***Jeremiah 34:1-11 The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord, when Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and all his army, all the kingdoms of the earth under his dominion, and all the people, fought against Jerusalem and all its cities, saying, 2“Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: ‘Go and speak to Zedekiah king of Judah and tell him, “Thus says the Lord: ‘Behold, I will give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire. 3And you shall not escape from his hand, but shall surely be taken and delivered into his hand; your eyes shall see the eyes of the king of Babylon, he shall speak with you face to face, and you shall go to Babylon.’ 4Yet hear the word of the Lord, O Zedekiah king of Judah! Thus says the Lord concerning you: ‘You shall not die by the sword. 5You shall die in peace; as in the ceremonies of your fathers, the former kings who were before you, so they shall burn incense for you and lament for you, saying, “Alas, lord!” For I have pronounced the word, says the Lord.’ 6Then Jeremiah the prophet spoke all these words to Zedekiah king of Judah in Jerusalem, 7when the king of Babylon’s army fought against Jerusalem and all the cities of Judah that were left, against Lachish and Azekah; for only these fortified cities remained of the cities of Judah. 8This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord, after King Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people who were at Jerusalem to proclaim liberty to them: 9that every man should set free his male and female slave—a Hebrew man or woman—that no one should keep a Jewish brother in bondage. 10Now when all the princes and all the people, who had entered into the covenant, heard that everyone should set free his male and female slaves, that no one should keep them in bondage anymore, they obeyed and let them go. 11But afterward they changed their minds and made the male and female slaves return, whom they had set free, and brought them into subjection as male and female slaves.***

We’re back with Jeremiah this week. The last time we visited with him, we had in view the coming of the promised Messiah and the Kingdom that will reign forever and ever. We know that this Kingdom was promised to spring from the Root of Jesse, to be a Branch. Of course, we also know that Jesus is the fulfillment of that Promise. Revelation 22:16 says - *I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star.* It really doesn’t get much clearer than that – the very fulfillment of the Promise verifying that He is the Root and the Offspring. Tonight, we return to a more immediate prophecy concerning Zedekiah and Judah. This prophecy was fulfilled in Chapter 39, just as the prophecy of a coming Kingdom will be fulfilled in the end times. We can rest assured.

Verse 1 *The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord, when Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and all his army, all the kingdoms of the earth under his dominion, and all the people, fought against Jerusalem and all its cities, saying –* The siege in view here is the siege that occurred in the ninth year, tenth month, and tenth day of the reign of king Zedekiah. Recall with me that Jehoiachin had been deposed by Nebuchadnezzar earlier and Zedekiah, Jehoiachin’s uncle, had been installed as king by Nebuchadnezzar. The agreement between the two is that Judah would be a vassal state and pay tribute to Babylon. Zedekiah broke that agreement and so here we are with the siege. According to the Jewish calendar, this would be in our month of December as the siege occurs. Likely, this is around the same time that Pharoah came up from Egypt to help Zedekiah and Nebuchadnezzar had to go and deal with the Egyptian army. With the Egyptians now successfully repulsed, Nebuchadnezzar returns to continue the siege. This is likely prior to Jeremiah being placed in prison, as we studied in Jeremiah 32. Nebuchadnezzar is besieging Jerusalem and all the lesser known cities in Judah at this time.

Verses 2-5 *“Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: ‘Go and speak to Zedekiah king of Judah and tell him, “Thus says the Lord: ‘Behold, I will give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire. 3And you shall not escape from his hand, but shall surely be taken and delivered into his hand; your eyes shall see the eyes of the king of Babylon, he shall speak with you face to face, and you shall go to Babylon.’ 4Yet hear the word of the Lord, O Zedekiah king of Judah! Thus says the Lord concerning you: ‘You shall not die by the sword. 5You shall die in peace; as in the ceremonies of your fathers, the former kings who were before you, so they shall burn incense for you and lament for you, saying, “Alas, lord!” For I have pronounced the word, says the Lord.’*God now speaks again to Jeremiah and directs him to go and speak directly to king Zedekiah. This would not have been terribly welcome news during the time of siege. The fact that Jeremiah is told to go and speak suggests strongly that this is prior to Zedekiah placing him in the court of prison. *Behold, I will give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire. 3And you shall not escape* ***–*** This prophecy is directed toward the nation of Judah, the city of Jerusalem, and ultimately to the king himself. We know that Zedekiah is so outraged by this prophecy that he places Jeremiah in the court of prison. Zedekiah is told that he will see the king of Babylon up close. His eyes will see the eyes of Nebuchadnezzar. We also know that Nebuchadnezzar gouged out the eyes of Zedekiah, after killing Zedekiah sons. Zedekiah was indeed taken to Babylon, just as this prophecy says, to Riblah. This happens in Jeremiah 39. *You shall not die by the sword. 5You shall die in peace –* Zedekiah was not put to death, but died in peace. *So they shall burn incense for you and lament for you -* as was the Jewish custom, Zedekiah will be honored with the burning of spices and incense***.*** The people will lament and mourn, giving Zedekiah an honorable burial.

Verses 6-8 *Then Jeremiah the prophet spoke all these words to Zedekiah king of Judah in Jerusalem, 7when the king of Babylon’s army fought against Jerusalem and all the cities of Judah that were left, against Lachish and Azekah; for only these fortified cities remained of the cities of Judah. 8This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord, after King Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people who were at Jerusalem to proclaim liberty to them -* The cities of Lachish and Azekah are not far from Jerusalem. They were fortified by Rehoboam, Solomon’s son, to defend the Kingdom of Judah. King Zedekiah made a covenant with the people to proclaim liberty and set free those Hebrews that were enslaved. This is in keeping with the law of Moses found in Exodus 21 and Deuteronomy 15. The Jewish people were not allowed to keep a brother or sister Jew more than 6 years. In the 7th year, they had to be set free. As the Babylonians and Chaldeans approached, Zedekiah made a covenant and set all Jewish slaves free. This may have been so they could serve the war effort, or it may have been from pure motives. Regardless, this satisfied the law. But, as the Chaldeans turned to fight the Egyptians, the people reneged on their promise and enslaved the people again. So often, this is the heart of people – true then and true now. We cry out to God and make all manner of deals and promises, only to forget them when the danger has receded. God is steadfast in His promises. Humans, not as much. A covenant is a solemn agreement, and the people entered this solemn agreement to release these slaves and obey God’s law, not with Zedekiah, but with God. So too are our promises – not with man, but with God. Ecclesiastes 5:2 says *Do not be rash with your mouth,  
And let not your heart utter anything hastily before God. For God is in heaven, and you on earth; Therefore let your words be few.* Eccleasiastes 5:4-5 says *When you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it; For He has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you have vowed -* ***5****Better not to vow than to vow and not pay.* Matthew 5:34-37 Jesus says - *But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God’s throne;****35****nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King.****36****Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black.****37****But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No.’ For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.* In the movie Tombstone, Johnny Ringo says to Doc Holliday, when Doc Holliday says they still needed to finish their game and have a shoot-out, Ringo says - “I was just foolin’ about.” Doc Holliday responds, “I wasn’t.” We mustn’t be just foolin’ about… because God isn’t.

Verse 9 - *that every man should set free his male and female slave—a Hebrew man or woman—that no one should keep a Jewish brother in bondage.*Here is the covenant **-** Every man should set free, force them to labor no more, his male and female slave – limited to Hebrews and not all slaves. No one should hold a Jewish brother or sister in bondage.

Verses 10-11 *Now when all the princes and all the people, who had entered into the covenant, heard that everyone should set free his male and female slaves, that no one should keep them in bondage anymore, they obeyed and let them go. 11But afterward they changed their minds and made the male and female slaves return, whom they had set free, and brought them into subjection as male and female slaves.* All the princes accepted this covenant with the king, and all the people agreed with the princes. All the Hebrew slaves were set free. The promise was to let them go and they did. They conformed to the order, but their heart never changed. Many times, we conform to the order and the commandment, but our heart has in no way changed. *But afterward they changed their minds* ***–*** all of these promises coincided with the threat of the Babylonians. When the Egyptians appeared ready to rescue Judah, minds changed because hearts never did. They thought themselves rescued and returned to their old ways. Many repent and, when rescued or healed, they return to their old ways. They despised the promise that they’d made, the covenant they’d entered. God wasn’t just fooling about. He wasn’t jesting. This brings His wrath. Making a promise to God and then not keeping it is lying to God. Recall what happened in Acts 5 with Ananias – He lied. In Acts 5:3-4 we read - *But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself?****4****While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart?* ***You have not lied to men but to God****.* Likewise, these people lied to God by breaking covenant. In the same manner, we lie to God when we break covenant with Him, make a vow and fail to keep it, fail to let our yes be yes and our no be no.

And so, we leave Jeremiah again tonight, as he prophecies to Zedekiah and will shortly be shut up in prison for his faithful delivery of the word. Likewise, we must be faithful, even when doing so may lead to painful consequences. When we gave our life to Jesus, we entered a covenant, not of convenience, but commitment. Our yes is yes, our no is no. We made our vow and we will keep it. God isn’t fooling around and neither must we.