

Jeremiah Chapter 38

Verses 1-6: Jeremiah was preaching surrender as the only way the people could survive the Babylonian onslaught. Believing he was weakening the war effort with his message, Judah's military officers sought to put Jeremiah to death by throwing him into an abandoned cistern (see verse 6). Zedekiah again lacked the courage to act on the prophet's behalf.

Jeremiah 38:1 "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,"

Of these two people we nowhere else read about. Some think that Pashur, whose son Gedaliah was, is the same as is mentioned in (Jer. 20:1). Which is not likely, since he was a priest, and this son was a prince.

"And Jucal the son of Shelemiah, and Pashur the son of Malchiah": These had been sent by the king to Jeremiah, to inquire of the Lord, and to pray for him and his people (Jer. 21:1). All four were princes, prime ministers of state, were of great power and authority. And to whom the king could deny nothing, or withstand (Jer. 38:4); these,

"Heard the words that Jeremiah had spoken to all the people": That is, to as many of them as came to the court of the prison to visit him. Some out of good will and some out of ill will; and others just out of curiosity. Craving to know by the prophet how things would go with them. And by which means what he said was spread all over the city, and came to the ears of the above princes. And no doubt there were those assertive enough to carry these things to them.

These were some of the princes. "Had spoken" could be continued to speak. They did not like what Jeremiah had to say. They did not even like Zedekiah taking Jeremiah out of the dungeon and giving him an opportunity to speak.

Jeremiah 38:2 "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."

Of Jerusalem; that does not go out of it, and surrender himself to the Chaldeans; but continues fighting against them.

"Shall die by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence": That is, by one or the other of these.

"But he that goeth forth to the Chaldeans shall live": That goes out of the city, throws down his arms, and delivers up himself to the Chaldean army. Submits to their mercy, he shall have quarters given him, and his life shall be spared.

"For he shall have his life for a prey, and shall live": Or, "his soul, and it shall live"; comfortably and in safety. He shall escape with his life, and that shall be preserved from the sword, famine, and pestilence. And whereas as it were, lost, it shall be recovered out of the jaws of death, and out of the above calamities it was exposed to. And so be like a prey taken out of the hands of the mighty, and be quite safe.

They did not like this message from God that Jeremiah was speaking. They still had an opportunity to save their lives if they would voluntarily surrender to the Chaldeans. If they did not surrender, God would let them die by the sword, famine, and by pestilence. Jeremiah might be imprisoned but his message was the same.

Jeremiah 38:3 "Thus saith the LORD, This city shall surely be given into the hand of the king of Babylon's army, which shall take it."

When those found in it should be put to the sword, or carried captive. This the prophet declares with the greatest certainty. And what he had often affirmed for twenty years past, and now stands to it, having had fresh assurances from the Lord that so it would be. And which he faithfully published. Though he had received some favors from the court, had his freedom enlarged, and was now eating the king's bread. He was not to be bribed by these things to hold his peace; but the nearer the ruin of the city was, the more confident was he of its destruction.

"Which shall take it": Or, "that it may take it"; being delivered into its hands by the Lord. Without whose permission the Chaldean army could never have taken it. Or "and he shall take it"; that is, the king of Babylon.

The king of Babylon whose army would take the city was Nebuchadnezzar.

Jeremiah 38:4 "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."

"Let this man be put to death" (compare 26:11 and see note there).

"He weakened the hands of the men of war": They charged that Jeremiah's urging to submit to Babylon (verse 2), undermined the defenders' moral and will. By proclaiming Babylon's victory, he was viewed as a traitor to Judah.

The princes marked Jeremiah a traitor because he told them to surrender to Babylon. They did not believe him to be a prophet. They wanted him killed for telling them the truth. They still wanted to fight for the city and they believed some who heard him might not be willing to fight. Some might believe this message might be from God.

Jeremiah 38:5 "Then Zedekiah the king said, Behold, he [is] in your hand: for the king [is] not [he that] can do [any] thing against you."

“The king [is] not [he that] can do [any] thing against you”: Palace women, taken over by Babylonians, heaped cutting ridicule on Zedekiah for listening to friends whose counsel failed him, who left him helpless as one with his feet stuck in mire.

It appears the princes had begun to take over the reins of tending the government. Zedekiah said "you handle this, it is out of my hands".

Jeremiah 38:6 "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."

“No water, but mire”: The murderous princes (compare verse 4), would let God’s spokesman die of thirst, hunger, hypothermia, or suffocation if he sank too deeply into the bottom of the cistern. (Compare Psalm 69:2, 14), a reference to Messiah.

Dungeon here means cistern. All of the houses had cisterns, so they would not run out of water in time of war. We remember, there was a drought in the land at this time, so there would not be any water. There would be just mud at the bottom. This was a deep cistern and Jeremiah had to be let down with ropes. When he got to the bottom, he sunk in the mud.

Verses 7-13: Ironically, it was a foreign officer in the court, an “Ethiopian” named “Ebed-melech”, who intervened on Jeremiah’s behalf and persuaded the king to rescue the prophet out of the cistern, or “dungeon”. (In 39:15-18), the Lord rewarded Ebed-melech with a promise to preserve his life because he had saved Jeremiah’s life.

Jeremiah 38:7 "Now when Ebed-melech 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;"

Or Cushite, as the Hebrew is. His country seems to be mentioned to let us know that this prophet of the Lord found more kindness from a stranger, who was a native heathen, than from his own countrymen.

"One of the eunuchs which was in the king’s house": That is, one of the court officers. It is probable that the princes had put Jeremiah into this miserable place privately, but by some means the report of what they had done providentially reached this officer’s ears.

"Heard that they had put Jeremiah in the dungeon": For though the princes did it with all possible secrecy, it was known at court, and came to the ears of this good man. And indeed the dungeon was not far from the court. Some have thought he might have heard the groans of Jeremiah in it. However, he came to the hearing of it, and was affected with the relation of his case, and determined to save him, if possible.

"The king then sitting in the gate of Benjamin": The same in which the prophet was taken (Jer. 37:13). Here he sat to hear and try causes, courts of the judiciary being held in gates of cities; or to receive petitions. Or rather it may be to consult about the present state of affairs, what was best to be done in defense of the city, and to annoy the besiegers. And it may be to have a view of the enemy's camp, and to charge out upon them. For that he was here in order to make his escape is not likely.

"Ebed-melech" means servant of a king. He was a black man (Ethiopian). It appears he had been working in the king's house, and heard about them putting Jeremiah in this cistern.

Jeremiah 38:8 "Ebed-melech went forth out of the king's house, and spake to the king, saying,"

"Ebed-melech's concern for the Lord and His prophet was duly rewarded at the time of Jerusalem's fall (38:16-18).

This is very unusual for a slave to speak to a king without being called.

Jeremiah 38:9 "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."

He addresses him as a courtier, with great reverence and submission, and yet with great boldness.

"These men have done evil in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet": Meaning the princes, who might be present, and whom he pointed at, and mentioned by name. Which showed great courage and faithfulness, as well as great zeal for, and attachment to the prophet. To charge after this manner persons of such great authority so publicly, and to the king, whom the king himself stood in fear of. He first brings a general charge against them that they had done wrong in everything they had done to the prophet. In their angry words to him; in smiting him, and putting him in prison in Jonathan's house. And particularly in their last instance of ill will to him.

"Whom they have cast into the dungeon": He does not say where, or describe the dungeon, because well known to the king, and what a miserable place it was. And tacitly suggests the cruelty and inhumanity of the princes.

"And he is like to die for hunger in the place where he is, for there is no more bread in the city": Or very little; as there was none to be had but with great difficulty, as Kimchi observes. And therefore though the king had ordered a piece of bread to be given him daily, as long as there was any in the city. Yet it being almost all consumed, and the prophet being out of sight, and so out of mind, and altogether disregarded, must be in perishing circumstances, and near death. And must inevitably perish, unless some immediate care be taken of him.

It appears the famine was widespread by this time. People had to eat whatever they could find. No one would go and put bread into the dungeon for Jeremiah when they did not have enough for themselves. This black slave has interceded with the king for Jeremiah's life. He was a brave

slave to say that the princes were evil for doing this to Jeremiah. Notice, he calls Jeremiah a prophet.

Jeremiah 38:10 "Then the king commanded Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, saying, Take from hence thirty men with thee, and take up Jeremiah the prophet out of the dungeon, before he die."

Being affected with the case of the prophet; and repenting of the leave he had given the princes to do with him as they pleased, he gave orders as follows.

"Saying, take from hence thirty men with thee": From the place where the king was, the gate of Benjamin. Where very probably at this time was a garrison of soldiers, thirty of which were ordered to be taken. Or these were to be taken out of the king's bodyguard, he had here with him. Josephus calls them thirty of the king's servants, such as were about the king's person, or belonged to his household. And so the Syriac version of (Jer. 38:11), says that Ebed-melech took with him men of the king's household. But why thirty of them, when three or four might be thought sufficient to take up a single man out of a dungeon? The true reason seems to be, that should the princes, whom the king might suspect, or any other, attempt to hinder this order being put in execution, there might be a sufficient force to assist, and repel those that might oppose it.

"And take up Jeremiah the prophet out of the dungeon before he die": The king speaks honorably of Jeremiah, giving him his title as a prophet, and expresses great concern for him. And orders them to hasten the taking him up, lest he should die before, which he suggests would give him great concern.

It would be quite a task to pull a mud-soaked man out of that cistern. He would be heavy and it would take many men for the task.

Zedekiah sends 30 men to pull Jeremiah out. He would probably be weak from his stay in the cistern. It would be like dead weight they would have to pull straight up.

Jeremiah 38:11 "So Ebed-melech 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."

The thirty men, as the king ordered. As soon as he had got the grant, he immediately set about the work, and lost no time to save the prophet's life.

"And went unto the house of the king under the treasury": From the gate of Benjamin he went to the king's palace, and to a particular place under the treasury. The Septuagint represent it as underground, a cellar under the wardrobe.

"And took thence old cast clouts, and old rotten rags": The Syriac version has it, such as cattle were wiped and cleaned with.

"And let them down by cords into the dungeon to Jeremiah": For it was so deep, that men could not reach to put them into the hands of the prophet. And, had they been thrown in, they might have been scattered about and be out of his reach, who stuck in the mire. Or they would have been in all likelihood greatly spattered with the mire.

"Clouts" is the same thing as rags. The rags seem to be the only things that Ebed-melech had access to, so he made ropes out of the old thrown-away rags.

Jeremiah 38:12 "And Ebed-melech the Ethiopian said unto Jeremiah, Put now [these] old cast clouts and rotten rags under thine armholes under the cords. And Jeremiah did so."

Being come to the dungeon, and at the mouth of it, he addressed him in a very humane and friendly manner, and directed him how to make use of the rags he let down for his ease and benefit.

"Put now these old cast clouts and rotten rags under thine arm holes under the cords": The cords were first put under his arm holes to draw him up with, and then these clouts and rags were put under the cords. Lest they should cut into his flesh and hurt him, giving him pain as the whole weight of his body was resting on them. And perhaps these parts had received some hurt when he was let down into the dungeon with cords, when they were not so careful of him. And therefore needed some soft rags the more to be put under them at this time. All which shows what an affection this man had for the prophet and how tender he was of him.

"And Jeremiah did so": He put the rags between the cords and his arm holes.

It seems as though they were tied and there were knots every little way. These tied places would help give a hold for Jeremiah. He was to put this home-made rope under his arm pits, because he had little strength to hold on to it.

Jeremiah 38:13 "So they drew up Jeremiah with cords, and took him up out of the dungeon: and Jeremiah remained in the court of the prison."

The men that were with Ebed-melech, as many as were necessary while he overlooked, directed and encouraged.

"And he took him out of the dungeon": Alive, according to the king's orders and design, and in spite of the prophet's enemies. The thing succeeded according to plan; the Lord ordering and prospering every step.

"And Jeremiah remained in the court of the prison": From whence he had been taken, and where he was placed again. Ebed-melech having no warrant to set him at entire liberty; nor would it have been prudent to have solicited that, which might too much have exasperated the princes. And besides, according to the king's order, bread was to be given him, as long as there was any in the city. So that it was the most fit and proper place for him to remain.

They were successful in getting him out of the cistern but they still did not release him. He was in minimum security but still locked up. The court of the prison was near the king's house.

Verses 14-23: "I will ask thee a thing": This is one of several queries as Zedekiah wanted to hear God's Word but rejected it. God's Word was surrender, and His answer for rejection was calamity for Jerusalem, capture of the king, and tragedy for his family plus others of the palace (for the fulfillment to Zedekiah, compare 39:4-8).

Jeremiah 38:14 "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."

When the prophet was taken out of the dungeon, and brought to the court of the prison, of which the king had knowledge, he sent some person or persons to bring him to him, to have a private conversation with him.

"Into the third entry that is in the house of the Lord": What place is meant Jarchi confesses his ignorance of, but conjectures it was the court of the Israelites. The outward court, and the court of the women, being before it. Kimchi rightly takes it to be a place through which they went from the king's house to the house of the Lord. No doubt the same that is called the king's ascent, by which he went up thither, shown to, and admired by, the queen of Sheba (1 Kings 10:5). In which there were three gates or entrances, as Dr. Lightfoot observes. The first, the gate of the foundation; the second, the gate behind the guard; and the third, the gate Coponius. And here the king and the prophet had their interview.

"And the king said to Jeremiah, I will ask thee a thing": Or "a word"; a word of prophecy. Or whether there was a word of prophecy from the Lord, concerning him, his people, and city, and what it was. And what would be the event of the present siege, whether it would issue well or ill.

"Hide nothing from me": Be it what it will, whether good or not. He had been told again and again how things would be; but still he was in hopes that something more favorable and consolatory would come from the Lord to him.

Even though Zedekiah publicly denied believing in the prophecy of Jeremiah, it appears he did believe privately. This was a place where Zedekiah would not be seen talking to Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 38:15 "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?"

Jeremiah had reason for caution with the king for his life, considering the easy answer of the king to the princes, moving for his death (Jer. 38:4-5). We must imagine Jeremiah at this time under no Divine command to reveal God's will in this case unto the king.

"Wilt thou not?" Is here as much as thou wilt not hearken unto me. Zedekiah had often been advised by the prophet, but would never take his advice. And the prophet knew it would be the same case still, that the king would be overruled by a corrupt court, and his own aversion, to change his state, as a king, for the state of a prisoner.

Jeremiah feels he has nothing to gain by telling the king of his fate. The king might kill him. The king had not listened to his prophecy before so why would he listen now?

Jeremiah 38:16 "So Zedekiah the king swore 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."

Zedekiah saith nothing to the latter part of Jeremiah's speech, promising nothing as to his hearing and obeying his counsel. As to the former, he gives him the security of his oath, that he would neither himself slay him, by giving any immediate command from himself, nor surrender him up into the hands of those malicious princes who he perceived sought his life. The form of his oath is what was usual.

"I will not put thee to death": Zedekiah says nothing to the prophet as to obeying his counsel, but he gives him the security of his oath that he would neither himself slay him. By giving an immediate command from himself for his being slain, nor surrender him up into the hands of those princes who, he perceived, sought his life.

Zedekiah promised Jeremiah he would protect him if he would tell him the prophecy. We remember that Zedekiah had turned most of the administration of his office over to the princes, so this had to be a private agreement.

Jeremiah 38:17 "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:"

Being thus indemnified and secured by the king's word and oath, he proceeds freely to lay before the king the whole matter as from the Lord.

"Thus saith the Lord, the God of hosts, the God of Israel": The prophet does not give the following advice in his own name, but in the name of the eternal Jehovah, the Lord of armies above and below. And who had a special regard to the people of Israel, and their welfare. And therefore it became the king to show the more regard to it.

"If thou wilt assuredly go forth unto the king of Babylon's princes": The generals of his army, whose names are mentioned (Jer. 39:3). The king not being with his army at this time, but at Riblah (Jer. 39:5). The meaning is, if he would open the gates of Jerusalem, and go forth from thence to the Chaldean army, and surrender himself and the city into the hands of the princes in it, and general officers of it.

"Then thy soul shall live": In thy body, and not be separated from it. Or live comfortably, in peace and safety, though not in so much splendor and glory as he had before.

"And this city shall not be burned with fire": As had been threatened; and as the Chaldeans would be provoked to do, should it hold out to the last extremity. But should preserve it upon a surrender.

"And thou shall live, and thine house": Not only himself, but his wives and children, and servants.

Jeremiah tells him one more time that the only way to live and save the city, is to surrender to the princes of Babylon. We must remember that this is a punishment from God for their unfaithfulness. If they do not surrender, they are rebelling against the punishment of God for their sin.

Jeremiah 38:18 "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."

And surrender to them.

"Then shall this city be given into the hands of the Chaldeans": If not willingly delivered up by the king of Judah, it shall be forcibly taken by the king of Babylon's army, through the permission of God. With respect to whom it is said to be given unto them, even by him who has the disposing of cities and kingdoms.

"And they shall burn it with fire": As it had been often foretold it should, and as it accordingly was (Jer. 39:8).

"And thou shalt not escape out of their hand": Though he might hope he should, and would attempt to do it, yet should be taken. And though he should not be slain, yet should never regain his liberty, or get out of their hands, when once in them (see Jer. 52:7).

One more time, he tells Zedekiah the consequences of not surrendering to Babylon.

Jeremiah 38:19 "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."

Zedekiah's fear of the treatment he would receive from the Judeans who had already "fallen to the Chaldeans" which kept him from following the prophet's advice. The consequences of not obeying God's Word are always worse than whatever keeps us from doing what the Lord commands (Matt. 10:28).

We see now the reason that Zedekiah did not want to surrender to the Chaldeans. He was not as afraid of the Babylonians as he was of the Jews. He had possibly been severe with some of them and feared reprisal.

Jeremiah 38:20 "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."

To take off the above excuse, or remove that objection, the prophet assures the king that the Chaldeans would never deliver him into the hands of the Jews. He might depend upon it, it would never be done.

"Obey, I beseech thee, the voice of the Lord, which I speak unto thee": The counsel he had given him, to surrender to the Chaldeans, was not from himself, but from the Lord. And though he had no express order to give it at that time, yet it was what was agreeable to the will of God, and what he had exhorted the people to in the beginning of this chapter. Therefore, since it came from the Lord, it ought to be attended to, so he might be assured of the divine protection should he act according to it.

"So it shall be well with thee, and thy soul shall live": That is, it would not only be much better with him than he feared, but than it would be with him should he obstinately stand out to the last. He should have more respect and honor from the king of Babylon. And not only have his life spared, but enjoy more of the comforts of life. Particularly the sight of his eyes, which he lost when he was taken.

Jeremiah appreciated Zedekiah saving his life and he wanted Zedekiah to surrender, so his life would be spared as well. He gives Zedekiah a promise that he will not be turned over to the Jews if he surrenders.

Jeremiah 38:21 "But if thou refuse to go forth, this [is] the word that the LORD hath showed me:"

Out of Jerusalem, to the Chaldean army, and submit to them.

"This is the word that the Lord hath showed me": Or the thing which should certainly come to pass. The word of prophecy the Lord had showed to the prophet, and which he now declares to the king. Who asked of him a word, was desirous to know whether there was a word from the Lord, and what it was. And this it is which follows, in case he continued impenitent, obstinate, and disobedient.

Jeremiah 38:22 "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."

"Thy friends have set thee on": Palace women, taken over by Babylonians, heaped cutting ridicule on Zedekiah for listening to friends whose counsel failed him, who left him helpless as one with his feet stuck in mire.

If Zedekiah continued to resist, the woman in the court would say that his “feet are sunk in the mire”. The same thing had happened to Jeremiah when the officials had thrown him into the cistern (38:6), but there would be no release for Zedekiah from his imprisonment.

The friends that Zedekiah had believed, convinced him not to surrender to Babylon. He had listened to them instead of Jeremiah. The women were concubines and women slaves in Zedekiah's house.

Jeremiah 38:23 "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."

Not the citizens of Jerusalem; but, as Kimchi observes, the Chaldeans that should enter the city shall bring them out to the Chaldeans without. Or it may be rendered impersonally, "they shall be brought out". Not only the ladies at court, that had waited on him and his queen, as before; but all his wives and concubines, and his children. Or his sons rather; for at the taking of the city. No mention is made of daughters, only of sons, who were slain before his eyes (Jer. 39:6).

"And thou shalt not escape out of their hand, but shalt be taken by the hand of the king of Babylon": Not by him personally, for he was not present at the taking of him, but by his army, who having taken him, brought him to him, and delivered him into his hand (Jer. 39:5).

"And thou shalt cause this city to be burnt with fire": Or, "thou shall burn this city with fire"; be the moral cause of it. Through his sin and obstinacy, impenitence and unbelief, the burning of the city might be laid to his charge. His sin was the cause of it; and it was as if he had burnt it with his own hands. All this is said to work upon him to hearken to the advice given. But all was in vain.

The wives and children are different from the women (in verse 22). Zedekiah had married several women and had children as well. There is an indication of the fact that he would be blinded, because of the statement. "taken by the hand of the king of Babylon". The cause of the fire would be Zedekiah's stubbornness not to surrender. He would not actually set the fire, but it would be his fault.

Jeremiah 38:24 "Then said Zedekiah unto Jeremiah, Let no man know of these words, and thou shalt not die."

Not a word signifying his approbation of the counsel given him, or that he intended to take it. His silence showed the reverse.

"Let no man know of these words": That had passed between them. Of the conference and conversation they had had together, at least not the particulars of it. The thing itself was known, as appears by what follows, that the king and prophet had been discoursing together. But what they talked of, he desires might be concealed, pretending the prophet's good, though it was his own honor and safety he sought.

"And thou shall not die": As he had promised he should not, and had sworn to it. But suggests by this, that if he disclosed the conversation, he should be set free from his word and oath. So that this carried something menacing in it. Or it may be rendered "that thou die not"; intimating, that if the princes should come to the knowledge of what he had said, of the advice he had given, they would surely put him to death. And therefore, for his own safety, he desires the whole may be kept a secret.

Zedekiah did not want the princes to know he had inquired of Jeremiah. Jeremiah's silence about their meetings would cause Zedekiah to protect Jeremiah from death.

Jeremiah 38:25 "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:"

It could hardly be imagined that Zedekiah should have this private discourse with Jeremiah, but some or other of his courtiers would take notice of it. But yet it argues that this king was in a miserable subjection to them, that he could discourse with nobody but they must come and inquire what he said.

Zedekiah was afraid of the princes. He did not want them to feel that he had any weakness. He was asking Jeremiah to promise he would not tell them the details of the meeting. If they came, Zedekiah wanted Jeremiah to cover up the facts for him.

Jeremiah 38:26 "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."

Here the king puts words into the prophet's mouth, what he should say to the princes, to put them off from inquiring further, and so keep the matter a secret.

"I presented my supplication before the king": Or "caused it to fall"; delivered it in a humble and submissive manner.

"That he would not cause me to return to Jonathan's house, to die there": This he had entreated of the king before (Jer. 37:20); and now, no doubt, renewed his request. Having this fair opportunity with the king alone to do it; or, however, it is highly probable he did it upon this hint of the king. This shows how much the king stood in fear of his princes in this time of his distress. And that he had only the name of a king, and had not courage and resolution enough to act of himself, according to the dictates of his mind. Yea, that he feared men more than he feared the Lord.

Zedekiah has an answer ready that he thinks will stop the princes inquiry. They were aware that Jeremiah did not want to go back into the dungeon of Jonathan's house. Zedekiah felt this would suffice them.

Jeremiah 38:27 "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."

“These words ... the king ... commanded”: Jeremiah did not fall into lying deception here. What he said was true though he did not divulge all details of the conversation, to which the princes had no right.

It appears from this that Jeremiah did exactly as the king had asked him to. The answer was accepted by the princes.

Jeremiah 38:28 "So Jeremiah abode in the court of the prison until the day that Jerusalem was taken: and he was [there] when Jerusalem was taken."

Where he was ordered to be by the king, before he was cast into the dungeon, and where he was released by Ebed-melech. And which was now confirmed by the king, and here he continued.

"Until the day that Jerusalem was taken": But how long it was from his conversation with the king, to the taking of the city, is not certain.

"And he was there when Jerusalem was taken": As appears from (Jer. 39:14). Kimchi connects this with the beginning of the next chapter. And so the Targum, rendering it, "and it came to pass when Jerusalem was taken." Namely, what is related in the following chapter.

God had promised Jeremiah that he would see the fall of Jerusalem. He did just that. He was in minimum security when the city fell to the Babylonians. Jeremiah lived to see his prophecy fulfilled.

Jeremiah Chapter 38 Questions

1. Who were the people mentioned in verse 1?
2. How did they feel about Zedekiah taking Jeremiah out of the dungeon, and letting him speak?
3. What did Jeremiah prophesy would happen to those who remained in the city?
4. How could they have saved their lives?
5. What will happen to this city?
6. Who was the king of Babylon at this time?
7. What did the princes want to happen to Jeremiah?

8. What excuse did they give for wanting Jeremiah punished this way?
9. Why did Zedekiah turn Jeremiah over to the princes?
10. What did they do to Jeremiah?
11. What does dungeon in verse 6 mean?
12. How did they get him in the cistern?
13. Who came to the king's house to speak in Jeremiah's behalf?
14. What nationality was he?
15. What does "Ebed-melech" mean?
16. What report did he give the king?
17. What did the king command him to do?
18. How much help did he give him to do this?
19. What did they use for ropes?
20. Why did Zedekiah meet privately with Jeremiah?
21. What did Jeremiah make Zedekiah promise, before he prophesied to him here?
22. What did Jeremiah tell Zedekiah?
23. Who was Zedekiah afraid of?
24. How could Zedekiah live?
25. Who had deceived Zedekiah into believing a lie?
26. Who were the women in verse 22?
27. What indicates the blinding of Zedekiah in verse 23?
28. What must Jeremiah promise for Zedekiah to keep him from death?
29. What was Jeremiah to say to the princes?
30. Where did Jeremiah live until Jerusalem was taken?