

August 27

Jeremiah 37-38

At the time that Nebuchadnezzar withdrew his army to deal with the threat created by the Pharaoh of Egypt, there must have been a brief period of Euphoria. During this time, Jeremiah was apparently free to come and go among the people of Jerusalem. While enjoying his brief moment of freedom Jeremiah thought it prudent to go as far as he could out of the grasp of the king. He had this newly purchased property that he really wanted to check out. I'll bet he thought, "I want to at least look at it even if I'm never going to have the opportunity to live there." He was leaving the city very quietly one morning when the king's officers saw him going. They viewed that thinking he was deserting the Babylonians...which of course is what he was telling everyone else to do. So he was arrested. Since we don't have a firm fix on the period of time covered by these chapters, we don't really know whether he was imprisoned for days or weeks in the dungeon, the courtyard and the cistern. My guess is that it was no longer than a few months. If it were not for the intervention of Ebed-Melec the Cushite (translation: servant of the king the Ethiopian) who was probably some kind of diplomat or ambassador, Jeremiah might not have survived those months. How awesome of God to provide a man, in the middle of enemy territory, to show compassion on Jeremiah and aid in his rescue. Little does Ebed-Melec know that his act of kindness will be returned to him. Looking ahead to tomorrow's reading we will see that God saved Ebed-Melec from being handed over to the Babylonians because he trusted in the Lord. Quite the opposite from what we will see in King Zedekiah.

Throughout Jeremiah's "imprisonments" and even after he was released he was sought after by King Zedekiah...who was basket case. He for so long denied that Jeremiah was truly speaking for the Lord, but then he would send messengers to Jeremiah to find out what the Lord might say about what would happen next. Amazing isn't it? Jeremiah told him, however I'm very sure that he would have preferred not to. If it were not so tragic, Jeremiah's dealings with Zedekiah in these last weeks of the king's reign would be really comical. It's as though Zedekiah was saying, "I don't like what you say, so I will put you in prison or let you be dropped down a well. But, I desperately want to know what is going to happen and I know you really do speak for God, so let's talk- in secret of course. If you tell anyone I'll deny it and kill you...but, let's talk anyway." Ludicrous isn't it?

Jeremiah faithfully administers the messages to Zedekiah but he won't listen. In response to Zedekiah's fear that he will be handed over to the Babylonians, Jeremiah says, "They will not hand you over. Obey the Lord by doing what I will tell you. Then it will go well with you, and your life will be spared. But, if you refuse to surrender, this is what the Lord has revealed to me...all your wives and children will be brought out to the Babylonians. You yourself will not escape from their hands but will be captured by the king of Babylon; and this city will be burned down."

Zedekiah even at the 11th hour could have reversed this thing if he had just continued the feeble reform program begun when the slaves were freed. But he missed it. Trust. Obedience. Surrender. This is what Jeremiah was asking Zedekiah to do. Just minutes before destruction, the king could have at least eased his punishment and saved the destruction of the city, but his fear and pride got in the way.