

Message #41

Jeremiah 37:1-21

What would it take to get you to stop standing up for God's word and to compromise the truth of God? The answer for Jeremiah was nothing. There would be nothing you could do to Jeremiah that would stop him from proclaiming the truth of God. Jeremiah would not compromise the truth of God no matter what you did to him.

Jeremiah lived in a religious world where the people believed religious lies and religious liars. They believed phony messages of prosperity and blessing no matter what they did and how they lived.

Jeremiah loved the truth and he proclaimed the truth in a world in which religious peoples loved false teachers and believed false teachers. But that did not stop him. No matter what you did to Jeremiah and no matter what you said about Jeremiah, he would not ever compromise the truth.

Now **verses 1-5** really set the stage for what happens.

In **verse 1** we learn that Zedekiah was appointed king by Nebuchadnezzar to replace Coniah, better known as Jehoiachin. We may remember that Jeremiah predicted that no one from Jehoiakim's family would sit on the throne of David (Jer. 36:30).

Well when Jehoiakim was eliminated, Jehoachin his son was put on the throne, but Nebuchadnezzar was used by God to remove him from office in three months (598 BC). He hauled Jehoachin and his mother to Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar appointed Zedekiah, who was the brother of Jehoiakim, to be king over Judah. So the prophecy was literally fulfilled.

Now since Nebuchadnezzar appointed Zedekiah, he would have naturally assumed that Zedekiah would be loyal to him.

Now reading between the lines, here is what happened. The Babylonians, who had been taking the Promised Land and had been in Jerusalem, had temporarily left Jerusalem. They had apparently moved south to fight against the Egyptians who were moving north. So there was some "break in the action" from the attack.

However, the break in the action did not cause God's people to turn from their sin and listen to the word of God. God wants to stress this point.

According to **verse 2, neither King Zedekiah nor his servants nor the people listened to the word of God spoken by the prophet Jeremiah.** This is critical. These people had faced a partial judgment from the Babylonians. **These were very religious people who believed in prayer, but they would not listen to the word of God and they would not turn from their sin and they would not submit to the word of God, which was spoken by Jeremiah, God's prophet.**

Now here is where the hypocrisy comes into play. **They will not listen to the words of God proclaimed by Jeremiah, but they want Jeremiah to pray for them.** What that tells us is that deep inside they know Jeremiah is a man of God and they know he is telling the truth.

According to **verse 3**, Zedekiah sent Jehucal and Zephaniah the priest to go to Jeremiah to get him to pray for them on their behalf.

Jehucal was no friend of Jeremiah. In fact, he is one of those who will demand Jeremiah be killed (Jer. 38:4). Zephaniah was the same guy who had been part of the team that went to Jeremiah earlier (21:1) to get Jeremiah to pray for them.

So what you have here are people who do not support Jeremiah, they don't like Jeremiah, they don't want to listen to him preach and they don't want to respond to the word of God; but what they do want is for him to pray for them.

This clearly shows the religious hypocrisy of these people:

- 1) They want Jeremiah to pray.**
- 2) They want Jeremiah to intercede for them.**
- 3) They do not want Jeremiah to instruct them.**
- 4) They do not and will not repent.**
- 5) They do not want to hear God's word.**
- 6) They do not intend to change their behavior and turn from evil.**
- 7) They only want him to pray because this is an emergency.**

Now the emergency is probably the fact that the Babylonians have temporarily left the area and Zedekiah thinks that some emergency prayer meeting conducted by Jeremiah may get them off the hook from the judgment of God.

According to **verse 4**, Jeremiah was still coming in and out among the people because they had not yet locked him up in prison. God wants us to realize that when this all started, Jeremiah was free to go where he wanted to go. The events of the previous chapter, when Jeremiah had been locked up, occurred some 10-15 years before this.

Now the historical context is given to us in **verse 5**. Pharaoh's Egyptian army from Egypt had set out and started to move north and when the Babylonians heard about it, they stopped their siege of Jerusalem and headed south.

It was right here when this happens and what we see here is this:

GODLESS LEADERS WANT A GODLY PROPHET TO PRAY FOR THEM AND GOD GIVES THE PROPHET AN ANSWER TO TAKE TO THE GODLESS PEOPLE; AND THE PEOPLE SO HATE GOD'S WORD AND JEREMIAH THAT THEY PUT HIM IN A HORRIBLE PRISON.

Here is where Jeremiah shines bright. No matter what you do to Jeremiah or how you threaten Jeremiah, he will not stop telling the truth of God.

There are three historical parts to this:

PART #1 – Jeremiah prays to God and God gives specific answers to his prayer. **37:7-10**

In **verses 6-7a** we learn that the LORD came to Jeremiah and God gave messages that He wanted communicated to Zedekiah:

Message #1 - Pharaoh's army has come out to assist you but will return to Egypt. **37:7b**

Zedekiah was hoping that the deals that had been made with the Egyptians would cause them to come and wipe out Babylon. It won't work. God was on the side of the Babylonians, not the Egyptians. The Egyptians will move north and God will turn them around and send them back south.

Message #2 - The Babylonians will come back to Jerusalem and burn it down. **37:8**

Jeremiah then was to tell Zedekiah that the Babylonians are going to turn around and come right back to Jerusalem and they will capture it and burn it down (II Kings 25:8-9).

Message #3 - Do not think the Babylonians are gone for good. **37:9**

You are deceiving yourself by believing the Babylonians are gone for good. They are not going away and any thinking that they are is deceptive.

Message #4 - No matter what you do to the Babylonians you will not stop them from burning down this city. **37:10**

Jeremiah said even if you wounded the Babylonians, God would enable them to rise up and burn this city down.

Zedekiah wanted Jeremiah to pray to God; well Jeremiah gave him God's answer.

Now had Jeremiah told him what he wanted to hear, life would have been good, but Jeremiah would not ever compromise the word of God.

When you are telling people the truth of God, sometimes it will not be what they want to hear. But we must be willing to tell the truth even if it means we are persecuted.

PART #2 – Jeremiah is falsely accused and arrested. **37:11-16**

According to **verses 11-12**, when the Babylonians stopped attacking Jerusalem for a while, because they heard about the Egyptian army, Jeremiah went out of Jerusalem to the land of Benjamin to take possession of some property.

More than likely he was going home to Anathoth to check on that property he purchased from Hanamel when in jail (32:6-15). He apparently hadn't seen the property so he was on his way to see it.

According to **verse 13**, as he was at the Gate of Benjamin, which was the same gate where he was publicly humiliated years before (20:2), the captain of the guard, whose name was Irijah, arrested Jeremiah the prophet and said you are a traitor who is joining the team of the Babylonians.

He alleges that Jeremiah was going south to join the Babylonians because he was predicting that they would defeat Israel and burn down the city of Jerusalem.

In **verse 14**, Jeremiah said that is a lie and I am not doing that. But the chief guard took him before the officials. Now previously about 10-15 years earlier, some of these officials had been on Jeremiah's side as he was preaching the truth (36:19, 25). They actually protected him, but these are new officials and they don't like Jeremiah or his message.

According to **verse 15**, the officials were so angry with Jeremiah for what he had been preaching that they beat him and put him in jail in a house of a scribe named Jonathan that they had turned into a prison.

According to **verse 16**, they put Jeremiah into a dungeon and left him there for many days. This must have been a horrible place because Jeremiah actually thought he could die in that place (Jer. 38:26).

So here is Jeremiah thrown into a dungeon and left to die. Notice there is no false teacher in this dungeon. There is no false prophet in this dungeon. There are no phony religious or political leaders in this dungeon, just one very faithful man of God who loved the truth of God and he proclaimed the truth of God.

PART #3 – Zedekiah gets Jeremiah out of prison. 37:17-21

King Zedekiah sent for Jeremiah and took him out of the dungeon. He knew Jeremiah was a true man of God so he did this secretly because he is a political weasel.

Now watch what happens. In **verse 17**, he sneaks in Jeremiah and asks him if he has had any word of God for him.

All Jeremiah has to do here is to soften the message. Or don't say anything negative. All Jeremiah has to do here is to give some positive message to Zedekiah and he will get out of this mess.

But Jeremiah was not about to compromise the word of God. He says in **verse 17**, yes there is a word from God—you will be taken captive by the King of Babylon. There is your message.

You wanted me to talk to God about you, well I did and there is your message.

Now after Jeremiah said that, he didn't stop. Jeremiah decides to lay out his innocent case and defend himself. He asks Zedekiah six probing questions:

- 1) In what way have I sinned against you? **37:18a**
- 2) In what way have I sinned against your servants? **37:18b**
- 3) In what way have I sinned against this people? **37:18c**
- 4) What have I done to cause you to put me in jail? **37:18d**
- 5) Where are your lying prophets, who told you Babylon would not come? **38:19**

They aren't locked up. They are the ones who have been lying to you and you have not locked them up.

- 6) Please don't send me back to that dungeon in Jonathan's house. **38:20**

Zedekiah let Jeremiah stay in the court of the guardhouse and gave him a loaf of bread every day. He wasn't staying in some place really nice and plush, but he was staying in a place better than before.

Now why was Jeremiah in this situation? **The reason is because he was one man on earth who told the truth of God and proclaimed the truth of God no matter what the message.**

As we have said many times in this study, what we are after here is the truth of God.

Once we know it, it is our job to present it and defend it.