

Jeremiah

Chapter 37

Jeremiah Warns Zedekiah

Zedekiah the son of Josiah, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon made king in the land of Judah, reigned instead of Coniah the son of Jehoiakim. 2 But neither he nor his servants nor the people of the land listened to the words of the LORD that he spoke through Jeremiah the prophet. 3 King Zedekiah sent Jehucal the son of Shelemiah, and Zephaniah the priest, the son of Maaseiah, to Jeremiah the prophet, saying, “Please pray for us to the LORD our God.” 4 Now Jeremiah was still going in and out among the people, for he had not yet been put in prison. 5 The army of Pharaoh had come out of Egypt. And when the Chaldeans who were besieging Jerusalem heard news about them, they withdrew from Jerusalem. 6 Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet: 7 “Thus says the LORD, God of Israel: Thus shall you say to the king of Judah who sent you to me to inquire of me, ‘Behold, Pharaoh’s army that came to help you is about to return to Egypt, to its own land. 8 And the Chaldeans shall come back and fight against this city. They shall capture it and burn it with fire. 9 Thus says the LORD, Do not deceive yourselves, saying, “The Chaldeans will surely go away from us,” for they will not go away. 10 For even if you should defeat the whole army of Chaldeans who are fighting against you, and there remained of them only wounded men, every man in his tent, they would rise up and burn this city with fire.”

37:1–38:28 During the last two years of Zedekiah’s reign (588–586 B.C.), Jeremiah is imprisoned by the authorities. (CSB)

Jeremiah is firm in proclaiming the inspired Word during the last two years before the fall of Jerusalem. In three private interviews with Zedekiah, he did not hesitate to announce the fearful fate awaiting the king, the city, and its inhabitants. Nor did scourging, jailing, and the threat of death by the princes cower him into deviating from the truth. (TLSB)

37:1-10 He was called to his first discussion with the king when Nebuchadnezzar lifted the siege of Jerusalem to engage an army under Pharaoh Hophra (44:30; cf 32:1-15). Asked to pray that the Babylonians be forced to stay away permanently, Jeremiah announced their inevitable return to burn the city with fire. (TLSB)

37:1 *Zedekiah*. Means “The LORD is my righteousness.” (CSB)

His original name had been Mattaniah, a brother of Jehoiakim, 2 Kings 24, 17. (Kretzmann)

Though Zedekiah consulted with Jeremiah often, he never really acted on what Jeremiah told him. In his heart he could never bring himself to believe what the Lord said. He followed the recommendations of his top advisors. Fear kept him from acting contrary to their wishes. He also pursued the same disastrous path as his wicked brother Jehoiakim had. Though he owed his throne to Nebuchadnezzar, he showed no loyalty to him. The pattern of disobedience and unbelief continued as before. (PBC)

reigned instead of Coniah the son of Jehoiachin. In 597 B.C. This fulfills the prophecy concerning Jehoiakim in 36:30. (CSB)

37:3 *Jehucal son of Shelemiah*. Later became Jeremiah’s enemy (see 38:1, 4). (CSB)

pray ... for us. Perhaps to ask the Lord to make the temporary withdrawal of the Babylonians in 588 B.C. permanent. (CSB)

Jeremiah was forbidden to intercede for people intent on opposing God's will (cf 7:16; 11:14; 14:11; 15:1). (TLSB)

This was, in the first place, an act of amazing stupidity in view of the king's deliberate disobedience, but also one of revolting hypocrisy, since Zedekiah feigned an allegiance to Jehovah which he was far from possessing. Zedekiah, moreover, did not seem to notice that his act was a further insult to Jeremiah, after the manner in which his messages had been received by the men in high places. (Kretzmann)

37:4 *not yet been put in prison* – he was at that time unhampered in his movements. He was not in ward in the prison court, where he had been compelled to spend so much time before. (Kretzmann)

37:5 *Pharaoh's army.* The troops of Hophra (see 44:30), called Apries by Greek historians. (CSB)

marched out of Egypt. Probably to help Zedekiah at his request; Lachish ostrakon 3 (see note on 34:7) mentions a visit to Egypt made by the commander of Judah's army. All such ploys by Zedekiah would fail, however (see Eze 17:15, 17). (CSB)

Babylonians ... withdrew. To deal with the Egyptian threat (see 34:21 and note). (CSB)

They discontinued the siege in order to meet this new danger. Such were the circumstances at the time when Zedekiah sent his men to Jeremiah. (Kretzmann)

37:7 *army of Pharaoh... withdrew from Jerusalem.* Hophra would soon be defeated by Nebuchadnezzar (see note on Eze 30:21). (CSB)

37:10 *wounded.* Lit. "pierced through," "mortally wounded." Though seriously handicapped, the Babylonians would still destroy Jerusalem. (CSB)

As the disobedient Jews in this instance, so the unbelievers ever depend upon false conclusions and vain delusions in order to have some basis for their opposition to the Lord and His Word. But they merely deceive themselves. (Kretzmann)

37:1–10 Jeremiah assures King Zedekiah and the city residents that the withdrawal of the Babylonians is only temporary. The Babylonians would certainly return and destroy the city, as God had ordained because of people's sin. Sin brings terrible consequences. They are sometimes delayed, but they are inevitable. God never entirely abandons His people, but continues to call them to repentance with the promise of forgiveness and hope for the future. • Help us to understand sin and its fruit, Lord, that we may wisely follow Your way instead of the world's way. Amen. (TLSB)

Jeremiah Imprisoned

11 Now when the Chaldean army had withdrawn from Jerusalem at the approach of Pharaoh's army, **12** Jeremiah set out from Jerusalem to go to the land of Benjamin to receive his portion there among the people. **13** When he was at the Benjamin Gate, a sentry there named Irijah the son of Shelemiah, son of Hananiah, seized Jeremiah the prophet, saying, "You are deserting to the Chaldeans." **14** And Jeremiah said, "It is a lie; I am not deserting to the Chaldeans." But Irijah would not listen to him, and seized Jeremiah and brought him to the officials. **15** And the officials were enraged at Jeremiah, and they beat him and imprisoned him in the house of Jonathan the

secretary, for it had been made a prison. 16 When Jeremiah had come to the dungeon cells and remained there many days, 17 King Zedekiah sent for him and received him. The king questioned him secretly in his house and said, "Is there any word from the LORD?" Jeremiah said, "There is." Then he said, "You shall be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon." 18 Jeremiah also said to King Zedekiah, "What wrong have I done to you or your servants or this people, that you have put me in prison? 19 Where are your prophets who prophesied to you, saying, 'The king of Babylon will not come against you and against this land'? 20 Now hear, please, O my lord the king: let my humble plea come before you and do not send me back to the house of Jonathan the secretary, lest I die there." 21 So King Zedekiah gave orders, and they committed Jeremiah to the court of the guard. And a loaf of bread was given him daily from the bakers' street, until all the bread of the city was gone. So Jeremiah remained in the court of the guard.

37:12 *land of Benjamin.* Where Jeremiah's hometown, Anathoth, was located. (CSB)

receive his portion. See 1Sa 30:24. While there was a brief lull in the Babylonian invasion, Jeremiah wanted to settle matters of estate with the other members of his family. (CSB)

Taking advantage of a lull in fighting, the prophet of Anathoth traveled home in order to claim his share of some family property. (TLSB)

Literally, "to make a division of inheritance," his business probably consisting in his taking away the personal property which he had inherited. (Kretzmann)

37:13 *Benjamin Gate.* The northern gate of Jerusalem, which led to the country of Benjamin and the northern province. (Kretzmann)

sentry ... Irijah. A guard in Jerusalem. Jeremiah got as far as one of the city gates, where this sentry arrested him on charges of deserting to the enemy. (TLSB)

You are deserting to the Chaldeans. Irijah's fear was understandable, since Jeremiah recommended surrendering to the Babylonians (see 21:9; 38:2) and since many Judahites in fact defected (see 38:19; 39:9; 52:15). (CSB)

Since the Chaldeans had undoubtedly retired in a northerly direction, the accusation of Irijah had a semblance of right, although it was, as a matter of fact, nothing but base slander. (Kretzmann)

37:14 *it is lie* Lit. "A lie" (see 2Ki 9:12). (CSB)

This was a just resentment on account of the unjust accusation which was brought against him. (Kretzmann)

37:15 *they beat him.* Probably in accordance with the Mosaic law of Dt 25:2-3) (CSB)

This was apparently done without so much as a hearing. (Kretzmann)

house of Jonathan. Jeremiah would later look back on this prison as a place of great danger for him (see v. 20; 38:26). (CSB)

Underground cell, located in the house of a certain Jonathan. (TLSB)

This very likely used because it contained subterranean cells, or cellars, which could readily be used for that purpose. (Kretzmann)

37:16 *dungeon*. Lit. “house of the cistern,” probably underground (see Ex 12:29). (CSB)

Apparently a further description of prison from v 15; may refer to a room below ground. (TLSB)

37:17 *Zedekiah ... questioned him privately*. Not wanting to do so in the presence of his officials, whom he apparently feared. (CSB)

During the siege, Zedekiah called for a secret consultation with Jeremiah at the palace. (TLSB)

37:19 *your prophets*. False prophets (see Dt 18:22). (CSB)

Predictions of popular prophets had proved false. Jeremiah spoke the true Word of God; therefore, he pleaded not to be sent back to the dungeon, where he would surely die. Afraid to expose him to possible harm by the princes, the king placed him into protective custody in the court of the guard and ordered provisions for him (vv 20–21). (TLSB)

Since the predictions of the false prophets had been found to be falsehoods, and since, on the other hand, the event prophesied by Jeremiah had come to pass, this, therefore, was a further argument for the fact that his arrest and imprisonment were acts of injustice. (Kretzmann)

37:20 *hear me*. His plea, according to the strongly figurative language of the Orient, being represented as falling down in supplication. (Kretzmann)

die there – The cells of the dungeon were anything but healthful places to live in for any length of time. (Kretzmann)

37:21 *court of the guard*. A less objectionable prison than the dungeon of v. 16. (CSB)

bakers' street. Perhaps near the Tower of the Ovens. (CSB)

In the Orient persons of the same trade or business often occupied their own streets and even their own quarters. (Kretzmann)

until all the bread ... was gone. The Hebrew word for “bread” is translated “food” in 52:6. (CSB)

Zedekiah either continued to feel resentful against Jeremiah for his prophetic sayings, or he, at least, did not have the courage of his convictions in setting him at liberty. (Kretzmann)

remained in the court of the guard – As in the case of Jeremiah, so today fearless testifying for and of the truth of the Lord is demanded of all who bear the name of His servants. (Kretzmann)

37:11–21 Jeremiah continues to suffer for doing God’s will and speaking the truth. The world hates God and His Word and opposes those who proclaim its truth. However, God does not ignore the plight of His persecuted people, and He will not neglect you. Though you enter the kingdom of heaven through tribulation, your future is assured through the Gospel of God’s beloved Son. • Grant us strength, Lord, when we face trials and persecution. Keep us faithful to Jesus and focused on the prize of eternal life. Amen. (TLSB)