

# Jeremiah 37 - Zedekiah's Vain Hope; Jeremiah Imprisoned

V. Present calamity of Judah (Jer 34:1—45:5)

(2) During the fall (Jer 37:1—39:18)

- (A) Jeremiah's messages to Zedekiah and imprisonment (Jer 37:1-21)
  - (a) Zedekiah consults with Jeremiah (37:1-10)
  - (b) Jeremiah imprisoned (37:11-16)
  - (c) Zedekiah consults Jeremiah (37:17-19)
  - (d) Jeremiah's transfer (37:20-21)

## The Final Siege of Jerusalem

The historical part of the book. It is not in chronological order, and therefore it causes a lot of confusion. Fortunately most passages are fairly well dated by their context but it is an assemblage of various presentations.

At this point it is in order, dealing with King Zedekiah. About 18 years have passed since Jer 36-37. The fall of Jerusalem is in these three chapters. Jeremiah has been talking about it for 40 years; Zedekiah has been reigning for about 11 years since the previous rebellion. Zedekiah is obviously not faithful to the Word of God. He seeks counsel with Jeremiah, doesn't like what he hears so he doesn't listen and hopes that the message will change. Zedekiah is not hostile in an open-aggressive sense like his advisors are to Jeremiah, in some soft ways he helps Jeremiah but he is a weakling. Weak men in positions of leadership hurt people.

## Jeremiah 37

(2) During the fall (Jer 37:1—39:18)

- (A) Jeremiah's messages to Zedekiah and imprisonment (Jer 37:1-21)
  - (a) Zedekiah consults with Jeremiah (37:1-10)

1 Now **Zedekiah** the son of **Josiah** whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had made king in the land of Judah, reigned as king in place of **Coniah** the son of Jehoiakim.

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1 Josiah's son King Zedekiah reigned in place of Jehoiakim's son Coniah, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had made king of the land of Judah.

**1** And king Zedekiah the son of Josiah reigned instead of Coniah the son of Jehoiakim, whom Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon made king in the land of Judah.

- "...Zedekiah" - was an heir but his source to power was Nebuchadnezzar's authority after the second siege of Jerusalem; he was a vassal king

— His second in command was pro-Egypt. Pharaoh Hophra was an ally and they continually tried to make alliances with Egypt in hope that Egypt will somehow help them throw off the Babylonian siege...it didn't work.

— Jeremiah continually tells them it won't work, they don't listen. The Babylonians withdraw from the siege and the people think that they have given up, they don't understand that they will be back; Nebuchadnezzar has just gone to take care of Pharaoh Hophra. They return, lay siege, level and burn the city.

- "...Josiah" - was the good king who did a lot of good things but after him the nation went back to idol-worship

- "...Coniah" - the throne name for Jehoiachin. He was the one who had the blood curse pronounced upon him.

**2** But neither he nor his servants nor the people of the land listened to the words of the LORD which He spoke through Jeremiah the prophet.

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**2** But neither he nor his officials nor the people of the land listened to the words of the LORD that were spoken by Jeremiah the prophet.

**2** But neither he, nor his servants, nor the people of the land, did hearken unto the words of the LORD, which he spake by the prophet Jeremiah.

- The same story, they wouldn't listen. He knew they wouldn't but his burden was to tell them in any case.

**3** Yet King Zedekiah sent Jehucal the son of Shelemiah, and the priest Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah, to Jeremiah the prophet, saying, "Please pray to the LORD our God in our behalf."

**3** Yet King Zedekiah sent Jehucal the son of Shelemiah, and Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah, the priest, to Jeremiah the prophet, saying, "Please pray to the LORD our God on our behalf."

**3** King Zedekiah sent Shelemiah's son Jehucal and Maaseiah's son Zephaniah the priest to Jeremiah the prophet, asking him, "Please pray to the LORD our God for us."

**3** And Zedekiah the king sent Jehucal the son of Shelemiah and Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah the priest to the prophet Jeremiah, saying, Pray now unto the LORD our God for us.

- Zephaniah - same as in Chapter 21 and 29. Not all Zephaniah's are the same, some of them are different. They are seeking God but selfishly.

— They come to Jeremiah for him to pray. Sounds great but they are asking Jeremiah to pray to God to let God know what their will is.

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

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

4 Now Jeremiah was still going in and out among the people since he had not yet been put in prison.

4 Now Jeremiah came in and went out among the people: for they had not put him into prison.

- He has plenty of time in prison, but he is not in prison yet

5 Meanwhile, Pharaoh's army had set out from Egypt; and when the Chaldeans who had been besieging Jerusalem heard the report about them, they withdrew from Jerusalem.

5 Meanwhile, Pharaoh's army had set out from Egypt; and when the Chaldeans who had been besieging Jerusalem heard the report about them, they lifted the *siege* from Jerusalem.

5 Pharaoh's army had come out of Egypt, and when the Chaldeans who were besieging Jerusalem heard the report about them, they withdrew from Jerusalem.

5 Then Pharaoh's army was come forth out of Egypt: and when the Chaldeans that besieged Jerusalem heard tidings of them, they departed from Jerusalem.

- This army is Pharaoh Hophra, these are the enemies of the Babylonians.

— The Judean leadership under the king was very pro-Egypt and they kept hoping that God would use an alliance with Egypt to spare them.

— They thought that God would see them through the way He saw Hezekiah through in the days of Isaiah. Wrong, because in the days of Hezekiah, they listened, repented and sought the Lord and He delivered them. That is the fine print.

— They thought, we are God's people, this is His city, this is His Temple, He is not going to let it go down. Wrong, He does what he preaches again and again.

So Pharaoh's army came out of Egypt. The inference here is that this alliance that Zedekiah and the people were hoping for was maybe taking root. When the Babylonians recognize this, they detach themselves from the siege for awhile and go and take care of Pharaoh Hophra, then they come back and finish the siege.

*Chaldeans* is for our purposes a synonym for the Babylonians. Technically they are not, as Chaldea is the general land, Babylon is the city-state that heads it up. So when you say

*Chaldeans* in this context, the term refers to the Babylonians.

In the book of Daniel, the term *Chaldeans* can mean that, but it is used denotatively to mean the mystics of that religion. Sometimes the word *Chaldean* implies a magician because of the way the language is used in Aramaic. They did not depart from Jerusalem out of fear. There is a false euphoria that sets in Jerusalem

**6** Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, saying,

**6** Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, saying,

**6** Then this message from the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet:

**6** Then came the word of the LORD unto the prophet Jeremiah, saying,

- They are still under siege but they think that they may not be. In other words they recognize that the Babylonians are gone away, at least for a while.

**7** "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel says: 'This is what you are to say to the king of Judah, who sent you to Me to inquire of Me: "Behold, Pharaoh's army, which has come out to help you, is going to return to its own land of Egypt.

**7** "Thus says the LORD God of Israel, 'Thus you are to say to the king of Judah, who sent you to Me to inquire of Me: "Behold, Pharaoh's army which has come out for your assistance is going to return to its own land of Egypt.

**7** "This is what the LORD God of Israel says: 'This is what you are to say to the king of Judah who sent you to me to inquire of me, "Look, Pharaoh's army that has come to help will go back to its own land of Egypt,

**7** Thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel; Thus shall ye say to the king of Judah, that sent you unto me to enquire of me; Behold, Pharaoh's army, which is come forth to help you, shall return to Egypt into their own land.

**8** Then the Chaldeans will return and fight against this city, and they will capture it and burn it with fire."

**8** The Chaldeans will also return and fight against this city, and they will capture it and burn it with fire."

**8** and then the Chaldeans will come back to fight against this city, to capture it, and burn it with fire."

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

- God is saying, don't put your hope in Pharaoh, he will go home and the Chaldeans will come again and re-establish the siege, they will fight against the city, take it and burn it.

9 This is what the LORD says: 'Do not deceive yourselves, saying, "The Chaldeans will certainly go away from us," for they will not go.

9 Thus says the LORD, 'Do not deceive yourselves, saying, "The Chaldeans will surely go away from us," for they will not go.

9 "This is what the LORD says: 'Don't deceive yourselves by saying, "The Chaldeans will surely go away from us," 'for they won't go.

9 Thus saith the LORD; Deceive not yourselves, saying, The Chaldeans shall surely depart from us: for they shall not depart.

- They departed only in a tactical sense, they will be back. They have not abandoned the siege of the city.

10 For even if you had defeated the entire army of Chaldeans who were fighting against you, and there were *only* wounded men left among them, each man in his tent, they would rise up and burn this city with fire."

10 For even if you had defeated the entire army of Chaldeans who were fighting against you, and there were *only* wounded men left among them, each man in his tent, they would rise up and burn this city with fire."

10 Indeed, even if you defeated the entire Chaldean army that is fighting against you, and they had only wounded men left in their tents, they would get up and burn this city with fire."""

10 For though ye had smitten the whole army of the Chaldeans that fight against you, and there remained *but* wounded men among them, yet should they rise up every man in his tent, and burn this city with fire.

- He is making His point and He explains it. "*For though ye had smitten the whole army of the Chaldeans*" — you could knock them all off until you have nothing left but the helpless and wounded, and the helpless and wounded would still win.

— It is sort of like an underscore; don't put your hopes in the Egyptians or anything else, they are going to cut you down.

(b) Jeremiah imprisoned (37:11-16)

11 Now it happened when the army of the Chaldeans had withdrawn from Jerusalem because of Pharaoh's army,

11 Now it happened when the army of the Chaldeans had lifted *the siege* from Jerusalem because of Pharaoh's army,

11 When the Chaldean army was leaving Jerusalem because of Pharaoh's army,

11 And it came to pass, that when the army of the Chaldeans was broken up from Jerusalem for fear of Pharaoh's army,

12 that Jeremiah left Jerusalem to go to the land of Benjamin in order to take possession of *some* property there among the people.

12 that Jeremiah went out from Jerusalem to go to the land of Benjamin in order to take possession of *some* property there among the people.

12 Jeremiah left Jerusalem to go to the territory of Benjamin to take possession of his property there among the people.

12 Then Jeremiah went forth out of Jerusalem to go into the land of Benjamin, to separate himself thence in the midst of the people.

- Jeremiah was going to the land of Benjamin, his hometown, Anathoth. He is going to be accused of desertion, treason in effect, which was nonsense for lots of reasons. Some think he was there to straighten out the land that he just bought from his uncle, but that hasn't happened yet.

— There is all kinds of evidence that point out that he had no intention of escaping, he wasn't trying to escape while the Chaldeans were off taking care of the Egyptians, he just used that as an opportunity to go to Anathoth to straighten out his personal affairs.

However he gets caught, so to speak.

13 While he was at the Gate of Benjamin, a captain of the guard whose name was Irijah, the son of Shelemiah the son of Hananiah was there; and he arrested Jeremiah the prophet, saying, "You are deserting to the Chaldeans!"

13 While he was at the Gate of Benjamin, a captain of the guard whose name was Irijah, the son of Shelemiah the son of Hananiah was there; and he arrested Jeremiah the prophet, saying, "You are going over to the Chaldeans!"

13 He was in the Gate of Benjamin, and chief officer Irijah, Shelemiah's son and the grandson of Hananiah, was there. He arrested Jeremiah the prophet, accusing him: "You are going over to the Chaldeans!"

13 And when he was in the gate of Benjamin, a captain of the ward was there, whose name was Irijah, the son of Shelemiah, the son of Hananiah; and he took Jeremiah the prophet, saying, Thou fallest away to the Chaldeans.

- Irijah accuses Jeremiah of treasonous desertion like he is trying to slip away. What makes that all so silly is if he was trying to slip away to the Chaldeans, he wouldn't wait until the Chaldeans were gone, he would have had lots of opportunities.

— Irijah's grandfather death (Hananiah's) was prophesied by Jeremiah in Chapter 28:16.

— So there is some view that because Jeremiah prophesied his grandfather's death, Irijah has a thing in for Jeremiah, spots him and lays an accusation in on him. That is the most rational view.

14 But Jeremiah said, "A lie! I am not deserting to the Chaldeans"; yet he would not listen to him. So Irijah arrested Jeremiah and brought him to the officials.

14 But Jeremiah said, "A lie! I am not going over to the Chaldeans"; yet he would not listen to him. So Irijah arrested Jeremiah and brought him to the officials.

14 Jeremiah said, "It's a lie! I'm not going over to the Chaldeans." But Irijah would not listen to him, and he arrested Jeremiah and brought him to the officials.

**14** Then said Jeremiah, *It is* false; I fall not away to the Chaldeans. But he hearkened not to him: so Irijah took Jeremiah, and brought him to the princes.

- The princes are the second tier, the people that are reporting to the king and are not Jeremiah's buddy. Jeremiah has been preaching for forty years that the Babylonians have risen to power by God's mechanism to judge Judah for their idol worshiping.

— The message is so unpopular that they seize upon this to accuse Jeremiah of treason.

15 Then the officials were angry at Jeremiah and they beat him, and put him in prison in the house of Jonathan the scribe, for they had made it into the prison.

15 Then the officials were angry at Jeremiah and beat him, and they put him in jail in the house of Jonathan the scribe, which they had made into the prison.

15 The officials were angry with Jeremiah and beat him. They put him in jail in the house of Jonathan the scribe because they had made it into a prison.

15 Wherefore the princes were wroth with Jeremiah, and smote him, and put him in prison in the house of Jonathan the scribe: for they had made that the prison.

- There is lots of archaeological evidence that they often had certain homes set up outside to include a prison. In any case these guys nail Jeremiah for his unpopular message.

16 For Jeremiah had come into the dungeon, that is, the vaulted cell; and Jeremiah stayed there many days.

16 For Jeremiah had come into the dungeon, that is, the vaulted cell; and Jeremiah stayed there many days.

16 So Jeremiah came into the cells in the dungeon and remained there for a long time.

**16** When Jeremiah was entered into the dungeon, and into the cabins, and Jeremiah had remained there many days;

(c) Zedekiah consults Jeremiah (37:17-19)

17 Now King Zedekiah sent *men* and took him *out*; and in his palace the king secretly asked him and said, "Is there a word from the LORD?" And Jeremiah said, "There is!" Then he said, "**You will be handed over to the king of Babylon!**"

17 Now King Zedekiah sent and took him *out*; and in his palace the king secretly asked him and said, "Is there a word from the LORD?" And Jeremiah said, "There is!" Then he said, "You will be given into the hand of the king of Babylon!"

17 Then King Zedekiah sent for Jeremiah and received him. The king questioned him secretly in his house: "Is there a message from the LORD?" Jeremiah said, "There is," and then he said, "You will be given into the hand of the king of Babylon."

17 Then Zedekiah the king sent, and took him out: and the king asked him secretly in his house, and said, Is there *any* word from the LORD? And Jeremiah said, There is: for, said he, thou shalt be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon.

- The princes put him in the dungeon. The king is senior to the princes but he doesn't rule with a free hand.

— It is interesting that Zedekiah gets him out of the dungeon, but does it secretly. Jeremiah is a prisoner sought out by the throne. Zedekiah who sits on the throne is tiptoeing around secretly counseling with Jeremiah.

— Jeremiah has something the king wishes he had, the word of the Lord. When he solicits it and gets it, he doesn't like what comes, but he seems to understand that God does speak through Jeremiah. It is hard to tell where Zedekiah is coming from.

- "...You will be handed over to the king of Babylon!" - Zedekiah was hoping that Jeremiah had some kind of good news. Not only will he be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon, he will have to face him face to face. Nebuchadnezzar was someone to fear, being enslaved by him was one thing, to confront him face to face caused trembling.

18 Moreover, Jeremiah said to King Zedekiah, "*In what way* have I sinned against you, or your servants, or this people, that you have put me in prison?

18 Moreover Jeremiah said to King Zedekiah, "*In what way* have I sinned against you, or against your servants, or against this people, that you have put me in prison?

18 Then Jeremiah asked King Zedekiah, "What offense have I committed against you, your officials, or these people that you have put me in prison?

**18** Moreover Jeremiah said unto king Zedekiah, What have I offended against thee, or against thy servants, or against this people, that ye have put me in prison?

- Very strange situation is happening here. For 40 years, the false prophets said that God is going to deliver His people, don't sweat it, God will deliver us just like He did in the days of Hezekiah and of Isaiah. Wrong, they were false prophets.

— The Torah is very explicit as to what you do to a false prophet, they had a very effective self-correcting professional development program. If you said "Thus saith the Lord" and it didn't come out, they killed you.

— Jeremiah was all this time saying that those guys were false, this is what is going to happen, the Chaldeans are going to win and God is going to use them to judge you.

— Zedekiah is nervous because he recognizes that this is happening, he is reconfirming that this is really what God's message is. He has been told, but he doesn't respond by putting the false prophets in prison and taking Jeremiah out and listening to God's counsel.

19 And where are your prophets who prophesied to you, saying, 'The king of Babylon will not come against you or against this land'?

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

19 Where are your prophets who prophesied to you, telling you: 'The king of Babylon won't come against you or against this land'?

19 Where are now your prophets which prophesied unto you, saying, The king of Babylon shall not come against you, nor against this land?

- Good question, those people on your payroll for at least 11 years now have been saying that the king of Babylon will not come against you or this land. That would make them false prophets, where are they now?

(d) Jeremiah's transfer (37:20-21)

20 But now, please listen, my lord the king; please let my plea come before you and do not make me return to the house of Jonathan the scribe, so that I will not die there." '

20 But now, please listen, O my lord the king; please let my petition come before you and do not make me return to the house of Jonathan the scribe, that I may not die there."

20 Now, please listen, your majesty, and pay attention to what I'm asking you. Don't make me go back to the house of Jonathan the scribe, so I don't die there."

20 Therefore hear now, I pray thee, O my lord the king: let my supplication, I pray thee, be accepted before thee; that thou cause me not to return to the house of Jonathan the scribe, lest I die there.

- So Jeremiah gives him the word of the Lord, then raises this interesting challenge of why is he in prison and these false prophets aren't, but then makes one petition, don't send me back to that dungeon, he didn't want to die there.

21 Then King Zedekiah gave a command, and they placed Jeremiah in custody in the courtyard of the guardhouse, and gave him a loaf of bread daily from the bakers' street, until all the bread in the city was gone. So Jeremiah remained in the courtyard of the guardhouse.

21 Then King Zedekiah gave commandment, and they committed Jeremiah to the court of the guardhouse and gave him a loaf of bread daily from the bakers' street, until all the bread in the city was gone. So Jeremiah remained in the court of the guardhouse.

21 So King Zedekiah gave the order, and they assigned Jeremiah to the courtyard of the guard. Each day they gave him a loaf of bread from the bakers' street until all the bread in the city was gone. So Jeremiah remained in the courtyard of the guard.

**21** Then Zedekiah the king commanded that they should commit Jeremiah into the court of the prison, and that they should give him daily a piece of bread out of the bakers' street,

until all the bread in the city were spent. Thus Jeremiah remained in the court of the prison.

- He is still under arrest but he is not in the dungeon for the moment. The point is that Zedekiah does give Jeremiah a measure of relief by not sending him back to the dungeon. He is given a daily ration of bread, which may not sound like much but the city is under siege, rations are scarce.