

## Jeremiah Chapter 37

Verses 1-2: A story of Zedekiah's disobedience to the prophetic word is placed next to the story of Jehoiakim's unbelief. One disobeyed out of anger, and the other out of fear, but both were unfaithful to the Lord.

**Jeremiah 37:1 "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."**

"Zedekiah ... reigned": Zedekiah, an uncle of Jeconiah, was raised to the throne by Nebuchadnezzar in contempt for Jehoiakim and Jeconiah. His 11 year vassal rule (was from 597-586 B.C.). The message of the king to Jeremiah in this chapter is somewhat earlier than that (in chapter 21), when Zedekiah was afraid of the Chaldean's (Babylonian's), defeating Egypt and returning to besiege Jerusalem (verses 3, 5).

2 Kings 24:17 "And the king of Babylon made Mattaniah his father's brother king in his stead, and changed his name to Zedekiah."

Coniah is the same person as Jehoiachin. Zedekiah was 21 years old when he began to reign.

**Jeremiah 37:2 "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."**

The king, his courtiers and subjects of the royal family, nobility, and common people. They were all degenerate and corrupt. Jarchi observes, that Jehoiakim was wicked, and his people righteous. And that Zedekiah was righteous, and his people wicked but he seems to have found his character on that single action of taking Jeremiah out of prison. Whereas, according to this account, king and people were all wicked.

"Did hearken unto the words of the Lord, which he spake by Jeremiah the prophet": Not those which were spoken in the former nor in the latter part of his reign, concerning the destruction of the city by the Chaldeans. This short count is given to show how just it was to give up such a prince and people to ruin.

It appears that all the warnings that God sent Zedekiah and his people were in vain. They did not listen to Jeremiah at all. They thought of him as being the false prophet. They preferred to accept the prophecy of their own false prophets who spoke of good times.

**Jeremiah 37:3 "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."**

Zedekiah asked the prophet to pray for the deliverance of Judah and Jerusalem, but the Lord had already commanded the prophet not to pray for the people (7:16; 11:14; 14:11; 15:1).

This is very ridiculous. They do not believe Jeremiah, but they ask him to pray for them. Perhaps they thought Jeremiah to be a righteous man.

James 5:16 "Confess [your] faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."

They still claim that the LORD is their God, but they certainly do not show that when they are unfaithful to Him. Even the priest's son (Jehucal), comes to ask for prayer.

**Jeremiah 37:4 "Now Jeremiah came in and went out among the people: for they had not put him into prison."**

The prophet was no longer in the prison court as he had been (32:2; 33:1).

This is early in the prophecies when Jeremiah met with them. At this time, they had not put him in prison. Even when they do put him in prison he had privileges that most prisoners do not have.

**Jeremiah 37:5 "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."**

Help from the Egyptian forces probably came as a result of a request from Zedekiah (compare Ezek. 17:11-21). Hope for permanent help from this Pharaoh was foolish, for he had political difficulties that led to his overthrow.

They had tried to get help from Egypt, but the effort here is temporary. At least for a moment, the Chaldeans turn back and leave Jerusalem because of the threat of the Egyptians. The Pharaoh mentioned here was Hophra, who had fled to Egypt for safety. God had warned that those who fled would be punished. He was not successful at all.

Verses 6-10: Zedekiah and his men also mistakenly believed that assistance from the Egyptian army would relieve Babylonian pressure on Jerusalem. They had reversed the great confession (of Psalm 20:7), by putting their trust in "chariots" and "horses" rather than "in the name of the Lord". Isaiah had warned in a previous generation that alliances with Egypt were futile (Isa. 30:1-3; 31:1-3).

**Jeremiah 37:6 "Then came the word of the LORD unto the prophet Jeremiah, saying,"**

At the time when the messengers came to him from the king to pray for them. For (Jer. 37:4), are to be included in a parenthesis.

Saying; as follows": Which is an answer to the messengers.

Verses 7-10: Babylon, which temporarily ended the siege to deal with an Egyptian advance, would return and destroy Jerusalem.

**Jeremiah 37:7 "Thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel; Thus shall ye say to the king of Judah, that sent you unto me to inquire of me; Behold, Pharaoh's army, which is come forth to help you, shall return to Egypt into their own land."**

Which are the usual titles and characters the Lord takes to himself, when he spake by the prophet (see Jer. 34:2).

"Thus shall ye say to the king of Judah, that sent you unto me, to inquire of me": In an oracular way; for by this it seems that they were not only sent to desire the prophet to pray for them, but to obtain an oracle from the Lord, confirming it to them, that the Chaldean army which was gone would not return any more. This they were willing to believe, but wanted to have a confirmation of it from the Lord. And so the Targum, "to seek an oracle from me;" or to ask instruction or doctrine from me. Now these messengers are bid to go back and tell the king, his nobles, and all the people of the land, what follows.

"Behold, Pharaoh's army, which is come forth to help you, shall return to Egypt, into their own land": Being afraid to face the Chaldean army; or being defeated and driven back by it. Josephus says there was a battle fought between the Egyptians and Chaldeans, in which the latter were conquerors. And put the former to flight, and drove them out of all Syria.

Zedekiah had sent to Jeremiah for prayer, but Jeremiah would not pray for something that was not in the will of God. Instead of praying an intercessory prayer for Zedekiah and Judah, Jeremiah sends another prophecy. Pharaoh's army will go home and the Chaldeans will be back.

**Jeremiah 37:8 "And the Chaldeans shall come again, and fight against this city, and take it, and burn it with fire."**

Jeremiah's answer here is even more unfavorable than that which is given (in Jer. 21:4-7). So hopeless is resistance that the disabled men among the Chaldaeans would alone suffice to capture the city and burn it to the ground.

Jeremiah tells them that not only will the Chaldeans come again, but they will win. When they have taken the city they will burn it.

**Jeremiah 37:9 "Thus saith the LORD; Deceive not yourselves, saying, The Chaldeans shall surely depart from us: for they shall not depart."**

Or, "your souls". With a false opinion, a vain persuasion and belief of the departure of the Chaldeans never to return. Which they would have confirmed by the Lord. Or, "lift not up your souls"; with vain hopes of the above things. Self or soul deception is a dreadful thing. And sad is the disappointment when men are elated with a false and vain hope.

"Saying, the Chaldeans shall surely depart from us": They had departed from Jerusalem; but they were persuaded they would depart out of the land of Judea, and go into their own land. The land of Babylon, from whence they came, and never return more.

"For they shall not depart": Out of the land of Judea, into their own land. At least not till they had done the work they were sent for.

They certainly had been deceiving themselves right along. They did not believe the message God had sent them by Jeremiah. They were deceived into believing the city would not fall.

**Jeremiah 37:10 "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."**

Supposing the whole army of the Chaldeans had been vanquished and slain by the Egyptians, the confederates of the Jews. Or should they be slain by them in a second siege of them, with the exception of the next mentioned.

"And there remained but wounded men among them": And supposing that those of them that were left, and were not slain, were every one of them wounded men. And so disabled for fighting, as might be thought.

"Yet should they rise up every man in his tent": Where he was smitten, and lay wounded. Or where he was carried to be cured of his wounds. Such should rise up like persons from the dead almost, and fight with such strength and spirit, that they should soon take the city, though in such a condition.

"And burn this city with fire": This being a thing determined by the Lord, and nothing should hinder it; for it matters not what the instruments are. Though ever so impotent and disabled, they shall do the work allotted to them. Wherefore all the hopes of the Jews, founded upon the departure of the Chaldean army, were vain ones.

Even if these exiled Jews from Egypt had won the battle, the city would not be spared because it is the judgement of God for it to burn. Since God is truly behind this attack, even men near to death could win. They would be fighting in the strength of the LORD and not in their own strength. They might turn them back, but they will come again and defeat the city.

Verses 11-21: Zedekiah's lack of courage allowed his military officers to beat and imprison Jeremiah, but then he sought Jeremiah's advice and counsel.

**Jeremiah 37:11 "And it came to pass, that when the army of the Chaldeans was broken up from Jerusalem for fear of Pharaoh's army,"**

When the siege of the city was broken up and raised. Or, when they "went up from Jerusalem"; were gone from it.

"For fear of Pharaoh's army": Or rather "because of Pharaoh's army". The word "fear" is not in the text; nor did they leave Jerusalem for fear of his army, but to meet it, and give it battle, as they did. However, by this means there was a freer entry and exit from and to the city.

**Jeremiah 37:12 "Then Jeremiah went forth out of Jerusalem to go into the land of Benjamin, to separate himself thence in the midst of the people."**

"Jeremiah went forth out": He returned to his hometown to claim the property he had purchased (in 32:6-12).

It seems that while the siege of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans was momentarily stopped, Jeremiah went back to his home at Anathoth. This separation is a holy separation. He was in the world, but not of the world, the same as we Christians are. He was in the midst of the people, but not involved in the sins of the people.

**Jeremiah 37:13 "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, Thouallest away to the Chaldeans."**

"Hananiah": Jeremiah had predicted his death (28:16), and thus the grandson took revenge with a false accusation (compare 38:19; 52:15).

Now Jeremiah has been accused by Irijah of going over to the side of the Chaldeans. This was a captain so he had some authority. It appears that he arrested Jeremiah.

**Jeremiah 37:14 "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."**

Or a "falsehood"; as undoubtedly it was.

"I fall not away to the Chaldeans": For the Chaldean army was gone from the city. Nor did Jeremiah like so well to be with an idolatrous people. For after the city was taken, when Nebuzar-adan the captain of the guard gave him his choice, either to go with him to Babylon, where he promised to take care of him; or to go to Gedaliah, who was made governor of Judah. He chose rather to be with him, and his poor company.

"But he hearkened not to him": Would not hear his defense, or however would not give any credit to it. Being unwilling to let slip this opportunity of doing him ill will.

"So Irijah took Jeremiah, and brought him to the princes": The princes of Zedekiah's court, or the princes of the people, the civil magistrates. Or it may be the great Sanhedrim, who he knew had no good disposition towards the prophet.

Jeremiah tries to defend himself from the accusations by denying affiliation with the Chaldeans.

**Jeremiah 37:15 "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."**

“Smote him”: Jeremiah often absorbed blows, threats, or other mistreatment for proclaiming the truth from God (11:21; 20:2; 26:8; 36:26; 38:6, 25).

Cisterns or abandoned wells were frequently used as places of imprisonment or for the disposal of slain bodies in the ancient Near East (compare 38:6, 13; 41:9; Gen. 37:24).

The princes had spoken highly of Jeremiah in the past, but they must not have much depth in themselves. The first accusation from Irijah of Jeremiah siding in with the Chaldeans is accepted as fact by them. They did not examine the facts, just took Irijah's word. They not only took Jeremiah, but struck him. This is a dangerous thing to do to a prophet of God. The scribe here is like a secretary of state. They imprisoned Jeremiah in the house of Jonathan.

**Jeremiah 37:16 "When Jeremiah was entered into the dungeon, and into the cabins, and Jeremiah had remained there many days;"**

Or, "into the house of the pit"; a dungeon, like a pit or ditch, dark, dirty, or dismal.

"And into the cabins": Or "cells"; into a place more inward than the cells. As the Targum; into the innermost and worst part in all the prison, where a man could not well lie, sit, nor stand.

"And Jeremiah had remained there many days": In this very uncomfortable condition. Very probably till the Chaldean army returned to Jerusalem, as he foretold it should.

This was some underground building with rooms in it. They locked Jeremiah in this place and left him three days.

**Jeremiah 37:17 "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."**

This showed Zedekiah's willful rejection. He knew Jeremiah spoke for God.

Remember, that Zedekiah had asked Jeremiah to pray for him. He now wants to know what the answer is from God. This is probably the only reason he took him out of the dungeon. Jeremiah can only speak the words that God puts into his mouth. He tells Zedekiah the bad news that he will be taken by the king of Babylon.

**Jeremiah 37:18 "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?"**

Having this opportunity with him alone, and perhaps observing the king was melted and softened with what he had said. However, finding liberty in his own mind, he enlarges his discourse, and freely expostulates with him in the following manner.

"What have I offended against thee, or against thy servants, or against this people, that ye have put me in prison?" Or, "what have I sinned?" Have I been guilty of treason against thee, O king? Or of scandal and defamation of any of thy nobles and courtiers? Have I done any injury to any of the king's subjects? Has there been any falsehood in my prophecies? Has not everything appeared to be true that I have spoken, concerning the coming of the Chaldeans to invade the land, and besiege the city? And concerning the return of the Chaldean army when broken up? Why then should I be cast into prison, and detained there? Is it not a clear case that what I have said comes from the Lord? And therefore, ought not to be used in this manner.

The king in the land is responsible for what the princes do. Jeremiah wants to know what crime he committed that was worthy of imprisonment. He asks Zedekiah, "Why did you put me in prison"?

**Jeremiah 37:19 "Where [are] now your prophets which prophesied unto you, saying, The king of Babylon shall not come against you, nor against this land?"**

"Prophets": They were shown to be liars who said the "king of Babylon" would not come. He had come and would return.

Jeremiah reminds Zedekiah that the prophecy he had given came true. The false prophets, that he was so eager to listen to, had lied. Now Jeremiah asks Zedekiah, "How have you punished the false prophets"? They had dealt harshly with Jeremiah and he was a true prophet. What punishment had the false prophets received?

**Jeremiah 37:20 "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."**

When the prophet spoke in the name of the Lord, and the words of the Lord, it was with great boldness and majesty. But when he spoke for himself, and on his own behalf, it was with great submission, as it became a subject to his king. And whom he owns as his sovereign lord, though a wicked prince, and whose destruction he knew was at hand.

"Let my supplication be accepted before thee": Or, "fall before thee" (see Jer. 36:7), which was as follows.

"That thou cause me not to return to the house of Jonathan the scribe": But that he might be discharged from his confinement. Or however be removed into another prison, not as uncomfortable and disagreeable as this man's house or prison was. And which perhaps was still the worse through his cruel and ill-natured carriage to him. And which all together endangered his life. Wherefore he adds,

"Lest I die there": For though he had continued there many days, yet the place was so exceedingly noisome, that he thought he could not long continue there, was he remanded back to it.

Jeremiah is speaking this to Zedekiah. The word "lord" is not capitalized, which means an earthly lord. "Supplication" in this particular instance, means graciousness, or entreaty. Jeremiah is explaining that he is just speaking the Words that God puts into his mouth. That is his duty as a prophet. He has committed no crime and should not be imprisoned in the dungeon again. This is such a terrible place, that Jeremiah felt he might die there.

**Jeremiah 37:21 "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."**

“Bread”: The king showed a measure of kindness by returning Jeremiah to “the court of the prison” (compare 32:2; 33:1), promising “bread” as long as it lasted in the siege (compare 38:9). He remained there until Jerusalem was taken soon after the food was gone (38:28), with only a brief trip to a pit (38:6-13).

Jeremiah was still imprisoned but it was minimum security. He would even receive a piece of bread each day to keep him from starving. Probably this was more than what we would call a slice. It was possibly a small loaf. Bread was short because there was a famine, as well as a siege against the city. The court was a little like being under house arrest. He was detained but had some freedom of movement.

### **Jeremiah Chapter 37 Questions**

1. Who is Coniah?
2. How old was Zedekiah, when he began to reign?
3. Verse 2 tells us the people \_\_\_\_\_ accept the prophecy of Jeremiah?
4. What did Zedekiah send messengers to Jeremiah to ask him to do?
5. Who was sent to ask Jeremiah to pray?
6. Verse 4 says Jeremiah could come and go as he pleased because of what?
7. What happened to the Chaldeans in Jerusalem, when they heard of the Egyptians coming?
8. Who was the Pharaoh mentioned in verse 5?



9. What did God tell Jeremiah to say to the king of Judah?
10. Why had Jeremiah not prayed for Zedekiah?
11. What will the Chaldeans do, when they come again to the city?
12. Why would the city not be spared, even if the exiled Jews had defeated the Chaldeans?
13. When did Jeremiah decide to leave Jerusalem?
14. Where did he want to go?
15. What happened, when Jeremiah was in the gate of Benjamin?
16. Who accused Jeremiah?
17. What did he accuse Jeremiah of?
18. What answer did Jeremiah give to the accusation?
19. What did Irijah do with Jeremiah?
20. Who smote Jeremiah?
21. Where did they imprison Jeremiah?
22. How long was Jeremiah in the dungeon?
23. Who took Jeremiah out of the dungeon?
24. What did he ask Jeremiah?
25. How did Jeremiah answer him?
26. What does Jeremiah remind Zedekiah of in verse 19?
27. Why did Jeremiah ask not to be sent back to Jonathan's house?
28. Where did they imprison Jeremiah?
29. What was he to be fed?