*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

July 29 – August 3

*The Prophet Jeremiah*

**Monday, July 29 Jeremiah 37:1-21**

*“What have I done that I should be imprisoned?”*

Judah sued for peace with king Nebuchadnezzar in 597BC, and king Jehoiachin was deported to Babylon. His uncle Zedekiah was placed on the throne of Judah by the Babylonians. He would remain king until the final destruction of Jerusalem in 586BC. In 588BC, an Egyptian army is moving toward Judah, threatening the Babylonian army which is once again laying siege to Jerusalem. This leads to a temporary departure of the Babylonians. During this time, Jeremiah receives a revelation from the Lord: Babylon will return and destroy the city.

When Jeremiah tries to leave Jerusalem to visit his tribal homeland, he is arrested, flogged and imprisoned, having been charged with attempting to defect to the Babylonians. Later, King Zedekiah sends for Jeremiah. Having earlier requested that Jeremiah pray to God for Jerusalem (verse 3), he now asks Jeremiah if he has a word from the Lord. After Jeremiah gives him God’s revelation, he asks why he is being mistreated for speaking what God has given him to say. The implied point is that he has told the truth and is being persecuted for it.

*We pray, Lord, for those imprisoned for speaking your truth. Amen.*

**Tuesday, July 30 Jeremiah 38:1-13**

*“They lowered him by ropes into an empty cistern”*

The Judean officials are angry with Jeremiah because his words about Babylonian supremacy are discouraging, weakening the resolve of the people and of the relatively few Judean fighting men still left to defend the city. These officials have much autonomy in dealing with people considered to be traitors, as Zedekiah concedes in verse 5. The officials lower Jeremiah into a cistern that has mud but no water, not only trapping him but putting him in a place where it’s hard to move or to rest.

One of the palace officials named Ebed-Melech courageously approaches Zedekiah to overturn the order consigning Jeremiah to a slow and painful death. He secures an agreement from the king and goes with thirty men to pull the weakened prophet from the muddy cistern. Jeremiah is freed from the cistern, but he is still kept under confinement with Zedekiah’s guards. The actions of Ebed-Melech later receive a commendation of God and the promise of personal deliverance when the Babylonians finally take the city (see 39:15-18).

*May I, Lord, like Ebed-Melech act with courage on my convictions. Amen.*

**Wednesday, July 31 Jeremiah 38:14-28**

*“King Zedekiah sent for Jeremiah”*

Although Jeremiah is imprisoned under royal guard for his unwanted prophecies, King Zedekiah is not through with the prophet. As in earlier cases, the king seeks spiritual advice from Jeremiah. Initially, Jeremiah seeks assurance that he will not be killed, and the king swears not to hand the prophet over to those who want to take his life. We learn from the text that Zedekiah is as worried about his personal safety and future as he is about the city and the state. Jeremiah sets before the king the alternatives of surrendering and trusting the Lord for his safety or holding out and seeing the Babylonians destroy Jerusalem.

Zedekiah asks Jeremiah not to reveal their conversation. This is another indication of the king’s divided mind and his vacillation with respect to listening to the prophet. One gains the impression from all this that both Jeremiah and Zedekiah are the subject of rumor and conspiracy, and that Zedekiah has precious few people whom he can trust. The chapter concludes with the comment that Jeremiah remained in the courtyard of the guard until the Babylonians took the city.

*After all is said and done, Lord, all who trust you will be safe. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

July 29 – August 3

T*he Prophet Jeremiah*

**Thursday, August 1 Jeremiah 39:1-18**

*“The king of Babylon pronounced judgment on Zedekiah”*

The chapter begins with the fall of Jerusalem in 586BC but quickly shifts to a description of Zedekiah’s fate, which is essentially the same as that of the city and people. He attempts to escape the consequences of Jerusalem’s fall by fleeing to the Jordan Valley, but is caught by the Babylonian army with gruesome results. His sons (and potential heirs) are slain in his presence along with other Judean nobles. The Judean king is then blinded so that the last thing he sees is the death of family and friends. He is then bound in fetters like other Judean exiles and taken to Babylon. This is the last we know of King Zedekiah.

Nebuchadnezzar himself orders that Jeremiah be released from confinement. Reasons for this release are not cited, but perhaps Nebuchadnezzar has heard secondhand that a Judean prophet proclaimed his supremacy. Moreover, the Babylonians turn him over to Gedaliah of the family of Shaphan, whose members had been supportive of Jeremiah. We learn in the next chapter that Nebuchadnezzar appoints Gedaliah as governor of Judah.

*Those who turn away from you, Lord, will not escape judgment. Amen.*

**Friday, August 2 Jeremiah 40:1-6**

*“Come to Babylon, or stay here”*

Nebuzaradan, a Babylonian official, addresses Jeremiah, stating that God has given Judah and Jerusalem into the hands of Babylon in order to judge them. This may sound strange to modern readers, but many people in antiquity affirmed the power of a local deity in its sphere of influence. There is no reason to suspect sarcasm or insincerity on the part of Nebuzaradan.

Jeremiah is also given a choice whether to go to Babylon or remain in the land with Gedaliah. From the point of view of personal security, it would likely be better for Jeremiah to accompany Nebuchadnezzar to Babylon, but he chooses to remain with the remnant in the land. In this choice the prophet signals a commitment to the land and to renewal, just like his symbolic purchase of property during the siege of Jerusalem. So Jeremiah becomes a member of the remnant band associated with Gedaliah, seemingly knowing nothing about the plot against the governor (see tomorrow’s passage). That Jeremiah is given provisions and money by the Babylonians is recognition on their part that the prophet predicted their success.

*Even those who don’t worship you, Lord, can recognize your power. Amen.*

**Saturday, August 3 Jeremiah 40:7-16**

*“The Babylonians mean you no harm”*

Remnants of Judeans begin to gather around Gedaliah at Mitzpah, about five miles north of Jerusalem. Included in the group are Ishmael and Johanan, two people whose actions will affect the fortunes of Judah and the prophet Jeremiah. Johanan is a member of the Judean army and also seemingly well-connected to the remaining officials in Judah. Ishmael is related to the royal family of Judah. Johanan discovers (we don’t know how) that Baalis, king of the Ammonites, has concocted a plot with Ishmael to assassinate Gedaliah. Johanan reveals this to the governor, but Gedaliah does not believe the report.

When the Babylonian army first marched into the area, a number of Judeans had fled their homes to take up residence in surrounding territories. Now that the main elements of the Babylonian army have gone back to Babylon, many of these Judeans return to see what remains of their former property. Gedaliah’s comment to them – “Live in the towns you have taken over” – indicates that the control of land has now passed to them and to others who remain.

*Protect us, Lord, from those who would do your people harm. Amen.*