

# CHAPTER 37

This chapter brings us very near the destruction of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans, for the story of it lies in the latter end of Zedekiah's reign; we have in it,

- I.** A general idea of the bad character of that reign (v. 1, 2).
- II.** The message which Zedekiah, notwithstanding, sent to Jeremiah to desire his prayers (v. 3).
- III.** The flattering hopes which the people had conceived, that the Chaldeans would quit the siege of Jerusalem (v. 5).
- IV.** The assurance God gave them by Jeremiah (who was now at liberty, v. 4) that the Chaldean army should renew the siege and take the city (v. 6-10).
- V.** The imprisonment of Jeremiah, under pretence that he was a deserter (v. 11-15).
- VI.** The kindness which Zedekiah showed him when he was a prisoner (v. 16-21).

## 250 JEREMIAH 37:1-10

### SIEGE OF JERUSALEM

Here is,

**1.** Jeremiah's preaching slighted, v. 1, 2. Zedekiah succeeded Coniah, or Jeconiah, and, though he saw in his predecessor the fatal consequences of contemning the word of God, yet he did not take warning, nor give any more regard to it than others had done before him. *Neither he, nor his courtiers, nor the people of the land, hearkened unto the words of the Lord,* though they already began to be fulfilled. Note, Those have hearts wretchedly hard indeed that see God's judgments on others, and feel them on themselves, and yet will not be humbled and brought to heed what he says. These had proof sufficient that it was the Lord who spoke by Jeremiah the prophet, and yet they would not hearken to him.

**2.** Jeremiah's prayers desired. Zedekiah sent messengers to him, saying, *Pray now unto the Lord our God for us.* He did so before (<sup>3211</sup>Jeremiah 21:1, 2), and one of the messengers, Zephaniah, is the same there and here. Zedekiah is to be commended for his, and it shows that he had some good in him, some sense of his need of God's favour and of his own unworthiness to ask it for himself, and some value for good people and good ministers, who had an interest in Heaven. Note, When we are in distress we ought to desire the prayers of our ministers and Christian friends, for thereby we put an honour upon prayer, and an esteem upon our brethren. Kings themselves should look upon their praying people as the strength of the nation, (<sup>3315</sup>Zechariah 12:5, 10). And yet this does but help to condemn Zedekiah out of his own mouth. If indeed he looked upon Jeremiah as a prophet, whose prayers might avail much both for him and his people, why did he not then believe him, and *hearken to the words of the Lord* which he spoke by him? He desired his good prayers, but would not take his good counsel, nor be ruled by him, though he spoke in God's name, and it appears by this that Zedekiah knew he did. Note, It is common for those to desire to be prayed for who will not be advised; but herein they put a cheat upon themselves, for how can we expect that God should hear others speaking to him for us if we will not hear them speaking to us from him and for him? Many who despise prayer when they are in prosperity will be glad of it when they are in adversity. Now *give us of your oil.* When Zedekiah sent to the prophet to pray for him, he had better have sent for the prophet to pray with him; but he thought that below him: and how can those expect the comforts of religion who will not stoop to the services of it?

**3.** Jerusalem flattered by the retreat of the Chaldean army from it. Jeremiah was now at liberty (v. 4); he *went in and out among the people*, might freely speak to them and be spoken to by them. Jerusalem also, for the present, was at liberty, v. 5 Zedekiah, though a tributary to the king of Babylon, had entered into a private league with Pharaoh king of Egypt (<sup>3375</sup>Ezekiel 17:15), pursuant to which, when the king of Babylon came to chastise him for his treachery, the king of Egypt, though he came no more in person after that great defeat which Nebuchadnezzar gave him in the reign of Jehoiakim (<sup>12415</sup>2 Kings 24:7), yet sent some forces to relieve Jerusalem when it was besieged, upon notice of the approach of which the Chaldeans raised the siege, probably not for fear of them but in policy, to fight them at a distance, before any of the Jewish forces could join them.

From this they encouraged themselves to hope that Jerusalem was delivered for good and all out of the hands of its enemies and that the storm was quite blown over. Note, Sinners are commonly hardened in their security by the intermissions of judgments and the slow proceedings of them; and those who will not be awakened by the word of God may justly be lulled asleep by the providence of God.

**4.** Jerusalem threatened with the return of the Chaldean army and with ruin by it. Zedekiah sent to Jeremiah to desire him to pray for them, that the Chaldean army might not return; but Jeremiah sends him word back that the decree had gone forth, and that it was but a folly for them to expect peace, for God had begun a controversy with them, which he would make an end of: *Thus saith the Lord, Deceive not yourselves*, v. 9. Note, Satan himself, though he is the great deceiver, could not deceive us if we did not deceive ourselves; and thus sinners are their own destroyers by being their own deceivers, of which this is an aggravation that they are so frequently warned of it and cautioned not to deceive themselves, and they have the word of God, the great design of which is to undeceive them. Jeremiah uses no dark metaphors, but tells them plainly,

**(1.)** That the Egyptians shall retreat, and either give back or be forced back, into *their own land* (<sup><357></sup>Ezekiel 17:17), which was said of old (<sup><300></sup>Isaiah 30:7), and is here said again, v. 7. The Egyptians shall help in vain; they shall not dare to face the Chaldean army, but shall retire with precipitation. Note, If God help us not, no creature can. As no power can prevail against God, so none can avail without God nor countervail his departures from us.

**(2.)** That the Chaldeans shall return, and shall renew the siege and prosecute it with more vigour than ever: *They shall not depart* for good and all (v. 9); *they shall come again* (v. 8); they shall *fight against the city*. Note, God has the sovereign command of all the hosts of men, even of those that know him not, that own him not, and they are all made to serve his purposes. He directs their marches, their counter-marches, their retreats, their returns, as it pleases him; and furious armies, like *stormy winds*, in all their motions are *fulfilling his word*.

**(3.)** That Jerusalem shall certainly be delivered into the hand of the Chaldeans: *They shall take it, and burn it with fire*, v. 8. The sentence passed upon it shall be executed, and they shall be the executioners. “O but” (say they) “the Chaldeans have withdrawn; they have quitted the

enterprise as impracticable.” “And though they have,” says the prophet, “nay, *though you had smitten* their army, so that many were slain and all the rest wounded, yet those *wounded men should rise up and burn this city*,” v. 10. This is designed to denote that the doom passed upon Jerusalem is irrevocable, and its destruction inevitable; it must be laid in ruins, and these Chaldeans are the men that must destroy it, and it is now in vain to think of evading the stroke or contending with it. Note, Whatever instruments God has determined to make use of in any service for him, whether of mercy or judgment, they shall accomplish that for which they are designed, whatever incapacity or disability they may lie under or be reduced to. Those by whom God has resolved to save or to destroy, saviours they shall be and destroyers they shall be, yea, though there were all wounded; for as when God has work to do he will not want instruments to do it with, though they may seem far to seek, so when he has chosen his instruments they shall do the work, though they may seem very unlikely to accomplish it.

## JEREMIAH 37:11-21

### JEREMIAH IMPRISONED

We have here a further account concerning Jeremiah, who relates more passages concerning himself than any other of the prophets; for the histories of the lives and sufferings of God's ministers have been very serviceable to the church, as well as their preaching and writing.

**I.** We are here told that Jeremiah, when he had an opportunity for it, attempted to retire out of Jerusalem into the country (v. 11, 12): *When the Chaldeans had broken up from Jerusalem because of Pharaoh's army*, upon the notice of their advancing towards them, Jeremiah determined *to go into the country*, and (as the margin reads it) *to slip away from Jerusalem in the midst of the people*, who, in that interval of the siege, went out into the country to look after their affairs there. He endeavoured to steal away in the crowd; for, though he was a man of great eminence, he could well reconcile himself to obscurity, though he was one of a thousand, he was content to be lost in the multitude and buried alive in a corner, in a cottage. Whether he designed for Anathoth or no does not appear; his concerns might call him thither, but his neighbours there were

such as (unless they had mended since <sup>2412</sup>Jeremiah 11:21) might discourage him from coming among them; or he might intend to hide himself somewhere where he was not known, and fulfil his own wish (<sup>2402</sup>Jeremiah 9:2), *Oh that I had in the wilderness a lodging-place!* Jeremiah found he could do no good in Jerusalem; he laboured in vain among them, and therefore determined to leave them. Note, there are times when it is the wisdom of good men to retire into privacy, to *enter into the chamber and shut the doors about them*, <sup>2350</sup>Isaiah 26:20.

**II.** That in this attempt he was seized as a deserter and committed to prison (v. 13-15): *He was in the gate of Benjamin*, so far he had gained his point, when a *captain of the ward*, who probably had the charge of that gate, discovered him and *took him* into custody. he was the grandson of Hananiah, who, the Jews say, was Hananiah the false prophet, who contested with Jeremiah (<sup>2380</sup>Jeremiah 28:10), and they add that this young captain had a spite to Jeremiah upon that account. He could not arrest him without some pretence, and that which he charges upon his is, *Thou fallest away to the Chaldeans* — an unlikely story, for the Chaldeans had now gone off, Jeremiah could not reach them; or, if he could, who would go over to a baffled army? Jeremiah therefore with good reason, and with both the confidence and the mildness of an innocent man, denies the charge: *“It is false; I fall not away to the Chaldeans; I am going upon my own lawful occasions.”* Note, it is no new thing for the church's best friends to be represented as in the interest of her worst enemies. Thus have the blackest characters been put upon the fairest purest minds, and, in such a malicious world as this is, innocency, nay, excellency itself, is no fence against the basest calumny. When at any time we are thus falsely accused we may do as Jeremiah did, boldly deny the charge and then commit our cause to him that judges righteously. Jeremiah's protestation of his integrity, though he is a prophet, a man of God, a man of honour and sincerity, though he is a priest, and is ready to say it *in verbo sacerdotis* — *on the word of a priest*, is not regarded; but he is brought before the privy-council, who without examining him and the proofs against him, but upon the base malicious insinuation of the captain, fell into a passion with him: they *were wroth*; and what justice could be expected from men who, being in anger, would hear no reason? They beat him, without any regard had to his coat and character, and then *put him in prison*, in the worst prison they had, that *in the house of Jonathan the scribe*; either it had been his house, and he had quitted it for the inconveniences of it, but it was thought good

enough for a prison, or it was now his house, and perhaps he was a rigid severe man, that made it a house of cruel bondage to his prisoners. Into this prison Jeremiah was thrust, *into the dungeon*, which was dark and cold, damp and dirty, the most uncomfortable unhealthy place in it; in the cells, or *cabins*, there he must lodge, among which there is no choice, for they are all alike miserable lodging-places. *There Jeremiah remained many days, and* for aught that appears, nobody came near him or enquired after him. See what a world this is. The wicked princes, who are in rebellion against God, lie at ease, lie in state in their palaces, while godly Jeremiah, who is in the service of God, lies in pain, in a loathsome dungeon. It is well that there is a world to come.

**III.** That Zedekiah at length sent for him, and showed him some favour; but probably not till the Chaldean army had returned and had laid fresh siege to the city. When their vain hopes, with which they fed themselves (an in confidence of which they had re-enslaved their servants, ﴿﴾ Jeremiah 34:11), had all vanished, then they were in a greater confusion and consternation than ever. “O then” (says Zedekiah) “send in all haste for the prophet; let me have some talk with him.” When the Chaldeans had withdrawn, he only sent to the prophet to pray for him; but now that they had again invested the city, he sent for him to consult him. Thus gracious will men be when pangs come upon them.

**1.** The king sent for him to give him private audience as an ambassador from God. He *asked him secretly in his house*, being ashamed to be seen in his company, “*Is there any word from the Lord?*” (v. 17) — any word of comfort? Canst thou give us any hopes that the Chaldeans shall again retire?” Note, Those that will not hearken to God's admonitions when they are in prosperity would be glad of his consolations when they are in adversity and expect that his ministers should then speak words of peace to them; but how can they expect it? What have they to do with peace? Jeremiah's life and comfort are in Zedekiah's hand, and he has now a petition to present to him for his favour, and yet, having this opportunity, he tells him plainly that *there is a word from the Lord*, but no word of comfort for him or his people: *Thou shalt be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon*. If Jeremiah had consulted with flesh and blood, he would have given him a plausible answer, and, though he would not have told him a lie, yet he might have chosen whether he would tell him the worst at this time; what occasion was there for it, when he had so often told it him before? But Jeremiah was one that had *obtained mercy of the Lord to be*

*faithful*, and would not, to obtain mercy of man, be unfaithful either to God or to his prince; he therefore tells him the truth, the whole truth. And, since there was no remedy, it would be a kindness to the king to know his doom, that, being no surprise to him, it might be the less a terror, and he might provide to make the best of bad. Jeremiah takes this occasion to upbraid him and his people with the credit they gave to the false prophets, who told them that *the king of Babylon should not come* at all, or, when he had withdrawn, should *not come again against* them, v. 19. “*Where are now your prophets, who told you that you should have peace?*” Note, Those who deceive themselves with groundless hopes of mercy will justly be upbraided with their folly when the event has undeceived them.

**2.** He improved this opportunity for the presenting of a private petition, as a poor prisoner, v. 18, 20. It was not in Jeremiah's power to reverse the sentence God had passed upon Zedekiah, but it was in Zedekiah's power to reverse the sentence which the princes had given against him; and therefore, since he thought him fit to be used as a prophet, he would not think him fit to be abused as the worst of malefactors. He humbly expostulates with the king: “*What have I offended against thee, or thy servants, or this people, what law have I broken, what injury have I done to the common welfare, that you have put me in prison?*” And many a one that has been very hardly dealt with has been able to make the same appeal and to make it good. He likewise earnestly begs, and very pathetically (v. 20), *Cause me to return to yonder noisome gaol, to the house of Jonathan the scribe, lest I die there.* This was the language of innocent nature, sensible of its own grievances and solicitous for its own preservation. Though he was not at all unwilling to die God's martyr, yet, having so fair an opportunity to get relief, he would not let it slip, lest he should die his own murderer. When Jeremiah delivered God's message he spoke as one having authority, with the greatest boldness; but, when he presented his own request, he spoke as one under authority, with the greatest submissiveness: *Near me, I pray thee, O my Lord the king! let my supplication, I pray thee, be accepted before thee.* Here is not a word of complaint of the princes that unjustly committed him, no offer to bring an action of false imprisonment against them, but all in a way of modest supplication to the king, to teach us that even when we act with the courage that becomes the faithful servants of God, yet we must conduct ourselves with the humility and modesty that become dutiful subjects to the government God hath set over us. A lion in God's cause must be a

lamb in his own. And we find that God gave Jeremiah favour in the eyes of the king.

(1.) He gave him his request, took care that he should not die in the dungeon, but ordered that he should have the liberty of the *court of the prison*, where he might have a pleasant walk and breathe a free air.

(2.) He gave him more than his request, took care that he should not die for want, as many did that had their liberty, by reason of the straitness of the siege; he ordered him his *daily bread out of the public stock* (for the prison was within the verge of the court), *till all the bread was spent*. Zedekiah ought to have released him, to have made him a privy-counsellor, as Joseph was taken from prison to be the second man in the kingdom. But he had not courage to do that; it was well he did as he did, and it is an instance of the care God takes of his suffering servants that are faithful to him. He can make even their confinement turn to their advantage and the court of the of their prison to become as green pastures to them, and raise up such friends to provide for them that *in the days of famine they shall be satisfied. At destruction and famine thou shalt laugh.*