

JEREMIAH 37

JEREMIAH IS ARRESTED

In this chapter, we have yet another example of the faithfulness of the Lord's words to all generations. From chapter 34, we will recall how the city of Jerusalem was delirious with joy after the release of all their Hebrew servants. The Babylonian army had lifted the siege and withdrawn their forces to deal with Egypt, with whom the Jews had entered into an alliance. They confidently counted on the belief that Pharaoh would prove more than a match for Nebuchadnezzar's army, and that they would never see their enemies again.

But the prophet never changed his tune – especially when the people returned to their lifestyle of disobedience to the Lord, and forced their Hebrew servants to come back to them. When they went back on their solemn covenant with the Lord, and caused their own brothers and sisters to return to a state of bondage – this only revealed the real state of their rebellious hearts. And the faithful prophet of God would not flatter them in their sins. So when King Zedekiah sent another deputation to Jeremiah, beseeching him to inquire of the Lord on the people's behalf, he received a terrible reply. God's prophet had such a clear vision of the outcome of the conflict between Babylon and Egypt, that he could not buoy up his people with false hopes of deliverance. The Babylonians withdrew, but only to defeat the Egyptians and then return. And although Zedekiah asked Jeremiah to pray to God for the people, neither he nor the people had the slightest inclination to take the prophet's advice. Over and over again, he had told them that the only way to escape out of this mess with their lives was to willingly surrender to the Babylonians; but they would not bring themselves to do this, and so the consequences of their own folly came upon them.

When Zedekiah sent Jeremiah a request for his prayers, he might have used this opportunity to ingratiate himself into the favor of the king and the princes – with whom he had often been at odds for the last four decades! He might have kept back the truth, and spoken smooth things to please these wicked men; but he dared not utter any other word than that which Jehovah had put into his mouth. Fearlessly and faithfully, he declared the message with which he was entrusted, and did not tone down the Lord's words – no matter what the consequences might be. Don't we need such preachers in our own day? It is very greatly to be feared that our times are becoming soft, weak, and lazy. And where are the preachers who warn us of the consequences? Where are the prophets of sorrow, who weep over our national sins? Where are the sons of thunder, who seek to awaken us from our guilty sleep? Both the pulpit and the press in our

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ In response to King Zedekiah's request for prayer, Jeremiah predicts that the Babylonians would return and complete the siege of Jerusalem – verses 1-10
- ❖ Jeremiah is arrested under the false charges of being a deserter – verses 11-15
- ❖ The secret interview that King Zedekiah had with the prophet – verses 16-21

days are far too tame in denouncing sin, and far too timid in standing up for the truth! O for a Jeremiah, a John the Baptizer, an Apostle Paul, a Martin Luther, or a John Knox to lift up their voices against the crying sins of our nation – against intemperance, against the government’s condoning of the worst of vices, and against skepticism and ungodliness in every form – and to present the Gospel of Jesus Christ as our country’s only remedy. But alas! Such faithful shepherds and leaders are few and far between.

Sad and sorrowful, Jeremiah took advantage of the temporary absence of the Babylonians to leave town. He headed for the Benjamin-gate, or the north gate of Jerusalem. But Irijah, the commander of the watch, recognized the prophet and arrested him under the charges of turning traitor and defecting to the Babylonians. This charge was absurd in its very essence, for the Babylonians had left the area to deal with the Egyptians! Nevertheless, since Jeremiah had said that those who gave themselves up to them would live (chapter 21:9), Irijah pretended to believe that such was Jeremiah’s intention. The prophet denied the false charges and cried out, “It is false!” But Irijah brought his prisoner before the princes anyway, who smote him and then threw him in prison in the house of Jonathan the scribe. That man’s house had been turned into a prison because there were dark vaults and cells underneath it. In this dreary dungeon, the noble-minded patriot was cast; and there he remained for many days. Sadly, it has been the lot of many of God’s faithful servants to suffer in dungeons for Jesus’ sake. But the days of tyranny and oppression are numbered! Every person or organization – whether political or religious – that attempts to crush the liberty of the Lord’s people shall one day be crushed itself!



Zedekiah had ignored the messages that the Lord’s prophet had spoken to him, but was he truly satisfied in his sense of carnal security? No indeed! On the contrary, he was restless and full of fear. So he sent for Jeremiah, in order to have a secret personal interview with him in his own palace. Here again, we have an example of where Jeremiah *could* have used this opportunity to tickle the king’s ears and gain his favor. But he did not. He would only speak the words that his Lord gave him permission to utter, even though they were words of judgment upon the king’s rebellious folly. However, the prophet did appeal to his innocence, and begged the king to not send him back to the subterranean cell in the house of Jonathan, for fear that he might die there. And so the king put him into the court of the royal prison instead, where a loaf of bread was given to him daily, until bread could no longer be found in the city. In the meantime, the army of the Babylonians had defeated Pharaoh; and now they had returned to Jerusalem – just as Jeremiah had said they would do.

Lord, we praise You that You do behold the afflictions of Your persecuted and faithful servants, and that You will not let them pass unrequited forever. Amen.