

## September 15

**Scriptures:** Read Jeremiah 37, 38 & 39

**Key Verse:** "... Please, obey the voice of the Lord which I speak to you. So it shall be well with you, and your soul shall live." (Jeremiah 38:20)

### Overview

Chapters 37 to 39 tell of Jeremiah's ministry during the siege and fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians, just as Jeremiah had foretold. We can see that Zedekiah, unlike his predecessor Jehoiakim, had some respect for Jeremiah, and although he asked Jeremiah to pray for them and enquire of Lord, he still did not heed the word of the Lord, which at this point was that he must surrender the city to the Babylonians if he desired to save himself and most of the people from sure death. The reason he did not heed the warnings was because he was a very weak king who acquiesced to the strong and ruthless princes (a different group than those during the reign of Jehoiakim) whom he feared might overthrow him if they knew he was listening to Jeremiah's words. These princes were in favor of holding out and depending on Egypt to save them.

When the Chaldeans (Babylonians) left the siege on Jerusalem to go and fight with the approaching Egyptian army, the people thought they were safe, but Jeremiah had the inside story: the Lord had revealed that the Chaldeans would return, succeed in penetrating the walls, and burn the city, for since God had purposed to do so, even an army of wounded and weakly men could do it (37:5-10).

During this period, Jeremiah took the opportunity to leave Jerusalem and go to his hometown of Anathoth in the territory of Benjamin in order to look after his land, or to possibly settle matters of the estate with his family. No doubt the authorities had been watching for a chance to imprison him, and when he stepped outside the city gate, they seized him, falsely charged him with treachery in attempting to flee to the Babylonians, and threw him in a dungeon that had once been a private residence, but because of the many defectors, it had been converted into an emergency prison to hold them (37:15-16; cf. 38:19; 39:9:52:15). After several days, when the Chaldeans had again laid siege to Jerusalem, the worried Zedekiah secretly brought Jeremiah out and asked him if there was any new word from the Lord. The word was the same -destruction was inevitable.

Still Zedekiah would not surrender, but at least he mustered enough strength to have Jeremiah moved to a prison with more humane conditions (37:20-21). Soon afterwards, as we read in chapter 38, Zedekiah gave in to the demands of the hateful princes to do with Jeremiah as they wished (38:5). They wanted to see him dead, for his words had encouraged many people and soldiers to defect (38:1-4). Rather than a public execution and having his blood on their hands, they lowered him into a muddy cistern that had run out of water, so that they might forget about him there and let him die. Providentially the Lord used a God-fearing Ethiopian eunuch named Ebed-Melech to come to Jeremiah's rescue. Having obtained permission from Zedekiah to bring him out, Ebed-Melech immediately went to free Jeremiah. His consideration in even sending down old clothes as padding under Jeremiah's arms shows that he was very thoughtful, merciful and compassionate. To reward him for his faith and kindness, the Lord promised to deliver his

life from the hands of the Babylonians (39:16-18; cf. Gal. 6:9-10). The Lord never forget His own.

One last time, Zedekiah calls upon Jeremiah to give him a word from the Lord. The message was the same: surrender or suffer. Once again Zedekiah shows his weakness and fear of both the Jews that had defected and the princes within the city (38:19, 24-25). He should have feared the Lord and not men, for since he did not obey God's word, the prophecies of Jeremiah all came to fulfillment.

As we read in chapter 39, the Babylonians finally broke through the city walls after a siege of one and a half years. They burned the city and captured Zedekiah while he was trying to flee. He suffered terribly, just as Jeremiah predicted. While he still had sight, they killed his sons, then they led him away to Babylon blinded and in chains, never to return (39:4-7; cf. 2 Kings 25:4-7). Such was the end of one who repeatedly heard the word of God, and yet ignored it. All that befell Jerusalem and the captivity of the people of Judah was because they too had rejected the Word of the Lord and they did not heed the many warnings that God had given to them from the time of Moses until Jeremiah about keeping His covenant and staying far from idolatry (cf. Deut. 28:62-66; Lam. 1:3). God hates sin, and He will not allow an ungodly and proud nation to go unpunished, for His holiness demands justice. The faithful people, however, such as Jeremiah, Ebed-Melech, and some of the commoners, such as the Rechabites, were not taken captive, but allowed to remain in the land. Just as the Lord promised Jeremiah, no harm came to him (cf. 15:11, 20-21). He was treated very well and shown much respect as a prophet of God (39:11-14; 40:4-5).

## **Prayer**

Loving God, bless the leaders of our land. May they hear Your voice in their deliberations and have the courage to put forth godly legislation.