

Series: God Cares #1483

Title: Jeremiah 37

Jeremiah Goes to Jail

Thank you for joining me today from wherever you are and by however you listen as we meet together coast-to-coast here in the United States and all the way around the world! Our message here on *God Is* has been that God cares for us. We have talked about God's care for us when we are in danger, when we face rejection, and when we are angry. Today I want to talk with you about God's care for His people who are in prison. As I do this, I have in mind two audiences. My primary audience are incarcerated men and women who listen to this radio broadcast. You, and your families.

God cares for you if you are family to someone now behind bars. You may be a husband, a wife, a boyfriend or girlfriend, a son or a daughter, a father or a mother, and a brother or a sister of a prisoner. Someone you know and love is incarcerated for a short time or a long time, even for life, perhaps even on death row. This is *hard*. How do you keep on? At first you visited your loved one, but slowly and over time it was hard to keep going. You never knew when there would be a sudden lockdown and your long scheduled visit would be cancelled with no notice. While it is sometimes hard to admit, you have disowned the person you love who is an inmate, especially if you are not sure if they will ever get out. Or, you have another circumstance. I hope you will receive the love, care, empathy, and mercy of Jesus as you listen.

And for you, incarcerated as you are, in Jeremiah you will meet a man of God who languished in prison, more like a dungeon. He was not just in prison, but in the worst possible place in a penitentiary - solitary confinement. He was the recipient of abuse at the hands of the guards, one in particular who held a grudge against Jeremiah. And he feared for his life when even his basic needs were not provided for. He experienced neglect. He was imprisoned under false accusations, which *some* of you are or, at least, your time far exceeds your crime. It is unjust and unfair what has happened to you. Well, those of you in these circumstances, I believe you can relate, deeply, to this man Jeremiah. You are primary, in my mind and heart.

I remember you. I pray for you. And I want to hear from you. Do you listen and haven't written to me yet? Or you have not written in a while? Please reach out to me. God Is, PO Box 802 Winchester Massachusetts 01890. That's God Is, PO Box 802 Winchester Massachusetts 01890. Winchester is spelled W-I-N-C-H-E-S-T-E-R.

For those of you with access to email, like CorrLinks, my email address is mark@godisministry.org, that's m-a-r-k@godisministry.o-r-g. I am on CorrLinks. I promise that if you will take time to write to me, I will write back and establish a correspondence. I know corresponding with you can be slow moving, with mail not getting to you as quickly as those of us on the outside send and receive our mail, but however long it takes, expect to hear back from me. I have given you my mailing address and email address, and both will be repeated at the end so stay tuned, jot these down and write to me. I look forward to hearing from you *and* your family.

My secondary audience are the rest of us, living outside the confines of prison and jail. Let me read to you a verse from the New Testament. This is the Book of Hebrews, chapter 13, a portion of verse 3.

"Remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them..." Again, "Remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them..." (Hebrews 13.3.)

Therein is a command of God, given to us through the writer of the Hebrews, and long preserved in God's Word. Every Christian within the sound of my voice, take this to heart: we are to be people who remember the prisoners. And, notice, it is not only that we remember them, as if a passing thought will do, it is further, that we remember the prisoners as though we are in prison with them. I read that and I wonder: what does it look like for me, practically, to "remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them..." And for myself, I think it can mean many things, and one thing for sure is that this ministry, *God Is*, will be a ministry that always remembers our friends in prison who listen to us. And we will do that now, directly, as we follow Jeremiah to jail.

The Bible has a lot to say, more than you might think, about God's care for prisoners. And since He cares, we care. Jesus, talking of the coming judgment, speaks of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25. In verse 36 He says the sheep, those bound for eternal life in heaven with Christ, visited the prisoner on earth. Jesus says, "**I was in prison and you came to Me.**" As a result of their faith in Christ, they visited prisons. But the goats, those bound for eternity in hell, Jesus says, "**in prison, you did not visit Me.**" Clearly God commands and values that we remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them! Jesus Himself was a prisoner, as were Paul and Peter and Jeremiah, and *more!*

So, all of you are my audience. Please be with us as we turn now to Jeremiah and the first thing I want to do is set the context for our reading, which will be in chapters 37 and 38.

Jeremiah is the author of this Book by his name, and this was written (with the assistance of Baruch, his scribe, to whom Jeremiah dictated his words) this was written between 626 and 585BC. It is 52 chapters and located between Isaiah and Lamentations in our Old Testament. Jeremiah also wrote Lamentations. And he was both a priest and a prophet and he came from a small village called Anathoth which was situated about 3 miles (or 4.8 kilometers) to the northeast of Jerusalem in the area allocated to the tribe of Benjamin. We will read about the land of Benjamin in our text. For the purposes of God, Jeremiah never married.

And he is known as the "weeping prophet," because he shed vast amount of tears over the judgment of God on his people. And especially the destruction that was to come upon Judah and Jerusalem. *I love Jeremiah.* He was very, very human and at the same time very, very godly. Most of all he was *faithful to God.* Despite the outright rejection of the man and his message, Jeremiah persisted in proclaiming God's truth. As we shall see, he lived a hard life. But through all his many tests and trials, problems and persecutions, Jeremiah became one of God's most faithful servants. Friends, I strongly encourage you to read the Book of Jeremiah. There is volumes more to say than we have time for. Read this for yourself. It will greatly bless and benefit you.

The setting is the invasion of the Babylonians, otherwise known as the Chaldeans. They will invade Judah and Jerusalem, because God's people refused to repent of their sins. Jeremiah pleads with the Israelites not to resist the Babylonians/the Chaldeans in order to avert total disaster, but this is then perceived as making Jeremiah a traitor to the Babylonian/the Chaldean side. In these chapters we will look at, Zedekiah is King of Judah. He is the last king of Judah. He was a real coward, vacillating back and forth on advice received from his counsellors. Indecisive and weak, he could not make decisions and stick to them, a real chicken if you ask me. Worst of all, he would not submit to the Lord.

OK, one more piece on background before we get into the text. Because Zedekiah was under siege by the Chaldeans he appealed to the Egyptians for help. At this time Hophra was King of Egypt. As Pharaoh he sent Egyptian soldiers to assist the Jews, and in response the King of the Babylonians, Nebuchadnezzar ordered a temporary stop to his siege on Jerusalem. In Jeremiah 37, verse 5 we read this, "**Pharaoh's army had set out from Egypt; and when the Chaldeans who had been besieging Jerusalem heard the report about them, they lifted the siege from Jerusalem.**"

And that corresponds to Jeremiah 37, verses 11-13 where we meet our man. "**Now it happened when the army of the Chaldeans had lifted the siege from Jerusalem because of Pharaoh's army,¹² that Jeremiah went out from Jerusalem to go to the land of Benjamin in order to take possession of some property there among the people.¹³ While he was at the Gate of Benjamin, a captain of the guard whose name was Irijah, the son of Shelemiah the son of Hananiah was there; and he arrested Jeremiah the prophet, saying, 'You are going over to the Chaldeans!'"**

You heard it. Jeremiah is arrested. Jeremiah is going to jail. Let's pick up here again when you join me, and all these other listeners, next time as together we continue to discover who God Is.

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