Jeremiah Falsely Accused
Jeremiah 37:1-21

Introduction

In the next two chapters Jeremiah the prophet will be falsely accused of desertion (chapter 37) and dissension (chapter 38). Chapter 37 begins with a request for prayer from King Zedekiah; who replaced Jehoiachin (36:30).

The section follows the events from chapter 34

The Word Of God Rejected By King And People (vv.1-10)

Jeremiah 37:1–21 (NKJV)

1Now King Zedekiah the son of Josiah reigned instead of Coniah the son of Jehoiakim, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon made king in the land of Judah.

Coniah is the abbreviated form of Jehoiachin (see 22:24,28). Nebuchadnezzar appointed Zedekiah the king over Judah. Coniah was removed after three brief months of rule. Zedekiah the son of Josia was brother to Jehoiakim.

2But neither he nor his servants nor the people of the land gave heed to the words of the Lord which He spoke by the prophet Jeremiah.

Zedekiah would flirt with the Word of God.

In the last chapter we learned about the inspiration and preservation of God’s Word. With the new King came a sad and tragic fact; the new administration continued to ignore God’s Word.

What are some of the sad consequences when people ignore God’s Word?

For King Zedekiah and his servants and the people it means in part--no answer to prayer. The King will plead with Jeremiah to ask God to deliver them from the advancing armies of Babylon. Disobedience to God’s Word will also instill a false and futile hope in the armies and governments and resources of foreign powers--in the case of Judah--they will look to the government of Egypt to be their deliverer. In the end--God’s judgment would exact a devastating toll--Jerusalem will fall.

Think about that for just a moment--ignore the Word of God--and prayers are hindered--people are given false hope and embrace deception--judgment is inevitable.
3And Zedekiah the king sent Jehucal the son of Shelemiah, and Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah, the priest, to the prophet Jeremiah, saying, “Pray now to the Lord our God for us.”

The name Jehucal means “the Lord is able”. He appears again in chapter 38:1-6 (Jucal); urging that Jeremiah be executed for treason. Zephaniah is not listed in chapter 38:1 calling for Jeremiah’s execution. Remember Jeremiah has been given explicit instructions not to pray for this people.

The King has asked you to pray Jeremiah.

Perhaps your unbelieving family and friends ask you to pray for them. But for the unbeliever it rarely occurs to them that there are things that can hinder prayer. Unconfessed sin (Ps. 66:18); insincerity (Matt. 6:5); carnal motives (James 4:3) or unbelief (James 1:5-6).

We are given example after example of those who refuse to submit to biblical teaching they can expect no answer to prayer.

“One who turns away his ear from hearing the law, Even his prayer is an abomination” (Prov. 28:9). Proverbs 1:24-30 “Because I have called and you refused, I have stretched out my hand and not one regarded, Because you disdained all my counsel, And would have none of my rebuke, I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your terror comes, When your terror comes like a storm, And your destruction comes like a whirlwind, When distress and anguish come upon you. They they will call on me, but I will not answer; They will seek me diligently, but they will not find me. Because they hated knowledge And did not choose the fear of the Lord, They would have none of my counsel And despised my every rebuke”.

4Now Jeremiah was coming and going among the people, for they had not yet put him in prison.

This was at a time when Jeremiah had free reign to travel in the city (see LXX).

5Then Pharaoh’s army came up from Egypt; and when the Chaldeans who were besieging Jerusalem heard news of them, they departed from Jerusalem.

At this time in history Hophra (588-569 B.C.) rules Egypt. When Hophra assumed the throne of Egypt he attempted to reverse the Babylonian encroachment in the levant (the land bridge linking Egypt with Assyria). He sent troops to relieve the siege against Jerusalem. It would appear that Nebuchadrezzar lifted the siege temporarily --we are not privy to the details; but the Egyptians apparently retreated and the Chaldeans resumed the siege and would eventually capture and burn the city.
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6 Then the word of the Lord came to the prophet Jeremiah, saying,
7 “Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘Thus you shall say to the king of Judah, who sent you to Me to inquire of Me: “Behold, Pharaoh’s army which has come up to help you will return to Egypt, to their own land.

8 And the Chaldeans shall come back and fight against this city, and take it and burn it with fire.”

9 Thus says the Lord: ‘Do not deceive yourselves, saying, “The Chaldeans will surely depart from us,” for they will not depart.

The brief retreat by the Babylonian armies filled the people with hope--a false hope. Maybe Jeremiah’s prophecy wasn’t true after all!

The leaders of Jerusalem and Judah did not want to believe the Word of the Lord and the prophecies of Jeremiah. The leaders wanted to believe the prophecies of Jeremiah were discredited! The people apart from faith and apart from Christ are the ones who have to worry about deception!

Let’s ask the question-- “Who is really running from the truth?” Those who believe the Bible or those tho reject the Bible? Those who believe prophecy or those who reject prophecy?

The Bible does not ignore the problem of sin or suffering or its solution. The Bible tells us the truth about God and our sinful condition and Jesus Christ.

Jeremiah was the one who saw clearly what would happen to Jerusalem. The Bible sees clearly what will happen to you and to me.

James Russell Lowell put it this way;

Once to every man and nation
Comes the moment to decide
In the strife of Truth with Falsehood
For the good or evil side
Then it is the brave man chooses
While the coward turns aside.

10 For though you had defeated the whole army of the Chaldeans who fight against you, and there remained only wounded men among them, they would rise up, every man in his tent, and burn the city with fire.’”
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The Lord impresses upon them the absolute certainty of the judgment. What if there is an amazing victory and the whole army of the Chaldeans seems overwhelmed; God will take a few wounded men and use them to burn the city with fire.

Judgment delayed--is not judgment cancelled or withdrawn.

A Picture Of Persecution: The Arrest And Imprisonment Of Jeremiah (vv.11-16)

11And it happened, when the army of the Chaldeans left the siege of Jerusalem for fear of Pharaoh’s army,  
12that Jeremiah went out of Jerusalem to go into the land of Benjamin to claim his property there among the people.

When the siege lifted Jeremiah used the opportunity to return to Anathoth to claim his property.

13And when he was in the Gate of Benjamin, a captain of the guard was there whose name was Irijah the son of Shelemiah, the son of Hananiah; and he seized Jeremiah the prophet, saying, “You are defecting to the Chaldeans!”

The Benjamin Gate was located at the North Wall of the city--that lead to the road to the territory of Benjamin.

A guard grabs Jeremiah and accuses the prophet of desertion. The name Irijah means “the Lord sees or provides”.

14Then Jeremiah said, “False! I am not defecting to the Chaldeans.” But he did not listen to him. So Irijah seized Jeremiah and brought him to the princes.

When you are the one who lays down his life for his country--it hurts to be called a traitor.

Pause for a moment and think--who in all Judea and Jerusalem was more loyal to the Jewish people and to Judah and Jerusalem? What king or prince or soldier was more loyal than Jeremiah? Jeremiah came so the people could hear from God! Jeremiah brought light in a dark circumstance

15Therefore the princes were angry with Jeremiah, and they struck him and put him in prison in the house of Jonathan the scribe. For they had made that the prison.
The leaders beat Jeremiah and throw him into a make-shift prison.

16When Jeremiah entered the dungeon and the cells, and Jeremiah had remained there many days,

The expression “entered the dungeon and the cells” is el beth habor wel hachanuyoth--entered the dungeon and into the stalls or vaults--the dungeon is the house of the pit--and is the same word that is used to describe the cistern in 38:6; the second--from a root word meaning to incline--a tradesman stall--with curved posts or crooked bars--it implies that Jeremiah was always forced to sit or lie in cramped position.

The Secret Meeting: Jeremiah’s Prophecy (vv.17-21)

17then Zedekiah the king sent and took him out. The king asked him secretly in his house, and said, “Is there any word from the Lord?” And Jeremiah said, “There is.” Then he said, “You shall be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon!”

Jeremiah’s prophecy includes a warning. Zedekiah would soon be handed over to the king of Babylon.

Andrew Blackwood points out some similarities between Zedekiah and Jeremiah and Pilate’s encounter with Jesus. He writes; “In each case the prisoner was the free man; the ruler had the outward paraphernalia of majesty and power but he was chained by fear. King Zedekiah was trapped by the policies of his pro-Egyptian princes. He had followed their advice, and his kingdom was on the brink of total destruction. Secretly, he summoned the prophet from the dungeon and asked if there were any word from the Lord. Jeremiah responded, without the fierce imagery of verse 10, the Chaldean victory was certain. He added that the false prophets had been proven wrong, and the sad events had proved Jeremiah right. So he made a personal plea not to be returned to the dungeon. Zedekiah asserted his manhood at least enough to transfer Jeremiah to a place of easier confinement” (see p. 257; Commentary On Jeremiah).

18Moreover Jeremiah said to King Zedekiah, “What offense have I committed against you, against your servants, or against this people, that you have put me in prison?

19Where now are your prophets who prophesied to you, saying, ‘The king of Babylon will not come against you or against this land?’

Jeremiah asks the King why he refuses to hold the false prophets accountable for their false prophecies.
The false prophets spoke without divine revelation or authority. The false prophets promised peace when war was imminent and inevitable. The false prophets predicted no evil (or trouble) when judgment was at hand. The false prophets represented themselves as divinely appointed messengers of God when they were in fact self-appointed. The false prophets covered up their lies under the pretext of having visions in their dreams.

20 Therefore please hear now, O my lord the king. Please, let my petition be accepted before you, and do not make me return to the house of Jonathan the scribe, lest I die there.”

21 Then Zedekiah the king commanded that they should commit Jeremiah to the court of the prison, and that they should give him daily a piece of bread from the bakers’ street, until all the bread in the city was gone. Thus Jeremiah remained in the court of the prison.

Zedekiah places Jeremiah in a minimum security facility with a daily ration of bread.

We might think of Zedekiah’s act as an act of kindness. He was willing to spare the prophet’s life but was unwilling to spare his own people. He was a slave to the bad advice of his closest counselors.

Conclusion