

Reading Guide for Jeremiah 37-39

Oracles Concerning the Babylonian Army's Departure from Jerusalem (37:1-10)

These next series of narratives (chs. 37-39) form a continuous narrative and focus on the rejection and severe persecution of Jeremiah (i.e., a rejection of God's word).

It begins with a fresh introduction (vv. 1-2), re-introducing us to Zedekiah (after two chapters featuring king Jehoiakim from an earlier period) and his unwillingness to listen to the word of the Lord. Zedekiah requests intercession and receives two oracles in reply, both of which describe the destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon as inevitable.

Re-introduction to King Zedekiah and His Apostasy (37:1-2)

Zedekiah Sends Messengers Requesting Intercession (37:3-5)

The Lord's Response (37:6-10)

Message-reception Formula (37:6)

Oracle 1 (37:7-8)

Quotation Formula (v. 7a)

Command to the Messengers to Speak to Zedekiah (v. 7b)

Oracle: Babylon will Return to Jerusalem and Burn It with Fire (vv. 7c-8)

Oracle 2 (37:9-10)

Quotation Formula (v. 9a)

The People's False Thesis that Babylon will Depart Permanently (v. 9b)

The Lord's Counter-thesis: They will Not Go Away (v. 9c)

It is Inevitable that Babylon will Rise Up and Burn the City with Fire (v. 10)

Jeremiah Arrested and Imprisoned in a Dungeon House (37:11-16)

While the Babylonian army temporarily suspended their siege on Jerusalem, Jeremiah attempted to leave the city to receive a portion of land from his family in Benjamin. Irijah, the gate guard, falsely accuses him of deserting to the Babylonians. Jeremiah is then brought to the officials who, in their anger toward him and his message, beat him and throw him into a dungeon house.

Jeremiah Attempts to Leave the City (vv. 11-12)

Jeremiah is Accused of Deserting (v. 13)

Jeremiah's Defense (v. 14a)

The Officials Imprison Jeremiah in Jonathan's House (vv. 14b-16)

Zedekiah Requests a Message/Jeremiah Sent to the Court of the Guard (37:17-21)

Zedekiah again requests a word from Jeremiah, which he receives; the word is he will be given into the hand of the Babylonians. This is a message the king had received before (cf. 21:7) but refused to heed. Jeremiah then pleads to the king for release and is sent to the court of the guard.

Zedekiah's Request for a Word from the Lord (v. 17a)

Jeremiah's Response: Zedekiah will be Given to Nebuchadnezzar (v. 17b)

Jeremiah's Defense and Plea to Zedekiah for Release (vv. 18-20)

Zedekiah's Response: Jeremiah is Sent to the Court of the Guard (v. 21)

Jeremiah Cast into a Cistern by the King's Officials (38:1-6)

Once again Jeremiah falls victim to the officials' rage toward his message, which they see as doing harm to Jerusalem's residents. They appeal to the king to deal with the prophet as they see fit. Zedekiah submits to them. Rather than executing him immediately, they lower him down into Malchiah's cistern in the court of the guard.

The Officials are Angered by Jeremiah's Message (vv. 1-3)

The Officials' Accuse Jeremiah Before the King (v. 4)

Zedekiah's Response: Jeremiah is Given into Their Hands (v. 5)

The Officials Cast Jeremiah into the Cistern (v. 6)

Jeremiah Rescued from the Cistern and Returned to the Court of the Guard (38:7-13)

Jeremiah is saved from death by a foreigner, Ebed-melech, an Ethiopian eunuch, who appeals to the king for Jeremiah's life. Zedekiah orders him to take thirty men and bring up the prophet from the pit. Jeremiah is then returned to the court of the guard.

Ebed-Melech's Plea to Zedekiah for Jeremiah's Release (vv. 7-9)

Zedekiah's Response: Free Jeremiah from the Cistern (v. 10)

Ebed-Melech Frees Jeremiah from the Cistern (v. 13a)

Conclusion: Jeremiah Returns to the Court of the Guard (v. 13b)

Zedekiah Seeks Out Jeremiah and Requests a Message from the Lord (38:14-28)

Zedekiah secretly requests a message from Jeremiah. He is told that if he surrenders, he will save his life and spare Jerusalem from destruction. If he does not, Jeremiah sees a vision of the king's concubines singing of his betrayal. Rather than an outright rejection, he tells Jeremiah to say nothing about this prophecy, because he fears his officials. Nevertheless, this presents Zedekiah's last chance to submit to the will of the Lord. The section ends with Jeremiah remaining in the court of the guard

Zedekiah's Request for a Word from the Lord (vv. 14-16)

Jeremiah's Response: Zedekiah Must Surrender (vv. 17-18)

Zedekiah's Response: He Fears the Judeans who had Deserted (v. 19)

Jeremiah's Response: Plea to Obey the Word of the Lord (vv. 20-23)

Zedekiah's Response: Keep the Message a Secret (vv. 24-25)

The Word is Hidden from the Officials (v. 27)

Conclusion: Jeremiah Returns to the Court of the Guard (v. 28)

The Fall of Jerusalem (39:1-18)

This final section describes the fall of Jerusalem, a tragic event that vindicates Jeremiah as a true prophet of the Lord. It also provides a positive ending to Jeremiah's persecution at the hands of Zedekiah and his officials. He is released from prison and shown kindness by Nebuzaradan, a Babylonian official. Additionally, Ebed-melech receives an oracle that his life will be spared.

The Walls of Jerusalem are Breached (vv. 1-3)

Zedekiah Captured (vv. 4-7)

Jerusalem Destroyed (vv. 8-10)

Jeremiah Released from Prison by Nebuzaradan (vv. 11-14)

Oracle Concerning Ebed-melech's Salvation (vv. 15-18)