

## Journey through Jeremiah Part 42, Jeremiah Imprisoned

A sermon series by Pastor Byron Chesney, Th.D. – Wednesday, Oct. 18, 2017

### † Jeremiah 37:1-21

1 And king Zedekiah the son of Josiah reigned instead of Coniah the son of Jehoiakim, whom Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon made king in the land of Judah.  
2 But neither he, nor his servants, nor the people of the land, did hearken unto the words of the LORD, which he spake by the prophet Jeremiah.

We now switch back to the last King of Judah, Zedekiah. The previous two chapters we studied were in an earlier time period. Tonight, Lord willing, we will cover chapters 37 and 38 together as they are related.

We have already studied some of the history that is here in our previous studies in this series but right quickly I will remind you that Zedekiah was the last King of Judah. He was actually made king by Nebuchadnezzar. When Nebuchadnezzar invaded Jerusalem he took the reigning king which was Jehoachin, as a captive to Babylon. Then he placed Jehoachin's uncle Mattaniah up as King and changed his name to Zedekiah.

We get some history of Zedekiah from **2 Kings 24:18-20**: *Zedekiah was twenty and one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Hamutal, the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah. 19 And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that Jehoiakim had done. 20 For through the anger of the LORD it came to pass in Jerusalem and Judah, until he had cast them out from his presence, that Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon.*

Well here in Jeremiah 37 we see that Zedekiah had not been listening to the words of the LORD which Jeremiah had been prophesying.

3 And Zedekiah the king sent Jehucal the son of Shelemiah and Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah the priest to the prophet Jeremiah, saying, Pray now unto the LORD our God for us.

Now that Nebuchadnezzar has besieged the city of Jerusalem, suddenly it appears that Zedekiah wants Jeremiah to pray for them. More than likely he is wanting Jeremiah to try and intercede for them so that the LORD would change his mind about allowing their enemies to prevail against them.

4 Now Jeremiah came in and went out among the people: for they had not put him into prison.

Even though the city was under the control of the Chaldeans, Jeremiah at this point and time has free reign, he is not arrested or in prison.

5 Then Pharaoh's army was come forth out of Egypt: and when the Chaldeans that besieged Jerusalem heard tidings of them, they departed from Jerusalem.

We talked about this a few lessons ago, but what happened at this time was that Pharaoh decided to send an army of men to Jerusalem to try and run the Chaldeans out, however, before they could get there the Chaldeans heard they were coming and they all pulled out of the city to meet the Egyptians head on while they were marching. The Egyptians were no match for Nebuchadnezzar and the Chaldean army and were defeated and turned back.

In the meantime, Jerusalem is Chaldean free and it appears to the Jews and Zedekiah that things are going to work out after all.

6 Then came the word of the LORD unto the prophet Jeremiah, saying,  
7 Thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel; Thus shall ye say to the king of Judah, that sent you unto me to enquire of me; Behold, Pharaoh's army, which is come forth to help you, shall return to Egypt into their own land.  
8 And the Chaldeans shall come again, and fight against this city, and take it, and burn it with fire.  
9 Thus saith the LORD; Deceive not yourselves, saying, The Chaldeans shall surely depart from us: for they shall not depart.  
10 For though ye had smitten the whole army of the Chaldeans that fight against you, and there remained *but* wounded men among them, *yet* should they rise up every man in his tent, and burn this city with fire.

The LORD reveals to Jeremiah that the false sense of hope that the Jews have because of the Chaldeans departing from Jerusalem, is going to be short lived. The Chaldeans will indeed come back and instead of just occupying the city they will burn it down. Even if the Jews somehow had been able to rise up and fight the Chaldeans, they would still prevail even wounded they would burn the place down. In other words, destruction is coming and there's nothing that anyone or anything can do about it. That's why he says "Deceive not yourselves." Don't think you can change the course of history that I have set forth against you.

11 And it came to pass, that when the army of the Chaldeans was broken up from Jerusalem for fear of Pharaoh's army,

12 Then Jeremiah went forth out of Jerusalem to go into the land of Benjamin, to separate himself thence in the midst of the people.

13 And when he was in the gate of Benjamin, a captain of the ward was there, whose name was Irijah, the son of Shelemiah, the son of Hananiah; and he took Jeremiah the prophet, saying, Thou fallest away to the Chaldeans.

14 Then said Jeremiah, *It is false*; I fall not away to the Chaldeans. But he hearkened not to him: so Irijah took Jeremiah, and brought him to the princes.

We have already studied this as well. During the time the Chaldeans were out of the city, Jeremiah takes the opportunity to go to his homeland to visit the piece of property that he had purchased from his cousin. He gets stopped and accused of desertion and colluding with the enemy and is arrested and brought back to Jerusalem.

15 Wherefore the princes were wroth with Jeremiah, and smote him, and put him in prison in the house of Jonathan the scribe: for they had made that the prison.

16 When Jeremiah was entered into the dungeon, and into the cabins, and Jeremiah had remained there many days;

These princes beat Jeremiah and locked him up in a makeshift prison in the house of a scribe. Evidentially the main prisons were filled up. It was a rough time in Jerusalem. But this scribe's house is even equipped with a dungeon. Probably just a deep hole dug beneath the house that was sectioned off with several chambers to keep prisoners. These would have been very small cramped quarters where the prisoner would be forced to stay in a bent over position 24/7, unable to stretch out, stand, or lay down. It was a miserable place to be.

We do not know exactly how long Jeremiah was locked up there, the Bible just says "many days." It was however many days it took for Nebuchadnezzar and the Chaldean army to drive off the Egyptians and return back to Jerusalem.

17 Then Zedekiah the king sent, and took him out: and the king asked him secretly in his house, and said, Is there *any* word from the LORD? And Jeremiah said, There is: for, said he, thou shalt be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon.

Since the Chaldeans have returned and things aren't looking good for the king, he gets Jeremiah out of prison in hopes that he might have some good news to bring from the LORD. It is not the news that the king wants to hear. Jeremiah, despite being wrongfully accused and locked up, just comes right and says "yes the LORD has spoken to me and you are going to be taken by Nebuchadnezzar." How this must have shook the king's very soul when he heard these words.

18 Moreover Jeremiah said unto king Zedekiah, What have I offended against thee, or against thy servants, or against this people, that ye have put me in prison?

19 Where *are* now your prophets which prophesied unto you, saying, The king of Babylon shall not come against you, nor against this land?

Then Jeremiah defends himself and point blank asks the king why he has had him locked up? What has he done to deserve this unfair treatment? Everything that he has said has been true. Where's all of the king's other prophets? The false ones that were telling him lies and that there would be peace and safety?

20 Therefore hear now, I pray thee, O my lord the king: let my supplication, I pray thee, be accepted before thee; that thou cause me not to return to the house of Jonathan the scribe, lest I die there.

The conditions in the dungeon underneath the scribe's house must have been horrendous. Jeremiah pleads for the king not to send him back there. He fears that he will die if he remains there.

21 Then Zedekiah the king commanded that they should commit Jeremiah into the court of the prison, and that they should give him daily a piece of bread out of the bakers' street, until all the bread in the city were spent. Thus Jeremiah remained in the court of the prison.

The king shows some compassion to Jeremiah by not sending him back to the dungeon, but instead of releasing him as he should have, he commits him to prison in the court of the king's palace. He would have more freedom here and be among other people. The king is also giving him a portion of bread to live on each day. Apparently he was being starved in the dungeon.

### **Jeremiah 38:1-28**

1 Then Shephatiah the son of Mattan, and Gedaliah the son of Pashur, and Jucal the son of Shelemiah, and Pashur the son of Malchiah, heard the words that Jeremiah had spoken unto all the people, saying,

2 Thus saith the LORD, He that remaineth in this city shall die by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence: but he that goeth forth to the Chaldeans shall live; for he shall have his life for a prey, and shall live.

3 Thus saith the LORD, This city shall surely be given into the hand of the king of Babylon's army, which shall take it.

4 Therefore the princes said unto the king, We beseech thee, let this man be put to death: for thus he weakeneth the hands of the men of war that remain in this city, and the hands of all the people, in speaking such words unto them: for this man seeketh not the welfare of this people, but the hurt.

While Jeremiah is under house arrest in the king's court, the princes named in verse 1 go to the king to speak out against Jeremiah. They want Jeremiah put to death for treasonous reasons. Because of his prophecies they claim it has caused anyone that would have fought against the Chaldeans to not try. They have already accepted defeat and would not stand up against them because of what Jeremiah has said.

5 Then Zedekiah the king said, Behold, he *is* in your hand: for the king *is* not *he that can do any thing* against you.

Well, this king is a spineless wimp. Instead of protecting the man of God, whom he knows is a true prophet, he gives in to these princes. They may have had some type of powers in their position but this king could have overruled them. Instead he plays up to them and states that he has no power against their wishes...

6 Then took they Jeremiah, and cast him into the dungeon of Malchiah the son of Hammelech, that *was* in the court of the prison: and they let down Jeremiah with cords. And in the dungeon *there was no water, but mire: so Jeremiah sunk in the mire.*

Now Jeremiah gets placed into an awful place. This dungeon was a cistern that would normally be used to store water in case of water shortages. It was not filled with water at the time but instead was a damp, muddy, nasty hole. The Jewish historian Josephus says that Jeremiah was sunk into the mud up to his neck. He has been left there to die. Instead of the princes executing him openly where it would have no doubt caused a backlash from the people, they think they can silence his death by leaving him abandoned in this muddy dungeon. He would have no bread or water given to him. It would have been a long, horrible, excruciating death.

7 Now when Ebedmelech the Ethiopian, one of the eunuchs which was in the king's house, heard that they had put Jeremiah in the dungeon; the king then sitting in the gate of Benjamin;

8 Ebedmelech went forth out of the king's house, and spake to the king, saying,

9 My lord the king, these men have done evil in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet, whom they have cast into the dungeon; and he is like to die for hunger in the place where he is: for *there is no more bread in the city.*

Obviously, the princes then went and talked and bragged among themselves about what they had done to Jeremiah. Little did they know that one of the eunuch's had overheard them talking and he knows what they have done is wrong. So he goes to the king and tells him what has happened and states that if Jeremiah is left there that he will die from starvation.

10 Then the king commanded Ebedmelech the Ethiopian, saying, Take from hence thirty men with thee, and take up Jeremiah the prophet out of the dungeon, before he die.

Now the King seems to have had a change of heart. Yeah, right. He's just protecting his position. If word gets out that the king is allowing the prophet to be starved to death for a crime he did not commit, it could have caused a riot. So he instructs his personal bodyguard to gather together 30 men to go and get Jeremiah the Prophet out of the dungeon.

That is a lot of men to get one old man out of a pit isn't it? Most likely the reason he took 30 men was in the case the princes tried to stop them. I'd say with 30 men coming they wouldn't even think about trying to stop them.

11 So Ebedmelech took the men with him, and went into the house of the king under the treasury, and took thence old cast clouts and old rotten rags, and let them down by cords into the dungeon to Jeremiah.

12 And Ebedmelech the Ethiopian said unto Jeremiah, Put now *these* old cast clouts and rotten rags under thine armholes under the cords. And Jeremiah did so.

The men get a bunch of old used clothes and rags so that Jeremiah can wrap them around himself so that he isn't injured by the ropes pulling against his body. It was a makeshift harness.

13 So they drew up Jeremiah with cords, and took him up out of the dungeon: and Jeremiah remained in the court of the prison.

Jeremiah is saved from death in a dungeon but is still under arrest and must stay in the court of the prison.

14 Then Zedekiah the king sent, and took Jeremiah the prophet unto him into the third entry that *is* in the house of the LORD: and the king said unto Jeremiah, I will ask thee a thing; hide nothing from me.

15 Then Jeremiah said unto Zedekiah, If I declare *it* unto thee, wilt thou not surely put me to death? and if I give thee counsel, wilt thou not hearken unto me?

16 So Zedekiah the king sware secretly unto Jeremiah, saying, As the LORD liveth, that made us this soul, I will not put thee to death, neither will I give thee into the hand of these men that seek thy life.

Once again, the king is wanting to hear some true words from the LORD. Each time he is hoping that it is good news and not bad news. Notice that he does all of this in secret. He doesn't want anyone else to know that he is seeking council from the man of God.

Jeremiah agrees to tell him the word of the LORD under the condition that Zedekiah will not put him to death and will not turn him back over to the princes that want him killed.

17 Then said Jeremiah unto Zedekiah, Thus saith the LORD, the God of hosts, the God of Israel; If thou wilt assuredly go forth unto the king of Babylon's princes, then thy soul shall live, and this city shall not be burned with fire; and thou shalt live, and thine house:

18 But if thou wilt not go forth to the king of Babylon's princes, then shall this city be given into the hand of the Chaldeans, and they shall burn it with fire, and thou shalt not escape out of their hand.

Jeremiah tells him what the LORD said. Of course, Zedekiah is not going to like it. He is given two choices:

1. Surrender to King Nebuchadnezzar and not fight against him and he will live, the city will not be burned, and he and his family will not be killed.
2. Or if he refuses to surrender then the LORD will allow the Chaldeans to invade the city, burn it with fire, and take Zedekiah as prisoner.

Zedekiah is not going to like either of those choices. Either way he is losing his kingdom.

19 And Zedekiah the king said unto Jeremiah, I am afraid of the Jews that are fallen to the Chaldeans, lest they deliver me into their hand, and they mock me.

One of Zedekiah's greatest fears is that he will be delivered into the hands of the Jews who had surrendered to the Chaldeans when they invaded the first time. Zedekiah had made strict laws forbidding anyone to surrender and go over to the enemy. Now he's afraid that if he surrenders that the Chaldeans will hand him over to those Jews for them to do what they want to him.

20 But Jeremiah said, They shall not deliver *thee*. Obey, I beseech thee, the voice of the LORD, which I speak unto thee: so it shall be well unto thee, and thy soul shall live.

Despite this king being a rotten king and doing what was wrong in the eyes of the LORD, Jeremiah is still trying to save him.

And that is what the true man of God will do. Despite the kind of person you may be facing, despite the sin they are dealing and dabbling in, we should always do the right thing and tell them the truth so they can be saved. Some may be tempted to think; "well, they will get what they deserve for the way they have lived their life." But that's not the love of Christ. The love of Christ is that we warn all men of the coming destruction.

21 But if thou refuse to go forth, this *is* the word that the LORD hath shewed me:

22 And, behold, all the women that are left in the king of Judah's house *shall be* brought forth to the king of Babylon's princes, and those *women* shall say, Thy friends have set thee on, and have prevailed against thee: thy feet are sunk in the mire, *and* they are turned away back.

23 So they shall bring out all thy wives and thy children to the Chaldeans: and thou shalt not escape out of their hand, but shalt be taken by the hand of the king of Babylon: and thou shalt cause this city to be burned with fire.

Jeremiah gives Zedekiah the alternative or the penalty for not obeying the Word of God. If he does not do what God says then the repercussions will be devastating. The Chaldeans will take all of the women out of the king's house and given to the Babylonian princes to do to them whatever they desire. These women will then blame the king for listening to the false prophets instead of listening to Jeremiah. They will now that the king is the reason they are being treated this way.

The king will be mired down. He will not be able to escape. They will take him, his wives, and all of his children and make them prisoners in Babylon. Then they will burn the city of Jerusalem to the ground.

24 Then said Zedekiah unto Jeremiah, Let no man know of these words, and thou shalt not die.

25 But if the princes hear that I have talked with thee, and they come unto thee, and say unto thee, Declare unto us now what thou hast said unto the king, hide it not from us, and we will not put thee to death; also what the king said unto thee:

26 Then thou shalt say unto them, I presented my supplication before the king, that he would not cause me to return to Jonathan's house, to die there.

Zedekiah forbids Jeremiah from telling anyone else these words and he also doesn't want the princes to know that he has been talking with Jeremiah. He puts a plan in motion that if the princes do find out he's been talking with him that Jeremiah is only to tell them that he had come to him to plead for his life not to be thrown back into the dungeon beneath Jonathan the scribes house.

27 Then came all the princes unto Jeremiah, and asked him: and he told them according to all these words that the king had commanded. So they left off speaking with him; for the matter was not perceived.

Of course, the princes found out about the king's "secret" meeting with Jeremiah. They immediately go to find out what it was all about. Just as the king commanded Jeremiah, he only told them that he had sought the king not to send him back to the dungeon to die. The princes took that answer and did not know about the prophecies that Jeremiah had spoken to the king.

28 So Jeremiah abode in the court of the prison until the day that Jerusalem was taken: and he was *there* when Jerusalem was taken.

Well, Jeremiah still remained under arrest, however, he was not kept in a dungeon anymore but was allowed to remain in the court of the prison until Jerusalem was fully taken over by the Chaldeans.

We will see in the next chapter in our studies next Wednesday, that Zedekiah does not obey the Word of the LORD and he will suffer greatly because of it.

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† All Scripture from the Authorized King James Version of the Bible