twenty-fifth day of the month, King Evil-merodach of Babylon, in the year he began to reign, showed favour to King Jehoiachin of Judah and brought him out of prison; ³²he spoke kindly to him, and gave him a seat above the seats of the other kings who were with him in Babylon. ³³So Jehoiachin put aside his prison clothes, and every day of his life he dined regularly at the king's table. ³⁴For his allowance, a regular daily allowance was given him by the king of Babylon, as long as he lived, up to the day of his death.

Confer the parallel account in 2Kings 25:27-30.

On the death of Nebuchadrezzar in 560, the throne of Babylon passed to Evil-merodach [Awel-Marduk]. As an act of largesse he granted freedom to Jehoiachin.

We are being given a glimpse into the final days of the last king of Judah. Are the editors of the scroll wanting us to see his death in exile as marking the end of the Davidic dynasty? Or do they end on this positive note in order to keep open the possibility of a revival of the dynasty (in God's good time)?

Whatever the future holds for God's people, hopefully they will form a worshipping community that will prove faithful to YHWH and to the covenant, including the mission entrusted to them.