

Fact Sheet for **“Panic Piety”**
Jeremiah 34

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January has traditionally been the time to make “New Year’s Resolutions.” These typically take the form of “I will eat less”, or “I will exercise more.” But often when we hit February we are doing neither.

The commitments we make to God can come from deep within our souls, and are indeed life changing. Or the commitments we make to God may come when we are distressed and are looking for God’s blessing. These commitments often fade quickly when our circumstances improve. What does God think when we make such passing commitments to him, then set them down? Does God take it in stride, realizing that we are flawed creatures, and is at least pleased that we are trying? If you have slipped into this way of thinking you may want to rethink your conclusions.

Today we are going to be looking at Jeremiah 34 and what some have termed “panic piety.” The chapter begins as God gives Jeremiah a message for King Zedekiah.

ESV 34:1 ¶ The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, when Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and all his army and all the kingdoms of the earth under his dominion and all the peoples were fighting against Jerusalem and all of its cities:

Nebuchadnezzar conscripted people from the nations he had conquered to take part in attacking Jerusalem.

(Read Jeremiah 34:2-5)

This may sound like things would go well for Zedekiah, but it would be just the opposite. If Zedekiah knew what was in store for him he may have chosen death instead.

Ezekiel was also prophesying during this same time. Here is the Lord’s word through Ezekiel about Zedekiah...

ESV Ezekiel 12:13 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.

How could Zedekiah be taken to Babylon, yet not see it? Here is a later passage in Jeremiah...

(Read Jeremiah 52:7-11. Riblah was still east of the Mediterranean Sea, but some 110 miles north of the Sea of Galilee, on the way to Babylon.)

These would be the last things Zedekiah would see before his eyes were put out. He was taken to Babylon and would die in peace, but in prison.

When Nebuchadnezzar killed the king’s sons and the officials of Judah this would have made it very tough for Judah to marshal up leadership to oppose Nebuchadnezzar again.

Jeremiah would now go to Zedekiah and deliver God's message to him.

(Read Jeremiah 34:6-7)

Jeremiah hadn't yet been imprisoned by Zedekiah. So chapter 34 must have taken place just before chapters 32 and 33.

Both Lachish and Azekah were located southwest of Jerusalem – Lachish by 35 miles, Azekah by 15 miles. In 1935 and 1938 archaeological excavations at Lachish uncovered 21 letters that had been written on broken pottery, dated near the end of Zedekiah's reign. Letter 4 reads, "We are watching for the smoke signals of Lachish... because we do not see Azekah." Evidently Azekah had already fallen. Lachish capitulated soon after this.

The rest of Jeremiah 34 has been referred to as "panic piety." Sometimes when life gets really tough people who would not normally turn to God (like Zedekiah) suddenly do. They make commitments to God that don't really come from the heart. Instead those who make them are just hoping to gain God's blessing. Real commitments come from a deep desire to follow the LORD fully, regardless of the circumstances. Zedekiah makes a commitment out of what I think is "panic piety." He makes this commitment in the form of a traditional and binding covenant.

Do you remember when God made a promise, a covenant, with Abraham in Genesis 15 with a heifer, a goat, a ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon?

Abraham cut the heifer, the goat, and the ram in half and laid each half over against the other. Then a deep sleep fell on Abraham. God promise the land to him and passed between the pieces, ratifying the covenant. Out of what I believe was "panic piety" Zedekiah and the people of Jerusalem made a covenant this same way with God, but it was a promise that they would soon break.

These were God's words for the people... *(Read Jeremiah 34:8-20)*.

Then these were God's words for Zedekiah... *(Read Jeremiah 34:21-22)*

Zedekiah had made a covenant with Nebuchadnezzar but had broken it (Ezekiel 17:11-15a). Nebuchadnezzar had briefly backed off from attacking Jerusalem to deal with Egypt, but he would soon be back!

Look at some words written long before this by Solomon that sound a warning about commitments to God that don't come from the heart (Ecclesiastes 5:1-6). What does God think when we make such passing commitments to him in times of stress, then set them down when the stress has passed? Does God take it in stride, realizing that we are flawed creatures, and He is at least pleased that we are trying? Or is this not pleasing to God at all? Jeremiah 34 seems to answer that question for me.

What should we do?

1. Make sure the commitments you make to God come from your heart, from deep within your soul. Then keep them!
2. In those panic situations we all will face... do seek God's blessing, but beware of promising God something during those times that you don't have the commitment to keep.