



The **Fiery** Bones

Jeremiah 20:9

Text

Jeremiah 37:1-21

Topic

Zedekiah secretly visits Jeremiah
in a makeshift dungeon to discuss the fate of Jerusalem

Title

"Dungeons & Dramatics"

Introduction

Jonathan Edwards is a former British Olympic champion in the triple jump. Due to his strong Christian beliefs during his athletic career he initially refused to compete on Sundays.

Following his retirement as an athlete Edwards worked as a sports commentator and presenter for BBC television. He also presented episodes of the BBC Christian worship program, *Songs of Praise*, until he renounced his faith in 2007.

"I lost my faith when I retired," he was quoted as saying. "Retirement is very traumatic. You stop doing what you love, what you are very good at, the thing that has given you your identity. You have to start again. At a time when your contemporaries are nearing the peak of their professional lives, you are over the hill. How do you prepare for life after being an athlete?"

You and I hear that and say, "It's time to quit whining and put on your big-boy pants," but the truth is that it is not uncommon for a person to encounter a life-changing event that puts their confidence in God's Word to the test.

Confidence in God's Word was put to the test when the Babylonian troops besieging Jerusalem suddenly retreated. It seemed contrary to everything Jeremiah had prophesied for decades.

Then Jeremiah was accused of trying to defect to the Babylonians and was beaten and incarcerated in a makeshift dungeon.

Some event, or some evil, may come upon you personally or upon those you love. However minor it may seem to others, it will be major to you. God's Word - perhaps a promise He's made - will seem almost voided. How will you respond?

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Don't Let Events Shake Your Confidence In God's Word, and #2 Don't Let Evils Shake Your Confidence In God's Word.

#1 Don't Let Events Shake Your Confidence In God's Word

(v1-10)

Babylon's troops were besieging Jerusalem for the third time and this time they were poised to destroy the city and its Temple. It was all exactly as Jeremiah had prophesied.

Then something dramatic happened that seemed to contradict God's Word through Jeremiah. Hearing of an Egyptian threat behind them, the Babylonians suddenly broke-off their siege and withdrew their troops.

What was happening? Had God repented of His prophesied judgment? Let's see how it all played-out and how Jeremiah - whose prophesies suddenly seemed suspicious - responded.

Jeremiah 37:1 Now King Zedekiah the son of Josiah reigned instead of Coniah the son of Jehoiakim, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon made king in the land of Judah.

Jeremiah 37:2 But neither he nor his servants nor the people of the land gave heed to the words of the LORD which He spoke by the prophet Jeremiah.

Zedekiah had been appointed by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon to govern Judah. Historians tell us he made an alliance with Egypt in order to get out from under the yoke of Babylon. It was his betrayal of Nebuchadnezzar that incited this third attack.

Meanwhile Jeremiah had been telling the kings of Judah to submit to Nebuchadnezzar and that they would be subject to Babylon for seventy years. It was the Word of The Lord and Jeremiah had not wavered from it. With the armies upon them it seemed to confirm the truth of his prophecies.

Jeremiah 37:3 And Zedekiah the king sent Jehucal the son of Shelemiah, and Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah, the priest, to the prophet Jeremiah, saying, "Pray now to the LORD our God for us."

Jeremiah 37:4 Now Jeremiah was coming and going among the people, for they had not yet put him in prison.

Jeremiah 37:5 Then Pharaoh's army came up from Egypt; and when the Chaldeans who were besieging Jerusalem heard news of them, they departed from Jerusalem.

Jeremiah 37:6 Then the word of the LORD came to the prophet Jeremiah, saying,

Jeremiah 37:7 "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Thus you shall say to the king of Judah, who sent you to Me to inquire of Me: "Behold, Pharaoh's army which has come up to help you will return to Egypt, to their own land.

Jeremiah 37:8 And the Chaldeans shall come back and fight against this city, and take it and burn it with fire." '

If I'm reading this correctly, the Babylonians withdrew and Zedekiah sent to ask Jeremiah if, in fact, God had repented of what he had been prophesying for some years and was going to spare Jerusalem from judgment.

Jeremiah insisted that the withdrawal precipitated by Egypt was merely a forestalling of the inevitable.

Think of it from Jeremiah's point of view. Powerful circumstantial evidence seemed to prove your prophecies to be wrong. Instead of the Babylonians breaching the walls and burning the city they had withdrawn - so much so, as we will see in a moment, that anyone who wanted could leave Jerusalem and travel freely in the surrounding regions and towns.

Add to that a couple of biblical facts:

1. First, some hundred years or so earlier God had repented of His judgment when Hezekiah was king and instead sent an angel into the camp of the besieging Assyrian army to kill 185,000 soldiers.
2. Second, Jonah had once announced doom upon Nineveh only to see God repent and spare them.

Was something like that happening again? Sadly, no, because unlike Hezekiah and the Ninevites, the citizens of Judah did not and would not repent. We just read that they "gave no heed" to the Word of God.

Still, if you were Jeremiah, this could be disheartening to say the least. Everything pointed to you being wrong about the most important thing you'd ever said. It was a very challenging event to say the least.

We say that all things are working together for the good but there can be huge periods of time when we don't **see** the good and can't even imagine it ever coming.

All of us have events - some life changing, some life challenging. Circumstantial evidence can point to a failure in the Word of God or, at least, a promise that now seems unlikely to be kept.

We **say** that all things are working together for the good but there can be huge periods of time when we don't **see** the good and can't even imagine it ever coming.

We all know people who had an event that shook them up so much they turned to The Lord. You might also know Christians - I know I do - who had an event that shook them up and they became embittered with The Lord. It's more common than we'd like to admit.

What did Jeremiah do?

Jeremiah 37:9 Thus says the LORD: 'Do not deceive yourselves, saying, "The Chaldeans will surely depart from us," for they will not depart.

Jeremiah 37:10 For though you had defeated the whole army of the Chaldeans who fight against you, and there remained only wounded men among them, they would rise up, every man in his tent, and burn the city with fire.' "

Jeremiah not only remained confident in God's revealed Word; he emphasized it all the more. In face of contrary circumstantial evidence he made the bold assertion that God's Word could not possibly fail. The Chaldean's had withdrawn but would return. Even if the Jews were to somehow defeat the Chaldeans in battle, a handful of their wounded would still fulfill God's Word.

This wasn't blind faith. As we already pointed out, Jeremiah knew God hadn't repented of the coming judgment because the Jews had refused to repent. Jeremiah's confidence was based upon both the Word of God **and** the character of God.

He knew God could never contradict Himself. Though He could conceivably turn away His judgment, it could only be in response to genuine national repentance.

In a court of law circumstantial evidence can be very powerful. Much of the evidence against convicted American bomber Timothy McVeigh was circumstantial. Speaking about McVeigh's trial, University of Michigan law professor Robert Precht said, "Circumstantial evidence can be, and often is much more powerful than direct evidence."

The 2004 murder trial of Scott Peterson was another high-profile conviction based heavily on circumstantial evidence.

Beware of allowing circumstantial evidence to challenge what God has said and Who God is. His revelation, and especially His promises to you, are all true and Amen despite what you may be experiencing at any given point along your journey homeward to Heaven.

Throw all that out when it comes to spiritual matters. Abraham comes to mind. All the promises God made him were dependent upon he and Sarah having a son when

they were past childbearing. Then, once they had the son, Abraham was asked to kill him in a sacrifice.

Circumstantial evidence was always against God fulfilling His promises to Abraham. But He did and He is still doing it today.

Beware of allowing circumstantial evidence to challenge what God has said and Who God is. His revelation, and especially His promises to you, are all true and Amen despite what you may be experiencing at any given point along your journey homeward to Heaven.

#2 Don't Let Evils Shake Your Confidence In God's Word

(v11-21)

A false accusation led to a great evil being done against Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 37:11 And it happened, when the army of the Chaldeans left the siege of Jerusalem for fear of Pharaoh's army, Jeremiah 37:12 that Jeremiah went out of Jerusalem to go into the land of Benjamin to claim his property there among the people.

Jeremiah 37:13 And when he was in the Gate of Benjamin, a captain of the guard was there whose name was Irijah the son of Shelemiah, the son of Hananiah; and he seized Jeremiah the prophet, saying, "You are defecting to the Chaldeans!"

Jeremiah 37:14 Then Jeremiah said, "False! I am not defecting to the Chaldeans." But he did not listen to him. So Irijah seized Jeremiah and brought him to the princes.

Jeremiah was a loyal patriot. He loved his country and his people. To be accused of defecting was a terrible and evil thing.

Jeremiah 37:15 Therefore the princes were angry with Jeremiah, and they struck him and put him in prison in the house of Jonathan the scribe. For they had made that the prison.

"Struck him" probably means he was flogged - a very, very serious and painful legal beating. All this without regard for any hearing or trial.

There were no prisons in Jerusalem so they used a portion of the house of Jonathan to hold Jeremiah. It was probably an underground cistern - a dank, empty water reservoir.

Can you say, "Life's not fair?" It isn't and all of us will experience evil in our lifetimes. It might be on a large scale, like Jeremiah's beating and incarceration. It might be something most people would consider petty. But either way it can cause you to lose confidence in God's Word.

Much of the philosophy I studied at the University of California Riverside was the modern response to the two world wars fought in the twentieth century. Intellectuals and academics, as well as average Joe's and Jane's, could not reconcile how there could be an omnipotent and loving God in the face of the horrors of those conflicts. They rejected the notion of God altogether on account of the evils that were so evident.

What did Jeremiah do?

Jeremiah 37:16 When Jeremiah entered the dungeon and the cells, and Jeremiah had remained there many days,
Jeremiah 37:17 then Zedekiah the king sent and took him out. The king asked him secretly in his house, and said, "Is there any word from the LORD?" And Jeremiah said, "There is." Then he said, "You shall be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon!"

Jeremiah went right on boldly proclaiming the very same Word of God he had been delivering. The presence of evil - even evil done against him, allowed by God to touch him - did not dissuade him from trusting God's Word.

We've already talked a lot, in previous studies, about the theological issue of evil with regard to the omnipotence and love of God. Today I will only say that it does you no good to remove God from the discussion. It may be hard for some to come to grips with why or how the omnipotent loving God allows evil; but if you reject Him the only alternative is hopelessness.

Those who reject God because of the presence of evil have adopted the philosophy of Satan. When Satan appeared in Heaven before God in the opening chapters of the Book of Job he insisted that if anything evil befell Job that he would renounce God and cease from worshipping Him. The devil uses the so-called 'problem of evil' to entice men and women to renounce God.

God is God in what seems like happenstance; He is God in every circumstance. Don't allow Satan to argue otherwise. Instead be like Jeremiah and go even deeper into God's Word.

Jeremiah 37:18 Moreover Jeremiah said to King Zedekiah, "What offense have I committed against you, against your servants, or against this people, that you have put me in prison?"

Jeremiah 37:19 Where now are your prophets who prophesied to you, saying, 'The king of Babylon will not come against you or against this land?'

There are always other voices to challenge God's Word. They seem true but only for a moment, and even then only in a very shallow, self-serving way. God's Word stands forever.

Jeremiah 37:20 Therefore please hear now, O my lord the king. Please, let my petition be accepted before you, and do not make me return to the house of Jonathan the scribe, lest I die there."

Jeremiah 37:21 Then Zedekiah the king commanded that they should commit Jeremiah to the court of the prison, and that they should give him daily a piece of bread from the bakers' street, until all the bread in the city was gone. Thus Jeremiah remained in the court of the prison.

He remained a prisoner but, really, everyone in the city was again a prisoner when the Babylonians returned; and bread was a delicacy during a siege.

It's a way of reminding us that, believer and nonbeliever, we are all in this together. The difference is that have the words of eternal life. We know the bread of life and can share Him with all men.

Time is too short for us to let events or evils turn us aside from the narrow road we are on that leads to eternal life. Too many hopeless sinners need us to remain confident in God's Word and when life challenges us to go even deeper in our confidence that all things really do work together for the good.