**Jeremiah 37 (Lesson 20a)**

**I. Text Of Chapter 37 – Jonathan’s Cistern (2.5 min. to read)**

*A. The Siege Will Resume! (37:1-10)* – Requests from Zedekiah (cf. 21:1f; 37:3, 16f)

1. Zedekiah is a client/puppet king of Nebuchadnezzar (v. 1). As such, his open rebellion by aligning with Egypt is worthy of punishment by this earthly king of kings (cf. Dan. 2:37; 2Chr. 36:11-14). His refusal to listen to the warnings of Jeremiah and make real changes merits the judgment of the Sovereign King of kings (v. 2; cf. 1Tim. 6:15).

2. Zedekiah requests an intercessory prayer of Jeremiah via Jehucal (opposed to Jeremiah – 38:4) and Zephaniah (sympathetic to Jeremiah – cf. 21:1ff; 29:25, 29; 52:24-27) while Jeremiah is still free (vv. 3f).

3. Pharaoh Hophra’s decision to defend ally Judah (v. 5; cf. Ez. 17:11-21) is futile & amounts to a minor skirmish before they flee home & Babylon returns to the siege (2:36; Is. 30:7). Interestingly, Necho II (610-595) had not come to aid of Judah prior to Hophra’s reign (589-570).

4. Temporary lifting of the siege should not provide any hope to Jerusalem. They will be razed to the ground (vv. 6-10). *“…even if the Babylonian forces were reduced to severely-wounded men lying in tents for shelter, even they would be enabled to rise up and capture Jerusalem. The rhetorical exaggeration portrays in stark fashion the fate about to overtake the capital.”* (Harrison, 153)

*B. Imprisonment For “Treason” (37:11-21)* – cf. Heb. 11:36

1. While the siege is lifted, Jeremiah seeks to inspect his family’s land, likely the land redeemed from Hanamel (32:1ff), though some chronological difficulty is present here (see Mott). Tries to exit Ben. Gate, is arrested by Irijah, accused of defecting to Babylon (vv. 11-14; 21:8-10; 38:1f).

2. Princes here opposed to Jeremiah, showing a transition, as good figs had been exiled (v. 15; 26:16, 24; 36:11-19, 25; 2K. 24:10-17; Dn. 1; Ez. 1).

3. Jeremiah spends “many days” in the cistern of Jonathan the scribe’s house but is called out to speak once more with Zedekiah. Jeremiah gives him the same message of doom and destruction & asks the king to provide a reason for his imprisonment. He also successfully requests a transfer to the palace stockade from the unsanitary subterranean dungeon given his proven validity as a prophet of the Lord and the true colors of the false prophets being revealed (vv. 17-21; cf. 28:1-4).

**II. Thought Questions For Chapter 37**

A. What impression do you get of Zedekiah’s abilities as a king? Might this have been a strategic decision by Nebuchadnezzar? Remember, Zedekiah is Josiah’s son!

B. Is 37:11-21 related to 32:1ff? Or is this altogether different?

C. What principles of leadership may be derived from this chapter?

D. In what ways does this chapter & context condemn situation ethics?

**III. Applications For Chapter 37**

A. *“Sometimes people dislike truth because it is presented in a hypocritical, unloving way; at other times, people simply do not like the truth of God, no matter how lovingly it is presented.”* (Humphries, 397)

B. False hope will be exposed (v. 19; 5:30f; 6:14; 18:18; 23:16f; 28:1-4; Ez. 13:10- 12). Wisdom in exposing fraud & falsehood (cf. Jn. 18:23; Acts 25:8, 11, 25)

**Jeremiah 38 (Lesson 20b)**

**I. Text Of Chapter 38 – Malchijah’s Cistern (4 min. to read)**

A. Imprisonment For Discouraging Soldiers (38:1-13)

1. *“The number of fighting men is evidently greatly reduced (v 4); famine has set in (v 9); the number of deserters has become large (v 19)—hence it is the last period of the siege.”* (Mott, 165)

2. Shaphatiah, Gedaliah, Jucal (cf. 37:3), and Passhur (cf. 21:1) conspire against Jeremiah and have him arrested with zero resistance from cowardly Zedekiah (vv. 1-6). Jeremiah’s advice in 21:9 is used against him (cf. Jn. 2:19; Matt. 26:61; 27:40). *“The courage Jeremiah sought to weaken was not a heroic courage based on trust in God, but a fleshly and foolish obstinacy which could only bring ruin. Hence the injustice of the charge.”* (Mott, 165) Ironically, the princes who accuse Jeremiah of discouraging the soldiers are themselves accused of the very same thing by the soldiers! (Lachish Ostracan VI).

4. He is cast into the cistern of the Malchijah, the king’s son (cf. 2Kgs. 18:31; Prov. 5:15; Is. 36:16). These cisterns were pear-shaped & lined with cement. The famine would explain it’s being waterless. He sank down into the boggy mud, left there to die (cf. Lam. 3:55; Ps. 69:1-3).

5. Ebed-melech (servant of the king) is moved to deliver Jeremiah & successfully intercedes, showing unrivaled kindness in the manner he lifted Jeremiah out of the cistern. He will be rewarded! (39:15-18)

B. Zedekiah’s Private Discussion With Jeremiah (38:14-28)

1. 3rd entrance probably the private royal entry (cf. 2Kgs. 16:18). His request for a word of the Lord is met with the same preaching Jeremiah had done for decades! (cf. Matt. 7:6) He was a man who knew the right thing to do but would not bring himself to do it!

2. Jeremiah puts a huge burden of the blame on Zedekiah for his vacillation and lack of trust in the Lord; as a wage for his rebellion, his wives and children would sing a taunt about him as they would be taken and ravished by the Babylonians. He should’ve been as nephew Jehoiachin.

3. Zedekiah implores Jeremiah to only reveal his request to be transferred out of cistern (39:14) & naught else if princes ask purpose of meeting.

**II. Thought Questions For Chapter 38**

A. Is this imprisonment the same as the one recorded in chapter 37?

B. If God is with His people, why would He allow evil people to punish the righteous?

C. What is so important about the manner in which Ebed-melech lifts Jeremiah out of the pit? How might this relate to us today as we seek to win souls and edify our brothers and sisters, especially when they are feeling very low?

D. Was Jeremiah deceptive to the princes post-meeting w/ Zedekiah? (vv. 24-28)

**III. Applications For Chapter 38**

A. *“Jer. 21:1-2; 37:3, 17; 38:14: Though we may come time and again seeking a different answer, God’s word remains constant. Whether regarding marriage and divorce, baptism, the work of the church, or any other Bible topic, we must obey God’s word rather than the selfish desires of our own heart (Jer. 10:23; 2 Cor. 4:13; 1 Pet. 4:11; 2 John 9).”* (Harkrider, 104)

B. We need to embody the soul-winning spirit of Jeremiah (v. 20).