



The **Fiery** Bones

Jeremiah 20:9

Text

Jeremiah 21:1-14

Topic

Jeremiah is consulted as the Babylonian armies begin their final siege of Jerusalem

Title

"Now You Siege Me, Now You Don't"

Introduction

The title of the article was How to Fight Monkeys. You might laugh but monkey attacks are on the rise. In 2007 the deputy mayor of New Delhi, India, fell off his balcony to his death after being attacked by monkeys. In June of this year an American graduate student working as a wildlife ranger at Jane Goodall's famous animal sanctuary in South Africa was dragged for almost a half-mile in a "frenzied" attack.

I, for one, intend to be ready!

How do you fight monkeys? You can try to appease them with food. You can try to chase them off by shaking a stick at them; but they might get violent if cornered. If they don't budge, bop 'em on the head; visitors to temples in India sometimes carry a stick for just this reason.

Primatologists will sometimes send a warning signal called the open-mouth threat. Basically, form an "O" with your mouth, lean toward them with your body and head, and raise your eyebrows.

Female victims might seek protection in a group of men since monkeys are somewhat afraid of males.

Whatever you do, don't freak out; those who scream, wave their arms, and run away are only going to make the monkeys even more aggressive.

In the sixth century BC Jerusalem would find itself surrounded. Not by monkeys; by the brutal Babylonian armies of King Nebuchadnezzar. It was a military siege.

A siege is a blockade of a city or fortress. Sieges involve surrounding the target and blocking the reinforcement or escape of troops or provision of supplies, typically coupled with attempts to reduce the fortifications by means of siege engines or other instruments of destruction.

Failing a military outcome, sieges can often be decided by starvation, thirst or disease, which can afflict either the attacker or the defender.

Our verses are set against another historic siege, that of Jerusalem by the Babylonian armies of King Nebuchadnezzar.

They are, however, about something more than an ancient army besieging an ancient city. They are about us, as disciples of the Lord, often being blockaded, beset, and besieged as we seek to serve the Lord.

And they are about what can happen to those who turn away from the Lord, who need His discipline in their lives.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 When You Are Besieged As A Disciple Your Proper Response Is To Endure, and #2 When You Are Besieged As A Discipline Your Proper Response Is To Surrender.

#1 When You Are Besieged As A Disciple
Your Proper Response Is To Endure

(v1-2)

This chapter leaps ahead to about 588BC.

Why put it here, out of chronological order? To emphasize a spiritual truth.

When we last saw Jeremiah he had been brutally flogged for preaching in the Temple. He'd been put overnight in the stocks. Although he went on preaching with boldness, he was discouraged, disheartened, despairing of life itself. The people were mocking him because his predictions of Babylon coming against them, to destroy their city, were not coming to pass.

The very next thing you read, that God wants you to know, is that Jeremiah was right all along.

Jeremiah 21:1-2

1 The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord when King Zedekiah sent to him Pashhur the son of Melchiah, and Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah, the priest, saying,

2 "Please inquire of the Lord for us, for Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon makes war against us. Perhaps the Lord will deal with us according to all His wonderful works, that the king may go away from us."

Babylon came against Judah in three waves. The first group of captives to be led away to Babylon included the prophet Daniel in 605BC. A few years later in 597BC ten thousand captives, including the prophet Ezekiel, followed.

Our verses are set in 588BC, eighteen months before the siege in which the city and the Temple would be burned to the ground. The Babylonians were forming a distant blockade but had not yet besieged the city.

Zedekiah was not the king; not really. He was a governor that Nebuchadnezzar had appointed to run things. Zedekiah, however, thought he could ally with Egypt and rebel against Nebuchadnezzar. His rebellion led to the destruction of the city.

One more quick note. The Pashhur of these verses is a different Pashhur than the chief of the Temple police who had Jeremiah flogged and put in the stocks.

At the end of chapter twenty Jeremiah cursed the day he was born. He was so discouraged he tried to quit. Chapter twenty-one testifies that the things Jeremiah had been predicting had now arrived. It was real; it was true. His mockers and persecutors now sought him out as perhaps the only one who could intercede on their behalf.

You might say that Jeremiah had been besieged long before Jerusalem ever was. For many decades his own people had besieged him. He had been cut-off and made to suffer. Surrounded on all sides by mockers. But he endured to the end.

You are a disciple of Jesus Christ. During your time on earth, walking with the Lord, you will face enemy blockades. You will be beset on every side. You might be besieged for your entire life on the earth.

Second Corinthians 4:8 says, "we are hard pressed on every side..." The apostle Paul described his trials in Ephesus as fighting against "wild beasts." To the Thessalonians he said that Satan had broken-up the road ahead of him, hindering his progress. In Second Timothy 4:16 Paul described a time when "no one stood with me." We could go on and on but I think you get the idea.

You will want to quit. **Don't.**

When the enemy blocks and besets and besieges you the only reasonable strategy is to endure because you are walking with the Lord of all the earth in His truth which must come to pass exactly as He has said.

Learn from Jeremiah that God is worthy of your enduring to the end.

#2 When You Are Besieged As A Discipline Your Proper Response Is To Surrender

(v3-14)

Almost 200 years earlier the Assyrian armies had surrounded Jerusalem. King Hezekiah consulted the prophet Isaiah. Hezekiah prayed. The next morning he awoke to find that 185,000 Assyrian troops did not awaken. The angel of the Lord had been dispatched from Heaven to kill them overnight. The rest of the Assyrians withdrew; Jerusalem was spared.

That is essentially what Zedekiah was thinking would happen when he consulted Jeremiah. The Jews figured God would never allow His city and His Temple to fall.

They had quite a surprise in store.

Jeremiah 21:3-7

3 Then Jeremiah said to them, "Thus you shall say to Zedekiah,
4 'Thus says the Lord God of Israel: "Behold, I will turn back the weapons of war that are in your hands, with which you fight against the king of Babylon and the Chaldeans who besiege you outside the walls; and I will assemble them in the midst of this city.
5 I Myself will fight against you with an outstretched hand and with a strong arm, even in anger and fury and great wrath.
6 I will strike the inhabitants of this city, both man and beast; they shall die of a great pestilence.

7 And afterward," says the Lord, "I will deliver Zedekiah king of Judah, his servants and the people, and such as are left in this city from the pestilence and the sword and the famine, into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of those who seek their life; and he shall strike them with the edge of the sword. He shall not spare them, or have pity or mercy." ' 1

They be overcome by the siege because God Himself was fighting against them. He was fighting against them in the sense that He was the one who had brought the invaders as a discipline for their idolatries and their refusal to repent.

The difference in Hezekiah's day was that he had led the people in spiritual reforms. He destroyed foreign altars and idols. The Jews in Zedekiah's time were steeped in idolatry of the most wicked kind and rudely refused to repent.

The stories we have in the Bible are not so much about God's *works* as they are His *ways*. By that I mean we're not looking for God to repeat Himself the way Zedekiah was. No, we're learning God will be Himself and act according to His nature and character. Zedekiah found a Bible story that was sort of like the predicament he was in and was counting on God to act mechanically, the way He'd acted before. Something much deeper was going on. God wanted to act mercifully but it required repentance.

You are therefore watching as God, who had given fair warning, was disciplining His people. What should they do?

Jeremiah 21:8-10

8 "Now you shall say to this people, 'Thus says the Lord: "Behold, I set before you the way of life and the way of death.

9 He who remains in this city shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence; but he who goes out and defects to the Chaldeans who besiege you, he shall live, and his life shall be as a prize to him.

10 For I have set My face against this city for adversity and not for good," says the Lord. "It shall be given into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire." '

The term "Chaldeans" is sometimes used to refer to Babylon after they had defeated the Assyrians and grew to a world-dominating empire.

Jeremiah told them to surrender and he did so using an illustration we miss but that they would understand. He said, "he who goes out and defects... he shall live, and his life shall be a prize to him." When soldiers came back from battle they brought back with them the prizes, the spoils, of their victory. If they came back with nothing it signified they had been defeated and the only 'prize' was that they were still alive.

Jeremiah was depicting the citizens of Jerusalem as an army that had already lost. Though the final destruction was still eighteen months in their future, it was over because God had determined the outcome. They may as well agree with God and surrender - admit defeat and have their lives as a prize - otherwise they'd be killed.

The commentators get sidetracked here talking about patriotism and whether Jeremiah was a traitor or committing treason. He wasn't.

It reminds me of that soul-stirring scene in *Chariots of Fire* where the politico's are trying to force Eric Liddle to deny his beliefs and run in the Olympics on what he considered the Sabbath. He said to them, "God made countries, God makes kings, and the rules by which they govern. And those rules say that the Sabbath is His. And I for one intend to keep it that way."

The truly patriotic thing for the Jews to do would have been to unconditionally surrender. They'd be surrendering to God.

This was a case in which God was besieging them as a discipline. They had refused to repent of their sin. Worse, they assumed God must deliver them from destruction in order to preserve His name and His glory. They were therefore spiritually blackmailing God - doing whatever immoral, idolatrous thing they wanted to all the while thinking He must defend them for His own sake.

Christians still do this today - blackmail God - or at least think they can. They know exactly what His Word says but they defy it, they go their own way according to their own desires, thinking God has forgiven them in advance so what's the big deal. I can't say how or when God will deal with each person but I know that as a loving Father He won't ignore disciplining them for their own good.

God disciplines His children. He did it then; He does it now. If you are pursuing sin, thinking God will defend and deliver you because He'll be embarrassed if you fall, watch out. He's more likely to discipline you openly.

When God disciplines you, the truly spiritual thing to do, the only reasonable thing, is to unconditionally surrender to Him. Endure His discipline because He is your Father who loves you.

Before you get to that, why not repent? God always gives you space to repent. Get back on track with the Lord.

The chapter ends hopefully.

Jeremiah 21:11-14

11 "And concerning the house of the king of Judah, say, 'Hear the word of the Lord,

12 O house of David! Thus says the Lord: "Execute judgment in the morning; And deliver him who is plundered Out of the hand of the oppressor, Lest My fury go forth like fire And burn so that no one can quench it, Because of the evil of your doings.

13 "Behold, I am against you, O inhabitant of the valley, And rock of the plain," says the Lord, "Who say, 'Who shall come down against us? Or who shall enter our dwellings?'

14 But I will punish you according to the fruit of your doings," says the Lord; "I will kindle a fire in its forest, And it shall devour all things around it." ' "

Why exhort the "house of David," seeing that they were about to be taken captive and exiled to Babylon?

It's a promise that God would restore them to their land, to their city, to their Temple - and to Himself. When He did, they should return to walking in ways befitting kings and the citizens of their great God and Savior and thereby avoid future discipline.

It also served as a warning that should they fail He would again, and again, and again, bring discipline upon them.

Rather than wonder if God is disciplining you, just repent of any known sin or sins. If you know that He is disciplining you, surrender yourself to Him and watch Him restore you.

Meantime remember that you will be blocked, beset, and besieged as you walk with the Lord and seek to serve Him. It goes with the territory of discipleship.

Writing about endurance Charles Spurgeon said,

[endurance] SHOULD BE THE GREAT CARE OF EVERY CHRISTIAN - his daily and his nightly care. O beloved! I conjure you by the love of God, and by the love of your own souls, be faithful unto death. Have you difficulties? You must conquer them... But ye cannot persevere except by much watchfulness in the closet, much carefulness over every action, much dependance upon the strong hand of the Holy Spirit who alone can make you stand. Walk and live as in the sight of God, knowing where your great strength lieth, and depend upon it you shall yet sing that sweet doxology in Jude, "Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever...

Endure to the end. You *can* endure because you know the end and you have all the help you need to get there in the Person of Jesus Christ, in the indwelling Holy Spirit, and by the inspired Word of God.