

## Zedekiah and the Slaves (589 BC)

Jeremiah 34

### Historical Summary

1 The word that came to Jeremiah from Yahweh, when Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, and all his army, with all *the* kingdoms of *the* earth *under* the dominion of his hand, and all the peoples *were* fighting against Jerusalem and against all its cities, saying,  
 2 “Thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel: ‘Go and say to Zedekiah the king of Judah, now you must say to him, “Thus says Yahweh: ‘Look, I *am* going to give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he will burn it with fire.  
 3 And you will not escape from his hand, but surely you will be captured, and into his hand you will be given, and you will see the king of Babylon eye to eye, and you will speak face to face with him, and *to* Babylon you will go.’  
 4 However, hear the word of Yahweh, *O* Zedekiah, the king of Judah. Thus says Yahweh concerning you: ‘You will not die by the sword.  
 5 In peace you will die, and as *there was* burning for your ancestors, the former kings who were before you, so they will burn for you, and they will lament for you, “Alas, lord!” For *the* word I have spoken,’ declares Yahweh.” ”  
 6 Then Jeremiah the prophet spoke to Zedekiah the king of Judah all these words in Jerusalem  
 7 when the army of the king of Babylon *was* fighting against Jerusalem and against all the cities of Judah that were left over—Lachish and Azekah, for these remained among the cities of Judah, the cities of fortification.

### A Broken Promise of Freedom for the Slaves

8 The word that came to Jeremiah from Yahweh after king Zedekiah made a covenant with all the people who *were* in Jerusalem to proclaim release to them,  
 9 to let go each one his *male* slave and each one his female slave, the Hebrew and the free Hebrew, *so that* no one among the Judeans *should* enslave his fellow countryman.  
 10 And all the officials and all the people obeyed, who had entered into the covenant to let go each one his *male* slave and each one his female slave, not enslaving them again, and they obeyed and they let *them* go.  
 11 But afterward they turned back and they brought back the *male* slaves and the female slaves whom they had let go free, and they subdued them as *male* slaves and female slaves.

### God Denounces the Broken Promise

12 And the word of Yahweh came to Jeremiah from Yahweh, saying,  
 13 “Thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel: ‘I made a covenant with your ancestors on the day of my bringing them out from the land of Egypt, from *the* house of slaves, saying,  
 14 “At *the* end of seven years you must let go each one his fellow countryman, the Hebrew who has been sold to you and who has served you six years, and you must let him go free from you.” [\[Exod 21:1–4; Deut 15:12–15\]](#) But your ancestors did not listen to me, and they did not incline their ears.  
 15 And you turned back recently and you did right in my eyes, to proclaim release each one to his neighbor, and you made a covenant before me in the house that is called by my name.  
 16 But you turned back and you profaned my name when you brought back each one his *male* slave and each one his female slave, whom you had let go free according to their desire, and you subdued them to be to you as *male* slaves and as female slaves.’

### Punishment for the Broken Promise

17 “Therefore thus says Yahweh, ‘You have not listened to me to proclaim release each one to his fellow countryman and each one to his neighbor. Look, I *am* going to proclaim to you a release,’ declares Yahweh, ‘to the sword, to the plague, and to the famine, and I will make you a terror to all the kingdoms of the earth.  
 18 And I will make the men who transgressed my covenant, who have not kept the words of the covenant that they made before me, *like* the calf which they cut in two and they passed between its parts—  
 19 the officials of Judah, and the officials of Jerusalem, the eunuchs, and the priests, and all the people of the land who passed between the parts of the calf—  
 20 and I will give them into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of the seekers of their lives, and their dead bodies will become as food for the birds of the heavens and for the animals of the earth.  
 21 And Zedekiah the king of Judah and his officials I will give into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of the seekers of their lives, and into the hand of the army of the king of Babylon, who retreated from you.  
 22 Look, I *am* going to command,’ declares Yahweh, ‘and I will bring them back to this city, and they will fight against it, and they will capture it, and they will burn it with fire, and the towns of Judah I will make a desolation without an inhabitant.’”

## Jeremiah's Arrest and Imprisonment (589 BC)

Jeremiah 37:11–21

### Jeremiah's Arrest

11 And then, at the withdrawing of the army of the Chaldeans from Jerusalem before the army of Pharaoh,  
 12 Jeremiah set out from Jerusalem to go to the land of Benjamin to receive a portion from there in the midst of the people.  
 13 And when he *was* at the Gate of Benjamin, there *was* a sentry on duty whose name *was* Irijah, the son of Shelemiah, the son of Hananiah, and he seized Jeremiah the prophet, saying, "You *are* deserting to the Chaldeans!"  
 14 And Jeremiah said, "*That is* a lie! I *am* not deserting to the Chaldeans." But he would not listen to him. So Irijah seized Jeremiah and brought him to the officials.  
 15 And the officials were angry at Jeremiah and they struck him. And they put him *in* prison, *in* the house of Jonathan the secretary, for they had converted it to the prison.  
 16 So Jeremiah came to the dungeon, even to the vaulted cells, and Jeremiah stayed there many days.

### Jeremiah's Secret Meeting with Zedekiah

17 Then King Zedekiah sent and fetched him. And the king questioned him in secrecy in his house, and he said, "Is there a word from Yahweh?" And Jeremiah said, "There is." And he said, "You will be given into the hand of the king of Babylon."  
 18 Then Jeremiah said to King Zedekiah, "What did I do wrong to you, or to your servants, or to this people, that you have put me in prison?  
 19 And where *are* your prophets who prophesied to you, saying, 'The king of Babylon will not come against you and against this land'?"  
 20 Now then, my lord the king, please let my plea fall before you. You must not send me back to the house of Jonathan the secretary, so that I will not die there."  
 21 So King Zedekiah commanded, and they handed Jeremiah over in the courtyard of the guard, and they gave to him a round loaf of bread from the street of the bakers every day until the finishing of all the bread from the city. And Jeremiah stayed in the courtyard of the guard.

## The Attempt on Jeremiah's Life (589 BC)

Jeremiah 38

### The Demand for Jeremiah's Punishment

1 Now Shephatiah the son of Mattan, and Gedaliah the son of Pashhur, and Jehucal the son of Shelemiah, and Pashhur the son of Malchiah heard the words that Jeremiah *was* saying to all the people, saying,  
 2 "Thus says Yahweh, 'The *one who* stays in this city will die by the sword, by the famine, and by the plague. But the *one who* goes out to the Chaldeans will live. And his life will be for him as booty, and he will live.'  
 3 Thus says Yahweh, 'Surely this city will be given into the hand of the army of the king of Babylon, and he will capture it.'  
 4 Then the officials said to the king, "Please, this man must be killed, because he *is* making slack the hands of the soldiers who are left in this city, and the hands of all the people, by speaking to them words like these, for this man *is* not seeking for welfare to this people, but only for harm."  
 5 And Zedekiah the king said, "Look, he *is* in your hand, for the king is not able to *do* a thing against you."  
 6 So they took Jeremiah and threw him into the pit of Malchiah, the son of the king, which *was* in the courtyard of the guard. And they let Jeremiah down by ropes. Now in the pit there was no water, but only mud, and Jeremiah sank in the mud.

### Jeremiah's Rescue by Ebed-Melech

7 When Ebed-melech the Cushite, a eunuch who *was* in the house of the king, heard that they had put Jeremiah into the pit—now the king *was* sitting at the Gate of Benjamin—  
 8 Ebed-melech went out from the house of the king and spoke to the king, saying,  
 9 "My lord the king, these men have done evil *in* all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet, *in* that they have thrown *him* into the pit, and he will die there because of starvation, for there is no longer any bread in the city."  
 10 Then the king commanded Ebed-melech the Cushite, saying, "Take with you these thirty men and pull Jeremiah the prophet up from the pit before he dies."  
 11 So Ebed-melech took the men with him and went to the palace of the king, to a *place* beneath the storehouse, and he took from there rags and worn-out clothes. And he let them down into the pit by ropes to Jeremiah.  
 12 Then Ebed-melech the Cushite said to Jeremiah, "Please put the rags and worn-out clothes under the joints of your arms under the ropes," and Jeremiah did so.  
 13 And they pulled Jeremiah by the ropes and brought him up from the pit. And Jeremiah stayed in the courtyard of the guard.

**A Second Secret Meeting With Zedekiah**

14 And Zedekiah the king sent and made someone bring Jeremiah the prophet to him, to *the* third entrance that *was* at the temple of Yahweh. And the king said to Jeremiah, “I *am* asking you something, you must not hide anything from me.”

15 And Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, “If I tell you, will you not surely kill me? Besides, if I advise you, you will not listen to me.

16 So Zedekiah the king swore to Jeremiah in secret, saying, “As Yahweh lives, who has made for us this life, I will not kill you and I will not give you into the hand of these men who are seeking your life.”

17 Then Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, “Thus says Yahweh, the God of hosts, the God of Israel, ‘If only you will go surrender to the officials of the king of Babylon, then you will live, and this city will not be burned with fire, and you will live, you and your house.

18 But if you *do* not go surrender to the officials of the king of Babylon, then this city will be given into the hand of the Chaldeans, and they will burn it with fire, and you will not escape from their hand.’”

19 And Zedekiah the king said to Jeremiah, “I *am* afraid of the Judeans who have deserted to the Chaldeans, lest they give me into their hand and they abuse me.”

20 And Jeremiah said, “They will not give *you over*. Please obey the voice of Yahweh with regard to what I *am* saying to you, and it will go well with you, and you will live.

21 But if you *are* refusing to surrender, this *is* the thing that Yahweh has shown me.

22 Now look, all the women who remain in the house of the king of Judah *are* being led out to the officials of the king of Babylon. And look, *they are* saying,

‘Your trusted friends have misled you,  
and they have prevailed against you.  
Your feet are stuck in the mud,  
so they turned backward.’

23 And all your wives and your children *will be* led out to the Chaldeans, and you will not escape from their hand, but by the hand of the king of Babylon you will be seized, and this city will burn with fire.”

24 And Zedekiah said to Jeremiah, “No man must know about these words so that you will not die.

25 And if the officials hear that I have spoken with you, and they come to you and say to you, ‘Please tell us what you said to the king. You must not conceal *it* from us so that we will not kill you. And what did the king say to you?’

26 Then you shall say to them, ‘I *was* presenting my plea before the king, to not cause me to return *to* the house of Jonathan to die there.’”

**Jeremiah is Questioned by the Officials**

27 And all the officials came to Jeremiah and questioned him, and he informed them like all these words that the king commanded. So they fell silent, for the conversation was not heard.

28 And Jeremiah stayed in the courtyard of the guard until *the* day that Jerusalem was captured.

**God’s Message to Jeremiah’s Rescuer, Ebed-Melech (589 BC)**

Jeremiah 39:15–18

15 And the word of Yahweh came to Jeremiah at his confinement in the courtyard of the guard, saying,

16 “Go and say to Ebed-melech the Cushite, saying, ‘Thus says Yahweh of hosts, the God of Israel: “Look, I *am* about to bring my words to pass against this city for evil and not for good. And they will be before you on that day.

17 But I will rescue you on that day,” declares Yahweh, “and you will not be given into the hand of the men of whom you are frightened.

18 For surely I will save you, and you will not fall by the sword. But your life will be for you as booty because you have trusted in me,” declares Yahweh.’”

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