

JEREMIAH IS IMPRISONED

TEXT: JEREMIAH 37 & 38

INTRODUCTION:

1. The book of Jeremiah is not in chronological order. Chapter 36 describes how King Jehoiakim threw the Word of God into the fire.
2. Jeremiah chapters 37 and 38 record the arrest and imprisonment of Jeremiah during the reign of King Zedekiah, the last king of Judah.
3. Jeremiah 37 begins with another reminder of the disobedience of King Zedekiah and the people of Judah (37:1, 2). These two verses summarize the reign of Zedekiah, who was a weak and unstable king.
4. H.A. Ironside says, "It was eleven years of indifference to the Word of the Lord. This king personally was not so daringly impious as some of his predecessors. He realized in some measure the claims of God upon him and his people, but he never earnestly set himself, like Hezekiah or his father Josiah, to seek His face and to do those things that were pleasing in His sight" (*Jeremiah and Lamentations*).
5. Despite King Zedekiah's unbelief and disobedience, he sent two of his officers to go and ask Jeremiah to pray for him and for his kingdom (37:3, 4). But there was no word of repentance; no confession; no remorse or grief for Judah's apostasy.
6. Like America today, they would not humble themselves before God.
7. Then we have a reference to the temporary withdrawal of the Chaldean troops upon the occasion of the advancement of Pharaoh's army (37:5).
8. Jeremiah was told by the LORD that the Egyptian soldiers would turn around and return to Egypt. Jeremiah assured King Zedekiah that the respite was only temporary and that the Chaldean army would soon return and utterly destroy Jerusalem (37:6-10).
9. This message infuriated the princes of Jerusalem, and they had Jeremiah arrested and thrown into a dungeon (37:11-16).
10. Jeremiah was hated and persecuted, falsely charged and imprisoned. The *Scofield Study Bible* gives the sequence of events (p. 814).

I. JEREMIAH WAS PUT IN A DUNGEON (37:11-15).

1. Jeremiah was in the gate of Benjamin, when a captain of the ward named Irijah, apprehended him, saying, "Thou fallest away to the Chaldeans" (37:13).
2. Jeremiah protested his innocence, but Irijah "hearkened not to him," and took him before the princes (37:14). It is hardly to be supposed

that these men really believed him to be guilty, but it gave them an opportunity to vent their hatred upon the man who had so often reproved them. He was ignominiously smitten, and, apparently without a hearing, was cast into prison, in the house of Jonathan the scribe (37:15).

3. Verse 15 says, "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." Verse 16 says it was a "dungeon."

II. JEREMIAH IS MOVED TO THE COURT OF THE PRISON.

1. Jeremiah was cast into the gloomy and damp dungeon, and "remained there many days" (37:16).
2. King Zedekiah knew Jeremiah was innocent of the charges brought upon him by Irijah, but Zedekiah was weak and was easily manipulated by others (cf. 38:4, 5).
3. Eventually Zedekiah sent for Jeremiah and took him out for a secret conference in the palace. The king asked him, "Is there any word from the LORD?" (37:17).
4. Once again, Jeremiah told the king what he had been saying all along. "There is: for, said he, thou shalt be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon" (37:17).
5. After telling King Zedekiah the unvarnished truth, Jeremiah asked, "What have I offended against thee, or against thy servants, or against this people, that ye have put me in prison?" (37:18).
6. Jeremiah reminded King Zedekiah that his false prophets had been consistently wrong, while the word of Jeremiah had been proven true -- Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon had indeed invaded the city.
7. The false prophets said that would never happen, and now they had been put to shame (Jer. 37:19, 20).
8. Recognizing that Jeremiah had been unjustly accused and imprisoned, King Zedekiah gave an order that Jeremiah be put in the court of the prison, with the allowance of "a daily a piece of bread out of the bakers' street, until all the bread in the city were spent" (37:21).

III. JEREMIAH IS MOVED YET AGAIN (38:1-6).

1. Among the king's court officers, there were many who were hostile toward the prophet Jeremiah (38:1-4).

2. For faithfully declaring the word of God, Jeremiah was hated.
3. He consistently warned the people -- including the nobles, the priests, the false prophets, and the king -- that the Jerusalem would soon fall.
4. H.A. Ironside said, "Burning with indignation against the man who so solemnly declared the utter futility of all their schemes and devices, they accused Jeremiah before the king, and urged that he be executed as a traitor...How little can worldly men understand that true love for the people leads one faithfully to show them their sins and their danger!...It is of the false prophets that the world speaks well. The true are accounted as the offscouring of the earth" (*Jeremiah and Lamentations*).
5. Zedekiah, an indecisive and spineless king, succumbed to the demands of his ministers. Like Pontius Pilate, Zedekiah consented to their demands in words that indicate his weakness as a leader -- "Behold, he is in your hand: for the king is not he that can do anything against you" (38:5).
6. Having obtained permission from the king, the four conspirators took Jeremiah and cast him into the dungeon of Malchiah, which was in the court of the prison, letting him down into the muck and mire with cords (38:6).
7. Apparently Jeremiah's enemies wanted to leave him there to die (cf. 38:10b).

IV. JEREMIAH IS RESCUED FROM THE FILTHY PIT.

1. Though Jeremiah had many enemies, he also had some friends. One man who bravely came to rescue him was an Ethiopian eunuch named Ebed-melech (38:7-9).
2. His name means, "servant of the king," and this may not actually be his proper name. Hearing that the prophet had been left to perish in the filthy pit of the prison court, this sympathetic Ethiopian went boldly to entreat the king's favor.
3. At this time, King Zedekiah was "sitting in the gate of Benjamin" (38:7). Supposedly, the king was sitting in the gate to dispense

- justice, while this inexcusable injustice had been carried out with his consent (38:7-9).
4. Zedekiah, "unstable as water," once again reverses his judgment and commands Ebed-melech, "Take from hence thirty men with thee, and take up Jeremiah the prophet out of the dungeon, before he die" (38:10).
 5. Thirty men were not needed to hoist Jeremiah up out of the pit. The king was anticipating trouble from Jeremiah's adversaries.
 6. It should be noted that King Zedekiah made no confession of sin in the way he mistreated Jeremiah; nor did he apologize to the prophet for his sufferings.
 7. Ebed-melech used old cloths (clothes) and rags, which he let down by cords into the dungeon to Jeremiah, with directions to put them under his armholes under the ropes (38:11, 12).
 8. H.A. Ironside said, "In that day when every cup of cold water given in the name of the Lord shall not fail of reward, Ebed-melech's 'old cast cloths and rotten rags' used to lessen the pain of the man of God will be remembered and duly taken into account" (*Jeremiah and Lamentations*).
 9. The situation in Jerusalem had become desperate, and in his distress King Zedekiah once again sent for Jeremiah for a secret interview. This would be their last conversation (38:14).
 10. Jeremiah had been repeatedly warning the king, but there was never any genuine contrition on the part of the king. He was a double-minded man, and James 1:8 says, "A double minded man is unstable in all his ways."
 11. Jeremiah spoke to the conscience of the king -- "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?" (38:15).
 12. The king swore secretly that Jeremiah would not be harmed, and so Jeremiah gave him instructions from the LORD (38:16-18).
 13. King Zedekiah said, "As the LORD liveth, that made us this soul, I will not put thee to death" (38:16). Merrill Unger said this implies, "May my life (soul) be forfeited if I go back on my oath" (*Unger's Commentary on the Old Testament*).
 14. Jeremiah told King Zedekiah, "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" (38:17).
 15. In other words, a complete and unconditional surrender to Babylon. On the other hand, if King Zedekiah would not yield to the king of

- Babylon's princes, Jerusalem would be given into the hand of the Chaldeans, and they would burn it with fire, and King Zedekiah would not be able to escape (38:18).
16. John 12:43 says the chief rulers “loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.” This describes weak and worldly King Zedekiah.
 17. Proverbs 29:25 says, "The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe." If King Zedekiah would have trusted in the LORD he would have been safe. But he was afraid of being mocked by the Jews who were already taken in by the Chaldeans (38:19).
 18. Like many other faithful preachers over the years, who have pleaded with sinners to get right with God, Jeremiah urged King Zedekiah to obey the LORD, assuring him that they should not deliver him up as he feared (38:20).
 19. “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” (38:20).
 20. But on the other hand, Jeremiah solemnly warned King Zedekiah that if he refused to go forth, all the women of his household and harem would taunt him before the Chaldean soldiers (38:21-23).
 21. King Zedekiah was indecisive. He did not indicate what his decision would be, but he told Jeremiah not to discuss the details of their conversation with anyone (38:24).
 22. If the princes asked him as to what had taken place, he was to mention the matter of his request to be released from prison, but nothing more than that (38:24-26).
 23. As expected, the princes did seek to know what Jeremiah discussed with the king, but he replied discreetly, as he had been bidden (38:27).
 24. The princes left Jeremiah in the court of the prison, where he remained "until the day that Jerusalem was taken: and he was there when Jerusalem was taken" (38:28).

CONCLUSION:

There are many lessons from the book of Jeremiah. One of the lessons is sometimes God judges sinful nations by sending them weak leaders whose ineffective governing plunges the country deeper into trouble.