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JEREMIAH 38: 1 Shephatiah the son of Mattan, and Gedaliah the son of Pashhur, and Jucal the son of Shelemiah, and Pashhur the son of Malchijah, heard the words that Jeremiah spoke to all the people, saying,

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The princes of Judah, taking offense at Jeremiah on account of his predicting the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by the Chaldeans, cause him to be cast into a deep and miry dungeon, Jer 38:1-6. Ebed-melech, an Ethiopian, gets the king's permission to take him out, Jer 38:7-13. Jeremiah advises the king, who consulted him privately, to surrender to the Chaldeans, Jer 38:14-23. The king promises the prophet that he will not put him to death, and requires him not to reveal what had passed to the princes; to whom he accordingly gives an evasive answer, telling them only so much of the conference as related to his request for his life, Jer 38:24-28.

Verse 1

Then Shephatiah - This was the faction - what Dahler terms the Antitheocratic faction - who were enemies to Jeremiah, and sought his life.

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JEREMIAH 38: 2 Thus says the LORD, He who remains in this city shall die by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence; but he who goes out to the Chaldeans shall live, and his life shall be to him for a prey, and he shall live.

JEREMIAH 38: 3 Thus says the LORD, This city shall surely be given into the hand of the army of the king of Babylon, and he shall take it.

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Verse 3

This city shall surely be given - This was a testimony that he constantly bore: he had the authority of God for it. He knew it was true, and he never wavered nor equivocated.

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JEREMIAH 38: 4 Then the princes said to the king, "Please let this man be put to death; because he weakens the hands of the men of war who remain in this city, and the hands of all the people, in speaking such words to them: for this man doesn't seek the welfare of this people, but the hurt."

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Verse 4

Let this man be put to death - And they gave their reasons plain enough: but the proof was wanting.

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JEREMIAH 38: 5 Zedekiah the king said, Behold, he is in your hand; for the king is not he who can do anything against you.

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Verse 5

He is in your hand - Ye have power to do as you please; I must act by your counsel. Poor weak prince! you respect the prophet, you fear the cabal, and you sacrifice an innocent man to your own weakness and their malice!

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JEREMIAH 38: 6 Then took they Jeremiah, and cast him into the dungeon of Malchijah the king's son, that was in the court of the guard: and they let down Jeremiah with cords. In the dungeon there was no water, but mire; and Jeremiah sank in the mire.

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Verse 6

So Jeremiah sunk in the mire - Their obvious design was, that he might be stifled in that place.

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JEREMIAH 38: 7 Now when Ebedmelech the Ethiopian, a eunuch, who was in the king's house, heard that they had put Jeremiah in the dungeon (the king then sitting in the gate of Benjamin),

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Verse 7

Ebed-melech - The servant of the king one of the eunuchs who belonged to the palace. Perhaps it should be read, "Now, a servant of the king, a Cushite, one of the eunuchs," etc.

The king then sitting in the gate of Benjamin - To give audience, and to administer justice. We have often seen that the gates of cities were the places of public judicature.

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JEREMIAH 38: 8 Ebedmelech went out of the king's house, and spoke to the king, saying,

JEREMIAH 38: 9 My lord the king, these men have done evil in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet, whom they have cast into the dungeon; and he is likely to die in the place where he is, because of the famine; for there is no more bread in the city.

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Verse 9

My lord the king, these men have done evil - He must have been much in the king's confidence, and a humane and noble spirited man, thus to have raised his voice against the powerful cabal already mentioned.

There is no more bread in the city - They had defended it to the last extremity; and it appears that bread had been afforded to the prophet according to the king's commandment, as long as there was any remaining. See Jer 36:21.

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JEREMIAH 38: 10 Then the king commanded Ebedmelech the Ethiopian, saying, Take from here thirty men with you, and take up Jeremiah the prophet out of the dungeon, before he dies.

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Verse 10

Take from hence thirty men - The king was determined that he should be rescued by force, if the princes opposed.

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JEREMIAH 38: 11 So Ebedmelech took the men with him, and went into the house of the king under the treasury, and took there rags and worn-out garments, and let them down by cords into the dungeon to Jeremiah.

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Verse 11

Went into the house of the king - and took thence - The eastern kings had their wardrobes always well furnished; as garments were a usual present to ambassadors, etc. I cannot think that, in the proper acceptation of the words, these were in any part of the king's house.

Old cast clouts, and old rotten rags - The fact seems to be this: there were several garments that had been used, and would not be used again; and there were others which, through continuing long there, had by insects, etc., been rendered useless. These he took, tied to the cord, let down to the prophet, that he might roll them round the ropes, and place them under his arm-pits, so that in being hauled up he might not suffer injury from the ropes, which in this case must sustain the whole weight of his body.

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JEREMIAH 38: 12 Ebedmelech the Ethiopian said to Jeremiah, Put now these rags and worn-out garments under your armpits under the cords. Jeremiah did so.

JEREMIAH 38: 13 So they drew up Jeremiah with the cords, and took him up out of the dungeon: and Jeremiah remained in the court of the guard.

JEREMIAH 38: 14 Then Zedekiah the king sent, and took Jeremiah the prophet to him into the third entry that is in the LORD's house: and the king said to Jeremiah, I will ask you something. Hide nothing from me.

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Verse 14

Into the third entry - A place to enter which two others must be passed through.

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JEREMIAH 38: 15 Then Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, If I declare it to you, will you not surely put me to death? and if I give you counsel, you will not listen to me.

JEREMIAH 38: 16 So Zedekiah the king swore secretly to Jeremiah, saying, As the LORD lives, who made us this soul, I will not put you to death, neither will I give you into the hand of these men who seek your life.

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Verse 16

As the Lord liveth, that made us this soul - He is the living God, and he is the Author of that life which each of us possesses; and as sure as he lives, and we live by him, I will not put thee to death, nor give thee into the hands of those men who seek thy life. A very solemn oath; and the first instance on record of the profane custom of swearing by the soul.

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JEREMIAH 38: 17 Then Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, Thus says the LORD, the God of Armies, the God of Israel: If you will go out to the king of Babylon's princes, then your soul shall live, and this city shall not be burned with fire; and you shall live, and your house.

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Verse 17

Wilt assuredly go - On the king's obedience to the advice of the prophet the safety of the city depended.

Unto the king of Babylon's princes - The generals of the army then returning to the siege from the defeat of the Egyptians; for Nebuchadnezzar himself was then at Riblah, in Syria, Jer 39:5, Jer 39:6.

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JEREMIAH 38: 18 But if you will not go out to the king of Babylon's princes, then shall this city be given into the hand of the Chaldeans, and they shall burn it with fire, and you shall not escape out of their hand.

JEREMIAH 38: 19 Zedekiah the king said to Jeremiah, I am afraid of the Jews who are fallen away to the Chaldeans, lest they deliver me into their hand, and they mock me.

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Verse 19

They mock me - Insult me, and exhibit me in triumph.

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JEREMIAH 38: 20 But Jeremiah said, They shall not deliver you. Obey, I beg you, the voice of the LORD, in that which I speak to you: so it shall be well with you, and your soul shall live.

JEREMIAH 38: 21 But if you refuse to go out, this is the word that the LORD has shown me:

JEREMIAH 38: 22 behold, all the women who are left in the king of Judah's house shall be brought out to the king of Babylon's princes, and those women shall say, Your familiar friends have set you on, and have prevailed over you. Your feet are sunk in the mire, they have turned away back.

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Verse 22

All the women - brought forth - I think this place speaks of a kind of defection among the women of the harem; many of whom had already gone forth privately to the principal officers of the Chaldean army, and made the report mentioned in the end of this verse. These were the concubines or women of the second rank.

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JEREMIAH 38: 23 They shall bring out all your wives and your children to the Chaldeans; and you shall not escape out of their hand, but shall be taken by the hand of the king of Babylon: and you shall cause this city to be burned with fire.

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Verse 23

They shall bring out all thy wives and thy children - These were the women of the first rank, by whom the king had children. These had no temptation to go out to the Chaldeans, nor would they have been made welcome; but the others being young, and without children, would be well received by the Chaldean princes.

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JEREMIAH 38: 24 Then Zedekiah said to Jeremiah, Let no man know of these words, and you shall not die.

JEREMIAH 38: 25 But if the princes hear that I have talked with you, and they come to you, and tell you, Declare to us now what you have said to the king; don't hide it from us, and we will not put you to death; also what the king said to you:

JEREMIAH 38: 26 then you shall tell them, I presented my supplication before the king, that he would not cause me to return to Jonathan's house, to die there.

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Verse 26

I presented my supplication - This was telling the truth, and nothing but the truth, but not the whole truth. The king did not wish him to defile his conscience, nor did he propose any thing that was not consistent with the truth.

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JEREMIAH 38: 27 Then came all the princes to Jeremiah, and asked him; and he told them according to all these words that the king had commanded. So they left off speaking with him; for the matter was not perceived.

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Verse 27

The matter was not perceived - They did not question him farther; and the king's commandment to remove him from the house of Jonathan being well known, they took for granted that they had all the information that they sought. And he was most certainly not obliged to relate any thing that might embroil this weak king with his factious but powerful princes, or affect his own life. He related simply what was necessary, and no more.

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JEREMIAH 38: 28 So Jeremiah stayed in the court of the guard until the day that Jerusalem was taken.

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