

ZEDKIAH'S FINAL MEETING

(Jer 38:1-28) 02/27/19

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I. CONTEXT

- A. *Chapters 37-39 are prophecies from the reign of Zedekiah, dealing with events and messages during the siege and capture of Jerusalem* (Feinberg)
- B. *The events recorded in this chapter [38] took place near the end of the siege of Jerusalem. As tensions mounted in Judah, the anti-Babylonian group at court wanted to do away with their chief opponent, Jeremiah.* (Feinberg)
- C. *In chapter 37 we have the captivity of the prophet, in chapter 39 that of Zedekiah.* (Feinberg).

II. OFFICIALS APPREHENDED JEREMIAH (1-6)

- A. Officers Heard Jeremiah (1) - Most likely these were the leading officials of a larger group. Gedaliah may have been the son of Pashhur who had Jeremiah beaten and put in stocks (Jer 20:2, 6). Jucal (Jehucal) was mentioned in Jer 37:3.
- B. Leave Jerusalem or Die (2) - They thought Jeremiah was a traitor and that his prophecies were treasonous.
- C. Jerusalem Will Be Captured (3) - Jeremiah was more loyal than they could comprehend, giving them prophecies (“**thus says the Lord**”) that would save their lives.
- D. Officials Wanted Jeremiah Put to Death (4) - Instead of concerning themselves with the Lord’s prophecies, the officials thought Jeremiah was **discouraging** (lit. “weakening the hands”) **the men of war** and seeking their **harm**. *They called for his death. Politicians are often obtuse to spiritual issues, and Judah’s leaders never saw that the Exile was Gods way of using the Babylonians to purge the nation of idolatry* (Feinberg).
- E. Zedekiah Handed Him Over to Officials (5) - In his own situation, Zedekiah was to “weak in the hands” to withstand the plan of the officials.
- F. Jeremiah Cast into Cistern (6) - So, they took Jeremiah out of the **court of the guardhouse** and put Jeremiah in a cistern. It was owned by **Malchijah the king's son**, most likely a prince. The cistern did not have water in it, but it did have mud in which Jeremiah sank. *The majority of water cisterns are plaster-lined, although unlined cisterns dug into impermeable rock have also been discovered in the central hill-country of early Israel* (Biblical Archaeology Library).

III. EBED INTERVENES FOR JEREMIAH (7-13)

- A. Ebed-melech Overheard Officials (7) - **Ebed-melech** was an Ethiopian eunuch in the **king’s palace**. Eunuchs (*saris*) were court officials who at times guarded the royal harem and were able to enter the king’s presence. He had heard about Jeremiah’s persecution.
- B. Ebed-melech Spoke to King (8-9) - Ebed-melech reported the actions of the **wicked** officials to the king. The sad reality was that Jeremiah would probably **die** from the conditions of the damp cistern and lack of **bread**. This foreigner cared more for God’s prophet than did his own people. As a result of Ebed-melech’s boldness, the Lord delivered his life in Jer 39:15-18.
- C. King Commanded Jeremiah’s Release (10-11) - The king was influenced by Ebed to release Jeremiah from the cistern. Ebed took thirty men to rescue him.
- D. Jeremiah Hoisted Out of Cistern (12-13) - Ebed had both compassion and wisdom when he took old **clothes and rags** to put under the armpits of the prophet. The clothes and rags would give cushioning under Jeremiah’s arms when they pulled him out of the cistern with **ropes**. Jeremiah was placed again in the court of the guardhouse.

IV. ZEDEKIAH’S SUMMONS JEREMIAH (14-23)

- A. Zedekiah Questioned Jeremiah (14) - Zedekiah called once more for Jeremiah. It would be the king’s final meeting with Jeremiah. Perhaps Zedekiah was inquiring to see if the Lord had changed His mind.
- B. Jeremiah Questioned Zedekiah’s Motives (15) - Jeremiah was no coward, but he did doubt the king’s true motives. Jeremiah stated that if he told the king the truth that the king would have him **put to death**. Jeremiah also questioned the motives of the king because the king had **not listened** to Jeremiah’s **advice**.
- C. Zedekiah Promised Not to Put Jeremiah to Death (16) - The king promised not to put Jeremiah to death. In fact, Zedekiah swore by the living Lord to keep his promise. The king also promised to protect Jeremiah from the hostile officials who were **seeking his life**. It is difficult to imagine the king boldly carrying out his promise when he had to make it in **secret**.

- D. Surrender/ Live, Resist/Burn (17-18) - Jeremiah told Zedekiah the same message that he had been telling him all along. Those who surrender to Nebuchadnezzar would be spared, but those who stayed in the city and resisted would die. In addition, Jerusalem would be burned.
1. 597 B.C. - At the very beginning of Zedekiah's reign (Jer 24:1, 8-10).
 2. 594-593 B.C. - In the fourth year ("beginning") of Zedekiah's reign (Jer 27:1, 12-15).
 3. 588-587 B.C. - In the ninth year of Zedekiah's reign (Jer 21:3-10).
 4. 587 B.C. - In the tenth year of Zedekiah's reign, beginning of the siege (Jer 32:1-5).
 5. 587-586 B.C. - In the last years of Zedekiah's reign (Jer 37:7-10, 17).
 6. 586 B.C. - In the last year of Zedekiah's reign (Jer 34:1-5).
 7. 586 B.C. - In the last year of Zedekiah's reign and last meeting with Jeremiah (Jer 38:17-18).
- E. Zedekiah Fearful of Deserters (19) - Zedekiah confided that he feared the deserters perhaps more than the Chaldeans. He feared that the Chaldeans would give him over to the Jewish deserters. Their animosity was against Zedekiah for not listening to the Lord to submit to Nebuchadnezzar.
- F. Obey the Lord and Don't Fear (20) - Jeremiah comforted Zedekiah in that he would not be given over to the deserters. But he admonished Zedekiah to obey the Lord and submit to Nebuchadnezzar so that he would live.
- G. If You Refuse You Will Be Rebuked (21-22) - Zedekiah should have been concerned about was obeying the Lord. Otherwise, Zedekiah would be lambasted by the **palace women**. Zedekiah would be rebuked for listening to disobedient officials and false prophets. Similar to Jeremiah, Zedekiah would be stuck in the **mire** (figuratively) with no escape or friends to help him.
- H. If You Refuse Your Family Will Be Taken (23) - If Zedekiah refused to listen to the Lord, then his **wives and sons** would be taken. Zedekiah himself would not escape his captors. In addition, Jerusalem would be burned. Chapter 39 will be the fulfillment of the words of this prophecy.
- V. IMPRISONMENT UNTIL FALL OF JERUSALEM (24-28)
- A. Zedekiah Said Tell No One (24) - Zedekiah still persisted in disobedience and asked Jeremiah not to reveal the words of his prophecy to the officials.
- B. Do Not Tell Officials (25-26) - If the officials asked Jeremiah, he was to tell them he requested not to go back to the house of Jonathan to die in that cell.
- C. Officials Questioned with Jeremiah (27) - Jeremiah was questioned by the officials and told them only about his request and nothing more (cf. Jer 37:15-16, 20). Jeremiah did not lie but divulged only what was permitted and appropriate.
1. *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 (MSB).*
 2. *We must be extremely reluctant to fault a true prophet of God like Jeremiah—a man of courage, brotherly love, patriotism, tremendous spiritual stature, and unparalleled devotion. In his defense the following facts need to be considered. 1. The precarious position of the king must be taken into account. 2. To allay suspicion was as much in the king's interest as in his own. 3. Jeremiah's answer was not a falsehood because the petition was implied in vv.15-16 (so Laetsch). 4. At this critical time, the king did not want to occasion a break between himself and his generals (so Payne Smith). 5. Actually, the officials had no authority to question either the king or the prophet. 6. The officials wanted to use the information for evil purposes. 7. Jeremiah told only what was necessary and no more. 8. It was his way of bolstering Zedekiah's battered morale [so Cunliffe-Jones] (Feinberg).*
- D. Jeremiah Stayed in Guardhouse (28) - Jeremiah remained in the **court of the guardhouse** until Jerusalem was **captured** by the Babylonians

VI. OBSERVATIONS AND APPLICATIONS

- A. Don't Fear Men and Obey the Lord (Jer 38:18-20) -
1. Zedekiah was more fearful of men than the Lord (Pro 29:25). He should have been fearful of the Lord.
 2. Zedekiah would be blamed for following the disobedient officials and false prophets.
 3. Following false prophets does bring consequences.
 - a. Beware of false prophets (Mat 7:15)
 - b. False prophets are a sign of the end times (Mat 24:24)
 - c. False Prophets bring destruction upon themselves and their listeners (2Pe 2:1).
- B. Cannot see the Lord's Will with Spiritual Blindness
1. Whether its politics, popular opinion, or Christian churches, without a relationship with the Lord and spiritual discernment there will be spiritual blindness.
 2. Spiritual blindness prevents anyone from seeing and following the Lord's will.
- C. Surrender/ Live or Resist/Burn (17-18) -

1. The truth of God's judgment is never pleasant, especially to those who will experience it.
 2. Surrender/Live or Resist/Burn is a gospel message. If we surrender and trust Christ as our Lord and Savior, we will have eternal life. But those who resist and reject the Lord's salvation will burn (Rev 20:15).
 3. We must have the truthfulness, boldness, care, and concern like Jeremiah to share the truth of the gospel.
- D. No time to be weak
1. Believers cannot be weak like Zedekiah in spiritual matters.
 2. It is time to be like Ebed-melech and care about God's Word and God's servants who preach the word. It is time to speak the truth in love (Eph 4:15).