

5/11/25

Sermon Title: Judgment on Those Who Break the Covenant

Preacher: Pastor Kim Soonbae

Scripture Passage: Jeremiah 34:1–26

(Jeremiah 34:1) While Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and all his army and all the kingdoms and peoples in the empire he ruled were fighting against Jerusalem and all its surrounding towns, this word came to Jeremiah from the LORD:

(Jeremiah 34:2) “This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: Go to Zedekiah king of Judah and tell him, ‘This is what the LORD says: I am about to give this city into the hands of the king of Babylon, and he will burn it down.

(Jeremiah 34:3) You will not escape from his grasp but will surely be captured and given into his hands. You will see the king of Babylon with your own eyes, and he will speak with you face to face. And you will go to Babylon.

(Jeremiah 34:4) “Yet hear the LORD’s promise to you, Zedekiah king of Judah. This is what the LORD says concerning you: You will not die by the sword;

(Jeremiah 34:5) you will die peacefully. As people made a funeral fire in honor of your predecessors, the kings who ruled before you, so they will make a fire in your honor and lament, “Alas, master!” I myself make this promise, declares the LORD.’”

(Jeremiah 34:6) Then Jeremiah the prophet told all this to Zedekiah king of Judah, in Jerusalem,

(Jeremiah 34:7) while the army of the king of Babylon was fighting against Jerusalem and the other cities of Judah that were still holding out—Lachish and Azekah. These were the only fortified cities left in Judah.

Freedom for Slaves

(Jeremiah 34:8) The word came to Jeremiah from the LORD after King Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people in Jerusalem to proclaim freedom for the slaves.

(Jeremiah 34:9) Everyone was to free their Hebrew slaves, both male and female; no one was to hold a fellow Hebrew in bondage.

(Jeremiah 34:10) So all the officials and people who entered into this covenant agreed that they would free their male and female slaves and no longer hold them in bondage. They agreed, and set them free.

(Jeremiah 34:11) But afterward they changed their minds and took back the slaves they had freed and enslaved them again.

(Jeremiah 34:12) Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah:

(Jeremiah 34:13) “This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I made a covenant with your ancestors when I brought them out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. I said,

(Jeremiah 34:14) ‘Every seventh year each of you must free any fellow Hebrews who have sold themselves to you. After they have served you six years, you must let them go free.’^[a] Your ancestors, however, did not listen to me or pay attention to me.

(Jeremiah 34:15) Recently you repented and did what is right in my sight: Each of you proclaimed freedom to your own people. You even made a covenant before me in the house that bears my Name.

(Jeremiah 34:16) But now you have turned around and profaned my name; each of you has taken back the male and female slaves you had set free to go where they wished. You have forced them to become your slaves again.

(Jeremiah 34:17) “Therefore this is what the LORD says: You have not obeyed me; you have not proclaimed freedom to your own people. So I now proclaim ‘freedom’ for you, declares the LORD—‘freedom’ to fall by the sword, plague and famine. I will make you abhorrent to all the kingdoms of the earth.

(Jeremiah 34:18) Those who have violated my covenant and have not fulfilled the terms of the covenant they made before me, I will treat like the calf they cut in two and then walked between its pieces.

(Jeremiah 34:19) The leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the court officials, the priests and all the people of the land who walked between the pieces of the calf, (Jeremiah 34:20) I will deliver into the hands of their enemies who want to kill them. Their dead bodies will become food for the birds and the wild animals. (Jeremiah 34:21) “I will deliver Zedekiah king of Judah and his officials into the hands of their enemies who want to kill them, to the army of the king of Babylon, which has withdrawn from you. (Jeremiah 34:22) I am going to give the order, declares the LORD, and I will bring them back to this city. They will fight against it, take it and burn it down. And I will lay waste the towns of Judah so no one can live there.”

While Jerusalem and all its towns are under attack by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, the word of the Lord comes to Jeremiah.

Jeremiah is still confined in the courtyard of the guard

(Jeremiah 34:1) While Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and all his army and all the kingdoms and peoples in the empire he ruled were fighting against Jerusalem and all its surrounding towns, this word came to Jeremiah from the LORD:

King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon brings all the military forces he can muster—his entire army, all the kingdoms under his rule, and all their peoples—to attack Jerusalem.

There is zero chance for Judah to survive this assault.

The Lord tells Jeremiah to deliver a message to King Zedekiah of Judah, saying: First, this is a message concerning the fate of Judah.

He will hand over the city of Jerusalem to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon.

(Jeremiah 34:2) “This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: Go to Zedekiah king of Judah and tell him, ‘This is what the LORD says: I am about to give this city into the hands of the king of Babylon, and he will burn it down.

Second, this is a message about the fate of King Zedekiah.

Though he will be taken captive to Babylon, he will not die by the sword but will die in peace, and a dignified funeral will be held for him.

The phrase "he will die in peace" means that he will die a natural death, having lived out his full life.

(Jeremiah 34:3) You will not escape from his grasp but will surely be captured and given into his hands. You will see the king of Babylon with your own eyes, and he will speak with you face to face. And you will go to Babylon.

(Jeremiah 34:4) "Yet hear the LORD's promise to you, Zedekiah king of Judah.

This is what the LORD says concerning you: You will not die by the sword;

(Jeremiah 34:5) you will die peacefully. As people made a funeral fire in honor of your predecessors, the kings who ruled before you, so they will make a fire in your honor and lament, "Alas, master!" I myself make this promise, declares the LORD.'"

However, in reality, King Zedekiah did not die peacefully.

He ended his life miserably in prison in exile, with his eyes gouged out.

So why did God say that King Zedekiah would die a peaceful death?

Was God's prophetic word wrong?

This prophecy implied a condition: that Zedekiah would accept the destruction of Jerusalem and Judah as the will of the Lord and surrender to Babylon.

But King Zedekiah did not fulfill this condition, and as a result, God nullified the promise.

The God of Israel had already determined the complete destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon and the capture of King Zedekiah.

It was the moment when even the faintest hope for Judah disappeared.

Indeed, only a month after Jerusalem was taken by Babylon—in the eleventh year of King Zedekiah, on the tenth day of the fifth month—the city was set ablaze.

King Zedekiah tried to escape through the Arabah but was captured by the Chaldeans.

King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon killed Zedekiah's sons before his eyes, then put out his eyes and bound him with chains to take him to Babylon.

King Zedekiah, who was taken to Babylon, never returned and eventually died there in prison.

Jeremiah immediately delivered the word of the Lord to King Zedekiah.

At that time, King Nebuchadnezzar's army was attacking Jerusalem and all the remaining cities of Judah.

(Jeremiah 34:6) Then Jeremiah the prophet told all this to Zedekiah king of Judah, in Jerusalem,

(Jeremiah 34:7) while the army of the king of Babylon was fighting against Jerusalem and the other cities of Judah that were still holding out—Lachish and Azekah. These were the only fortified cities left in Judah.

The cities of Judah, without God's protection, fell all too easily.

Now, only two of Judah's fortified cities—Lachish and Azekah—remained unconquered.

In the face of crisis, King Zedekiah and the people of Judah made a covenant before the Lord.

(Jeremiah 34:8) The word came to Jeremiah from the LORD after King Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people in Jerusalem to proclaim freedom for the slaves.

(Jeremiah 34:9) Everyone was to free their Hebrew slaves, both male and female; no one was to hold a fellow Hebrew in bondage.

(Jeremiah 34:10) So all the officials and people who entered into this covenant agreed that they would free their male and female slaves and no longer hold them in bondage. They agreed, and set them free.

(Jeremiah 34:11) But afterward they changed their minds and took back the slaves they had freed and enslaved them again.

Through a covenant, God commanded the people of Judah to release their Hebrew male and female slaves and to never again enslave fellow Jews.

The people obeyed and set their slaves free according to the covenant.

However, later they changed their minds and brought back the freed slaves, forcing them into servitude once again.

Then why did King Zedekiah and the people of Judah make this covenant in the first place?

We can consider the possible motivations behind their agreement with God:

First, from a military perspective:

At the time, Judah needed more soldiers to fight against Babylon.

However, slaves were not eligible for conscription.

Therefore, they may have freed their slaves to increase the size of their army.

Second, from an economic perspective:

During wartime, slaves could no longer bring economic benefit to their masters through labor.

Instead, they became a burden.

So, freeing them may have been seen as a way to reduce immediate hardship.

Third, from a religious perspective:

They may have hoped to receive God's help by obeying His command in the midst of their difficult situation.

However, once their objectives were achieved, King Zedekiah and the people of Judah ignored and nullified the covenant.

When the Babylonian army, which had surrounded Jerusalem, temporarily withdrew due to Egypt's intervention, they assumed Jerusalem was now safe.

In 588 BC, the Babylonian forces lifted the siege after hearing that Pharaoh Hophra of Egypt was marching out to assist Jerusalem.

(Jeremiah 37:5) Pharaoh's army had marched out from Egypt, and when the Babylonians (Chaldeans) who were besieging Jerusalem heard the report about them, they withdrew from Jerusalem.

As a result, the people once again found themselves in need of labor, so they brought back the slaves they had previously set free and forced them to work again.

God had seen the Israelites releasing their Hebrew slaves and moved Pharaoh's army to engage the Babylonians, causing the Babylonian army to retreat from Jerusalem.

But once the people of Judah saw that the Babylonians had left, they disregarded the covenant they had made with God and changed their hearts.

They brought back the slaves they had released and enslaved them once again.

God was angered by the shameless behavior of the people of Judah, who had treated His covenant as if it were worthless.

(Jeremiah 34:12) Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah:

(Jeremiah 34:13) "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I made a covenant with your ancestors when I brought them out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. I said,

(Jeremiah 34:14) 'Every seventh year each of you must free any fellow Hebrews who have sold themselves to you. After they have served you six years, you must let them go free. Your ancestors, however, did not listen to me or pay attention to me.

(Jeremiah 34:15) Recently you repented and did what is right in my sight: Each of you proclaimed freedom to your own people. You even made a covenant before me in the house that bears my Name.

(Jeremiah 34:16) But now you have turned around and profaned my name; each of you has taken back the male and female slaves you had set free to go where they wished. You have forced them to become your slaves again.

God made a covenant with the Israelites at the time of the Exodus.

He said, “You were all slaves in Egypt, but I showed you grace and set you free.

Therefore, you must also show grace to your fellow Israelites. Even if they are sold to you and become your slaves, you must set them free in the seventh year.”

But the people of Judah broke this covenant.

They had failed to keep it since the time of their ancestors, and when hardship came upon them, they renewed the covenant with God out of human calculation.

At first, they pretended to obey God and honor the covenant, but as soon as their situation improved, they no longer kept it.

God urged the people of Judah to repent of their sins, but they refused.

So God warned them of judgment.

The judgment would be so severe that it would strike fear into all the nations of the earth.

Because they did not obey His command to proclaim freedom to their brothers and neighbors, God said He would now proclaim “freedom” for the sword and for pestilence against them—allowing war and disease to strike the people of Judah freely.

War, deadly plague, and famine would come upon them.

God would bring back King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, whom they had temporarily driven away, and allow him to attack and burn the city of Jerusalem.

(Jeremiah 34:17) “Therefore this is what the LORD says: You have not obeyed me; you have not proclaimed freedom to your own people. So I now proclaim ‘freedom’ for you, declares the LORD—‘freedom’ to fall by the sword,

plague and famine. I will make you abhorrent to all the kingdoms of the earth.

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(Jeremiah 34:22) I am going to give the order, declares the LORD, and I will bring them back to this city. They will fight against it, take it and burn it down. And I will lay waste the towns of Judah so no one can live there."

The people of Israel, when they made a covenant with God, cut a calf in two and walked between the pieces.

This signified that if they broke the covenant with God, they would suffer the same fate as the split calf—death.

The people of Judah broke their covenant with God.

Those who have forsaken their covenant with Him will die like the calf that was cut in two.

God declares that He will hand them over to their enemies and to those who seek their lives, and their corpses will become food for the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth.

He declared that He would call back the Babylonians, who had once departed, to utterly destroy those who broke His covenant.

Jerusalem would be engulfed in flames, and the towns of Judah would become desolate.

Even King Zedekiah, who led the covenant, would be handed over to the Babylonians.

Beloved members of Church of God's Dream,
God is always faithful.
He keeps His promises without a single error.

Just as He faithfully keeps His promises, He wants us to faithfully uphold our covenant with Him.
If not, He becomes angry.
And if we do not repent, He judges with terrifying punishment.

God was angry with King Zedekiah and the people of Judah who broke His covenant, and He warned of the judgment they would receive through the prophet Jeremiah.
He declared that they would be destroyed, and that all the nations of the world who witnessed it would fear Him.
As spoken, Judah was destroyed.

Even now, God is angry with all His people who have broken His covenant and is warning of the judgment they will face.
Unless there is repentance, the judgment will be carried out just as He warned.
Those who break the covenant will receive dreadful punishment.

Fear the God of judgment.
God is not someone who just endlessly tolerates wrongdoing.
He is not someone who overlooks things casually.
Though He is patient, when the time comes, He will judge with terrifying righteousness.

Let us all repent and live faithfully, keeping the covenant we made with God.