

CHAPTER 38

INTRODUCTION TO JEREMIAH 38

This chapter is taken up in giving an account of Jeremiah's being cast into a dungeon; his deliverance from it; and private conversation with King Zedekiah. The occasion of the prophet's being cast into a dungeon was his discourse to the people, which four of the princes represented to the king as seditious, and moved to have him put to death; and, being delivered into their hands, was put into a miry dungeon, (~~2801~~Jeremiah 38:1-6). Ebedmelech, the Ethiopian, hearing of his miserable case, represented it to the king, and interceded for his release; which being granted, with the help of thirty men, and by means of old clouts and rotten rags, let down by cords, drew him up, and placed him in the court of the prison, (~~2804~~Jeremiah 38:7-13). King Zedekiah sends for Jeremiah, and has a private conference with him about the state of affairs; when the prophet faithfully told him how things would issue, and gave him his best advice, (~~2804~~Jeremiah 38:14-23); upon parting, the king desires the conference might be kept a secret from the princes, which was accordingly done, (~~2804~~Jeremiah 38:24-27); and Jeremiah remained in the court of the prison till the taking of Jerusalem, (~~2808~~Jeremiah 38:28).

Ver. 1. *Then Shephatiah the son of Mattan, and Gedaliah the son of Pashur*, etc.] Of these two persons we nowhere else read. Some think that Pashur, whose son Gedaliah was, is the same as is mentioned (~~2801~~Jeremiah 20:1-18); which is not likely, since he was a priest, and this son a prince:

and Jucal the son of Shelemiah, and Pashur the son of Malchiah; these had been sent by the king to Jeremiah, to inquire of the Lord, and to pray for him and his people, (~~2801~~Jeremiah 21:1 37:3); all four were princes, prime ministers of state, of great power and authority, and to whom the king could deny nothing, or withstand, (~~2804~~Jeremiah 38:4,5); these

heard the words that Jeremiah had spoken to all the people; that is, to as many of them as came to the court of the prison to visit him; some out of good will, and some out of ill will; and others out of curiosity; being desirous to know by the prophet how things would go with them; and by

which means what he said was spread all over the city, and came to the ears of the above princes; and no doubt there were persons enough officious enough to carry these things to them:

saying; as follows:

Ver. 2. *Thus saith the Lord, he that remaineth in this city*, etc.] Of Jerusalem; that does not go out of it, and surrender himself to the Chaldeans; but continues in it fighting against them:

shall die by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence; that is, by one or other of these:

but he that goeth forth to the Chaldeans shall live: that goes out of the city, throws down his arms, delivers up himself to the Chaldean army, and submits to their mercy, shall have quarters given him, and his life shall be spared:

for he shall have his life for a prey, and shall live; or, “his soul, and it shall live”^{f711}; comfortably and in safety; he shall escape with his life, and that shall be preserved from the sword, famine, and pestilence; and whereas it was, as it were, lost, it shall be recovered out of the jaws of death, out of the above calamities it was exposed to; and so be like a prey taken out of the hands of the mighty, and be quite safe.

Ver. 3. *Thus saith the Lord, this city shall surely be given into the hand of the king of Babylon’s army*, etc.] When those found in it should be put to the sword, or carried captive: this the prophet declares with the greatest certainty; and what he had often affirmed for twenty years past, and now stands to it, having had fresh assurances from the Lord that so it would be; and which he faithfully published; though he had received some favours from the court, had his liberty enlarged, and was now eating the king’s bread, he was not to be bribed by these things to hold his peace; but the nearer the ruin of the city was, the more confident was he of its destruction:

which shall take it; or, “that it may take it”^{f712}; being delivered into its hands by the Lord, without whose permission the Chaldean army could never have taken it: or “and he shall take it”^{f713}; that is, the king of Babylon.

Ver. 4. *Therefore the princes said unto the king*, etc.] The four princes mentioned in (^{281E}Jeremiah 38:1), having heard what Jeremiah said to the people, laid the case before the king, and addressed him upon it in the following manner:

we beseech thee, let this man be put to death; or,

“let this man now be put to death,”

as the Targum. They speak very disrespectfully of the prophet, him “this man”; and with great authority to the king and not in a submissive supplicating way, as we render it; the king, being in distress, was in their hands; he stood in fear of them, and could do nothing against their will and pleasure; and they urge that he might die instantly; they were for taking away his life at once. The reason they give follows:

for thus he weakeneth the hands of the men of war that remain in this city, and the hands of all the people, in speaking such words to them; dispirited the soldiers who were set for the defence of the city, such of them as were left, who were not taken off by the sword, famine, or pestilence; since, if what Jeremiah said was true, all attempts to defend it must be in vain; and the people be without any hope of being delivered out of the hands of the enemy:

for this man seeketh not the welfare of this people, but the hurt; than which nothing was more false; for the prophet foreseeing that their lives were in danger, through the sword, famine, or pestilence, by continuing in the city, advised them to go out of it, and surrender to the Chaldeans, whereby they would be preserved.

Ver. 5. *Then Zedekiah the king said, behold, he [is] in your hand*, etc.] In your power, to do with him as you please. This is either a grant of the king, allowing them to do as they thought fit; or a declaration of their power, supposing them to be the princes of the sanhedrim, as Grotius thinks, to judge of a false prophet, and condemn him; but that they were such does not appear; nor does their charge of the prophet, or their procedure against him, confirm it. The former sense seems best:

for the king [is] not [he that] can do [any] thing against you; which is said either in a flattering way, that such was their interest in him, and so great his regard for them, that he could not deny them any thing. So it is in the old translations, “for the king may deny you nothing”; and, “the king

can deny you nothing”: or else in a complaining way, suggesting that, he was a king, and no king; that he had no power to oppose them; they would do as they pleased; and therefore it signified nothing applying to him; he should not say any thing against it; he would have no concern in it; they might do as they pleased, since he knew they would.

Ver. 6. *Then took they Jeremiah*, etc.] Having the king’s leave, or at least no prohibition from him; they went with proper attendants to the court of the prison, and took the prophet from thence:

and cast him into the dungeon of Malchiah the son of Hammelech, that [was] in the court of the prison; this was a dungeon that belonged to the prison which Malchiah had the care of, or which belonged to his house, which was contiguous to the court of the prison. The Targum renders it, Malchiah the son of the king; and so the Septuagint and Arabic versions; but it is not likely that Zedekiah should have a son that was set over his dungeon, or to whom one belonged, or should be called by his name: here the princes cast the prophet, in order that he should perish, either with famine or suffocation, or the noisomeness of the place; not caring with their own hands to take away the life of a prophet, and for fear of the people; and this being a more slow and private way of dispatching him, they chose it; for they designed no doubt nothing less than death:

and they let down Jeremiah with cords; there being no steps or stairs to go down into it; so that nobody could come to him when in it, or relieve him:

and in the dungeon [there was] no water, but mire; so Jeremiah sunk in the mire; up to the neck, as Josephus^{f714} says. Some think that it was at this time, and in this place, that Jeremiah put up the petitions to the Lord, and which he heard, recorded in (~~2185~~ Lamentations 3:55-57); and that that whole chapter was composed by him in this time of his distress.

Ver. 7. *Now when Ebedmelech the Ethiopian*, etc.] The Targum renders it,

“a servant of King Zedekiah;”

which Jarchi, and other writers, following, make Zedekiah to be the Ethiopian; so called, because as an Ethiopian differs in his skin, so Zedekiah differed in his righteousness, from the rest of his generation; and this his servant, he, with others^{f715}, takes to be Baruch the son of Neriah, but without any foundation; but, as Kimchi observes, with whom Abarbanel and Ben Melech agree, had this word “Ebedmelech” been an appellation,

the usual article would have been prefixed before the word “king”, as in the next clause; and somewhere or other his name would have been given; but it is a proper name, as Ahimelech, and Abimelech. A servant of the king he might be, and doubtless he was; and perhaps had this name given him when he became a proselyte; for such he seems to be, and a good man; who had a great regard to the prophet, because he was one; and had more piety and humanity in him, though an Ethiopian, than those who were Israelites by birth:

one of the eunuchs which was in the king's house; an officer at court; one of the gentlemen of the bedchamber. Josephus^{f716} says he was in great honour; so the Targum renders it,

“a great man;”

a man in high office, of great authority; taking it to be a name of office, as it sometimes is; though it may be understood, in a proper sense, of a castrated person; for such there were very commonly in kings' palaces, employed in one office or another, and especially in the bedchamber: now this man

heard that they had put Jeremiah in the dungeon; for though the princes did it with all possible secrecy, it was known at court, and came to the ears of this good man; and indeed the dungeon was not far from the court; and some have thought he might have heard the groans of Jeremiah in it; however, he came to the hearing of it, and was affected with the relation of his case, and determined to save him, if possible:

the king then sitting in the gate of Benjamin; the same in which the prophet was taken, (²⁵⁷¹³Jeremiah 37:13); here he sat to hear and try causes, courts of judicature being held in gates of cities; or to receive petitions; or rather it may be to consult about the present state of affairs, what was best to be done in defence of the city, and to annoy the besiegers; and it may be to have a view of the enemy's camp, and to sally out upon them; for that he was here in order to make his escape is not likely.

Ver. 8. *And Ebedmelech went forth out of the king's house*, etc.] As soon as he heard of the prophet's distress, he immediately went out from his apartments in the king's palace, where he performed his office, and his business chiefly lay, or where he dwelt, to the gate of Benjamin, where the king was; and if he was here for the administration of justice, it was a

proper time and place for Ebedmelech to lay the case of Jeremiah before him:

and spake to the king; freely, boldly, and intrepidly, in the presence of his nobles:

saying; as follows:

Ver. 9. *My lord the king*, etc.] He addresses him as a courtier, with great reverence and submission, and yet with great boldness:

these men have done evil in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet; meaning the princes, who might be present, and whom he pointed at, and mentioned by name; which showed great courage and faithfulness, as well as great zeal for, and attachment to, the prophet; to charge after this manner persons of such great authority so publicly, and to the king, whom the king himself stood in fear of: he first brings a general charge against them, that they had done wrong in everything they had done to the prophet; in their angry words to him; in smiting him, and putting him in prison in Jonathan's house; and particularly in their last instance of ill will to him:

whom they have cast into the dungeon; he does not say where, or describe the dungeon, because well known to the king, and what a miserable place it was; and tacitly suggests the cruelty and inhumanity of the princes:

and he is like to die for hunger in the place where he is, for [there is] no more bread in the city; or very little; there was none to be had but with great difficulty, as Kimchi observes; and therefore though the king had ordered a piece of bread to be given him daily, as long as there was any in the city; yet it being almost all consumed, and the prophet being out of sight, and so out of mind, and altogether disregarded, must be in perishing circumstances, and near death; and must inevitably perish, unless some immediate care be taken of him. It may be rendered, "he will die"^{f717}, etc. or the sense is, bread being exceeding scarce in the city, notwithstanding the king's order, very little was given to Jeremiah, while he was in the court of the prison; so that he was half starved, and was a mere skeleton then, and would have died for hunger there; wherefore it was barbarous in the princes to cast such a man into a dungeon. It may be rendered, "he would have died for hunger in the place where he was, seeing there was no more bread in the city"^{f718}; wherefore, if the princes had let him alone where he was, he would have died through famine; and therefore acted a

very wicked part in hastening his death, by throwing him into a dungeon; this is Jarchi's sense, with which Abarbinel agrees.

Ver. 10. *Then the king commanded Ebedmelech the Ethiopian*, etc.] Being affected with the case of the prophet; and repenting of the leave he had given the princes to do with him as they pleased, gave orders as follows:

saying, take from hence thirty men with thee; from the place where the king was, the gate of Benjamin; where very probably at this time was a garrison of soldiers, thirty of which were ordered to be taken; or these were to be taken out of the king's bodyguard, he had here with him. Josephus^{f719} calls them thirty of the king's servants, such as were about the king's person, or belonged to his household; and so the Syriac version of (^{<3881>}Jeremiah 38:11) says that Ebedmelech took with him men of the king's household; but why thirty of them, when three or four might be thought sufficient to take up a single man out of a dungeon? Abarbinel thinks the dungeon was very deep, and Jeremiah, an old man, could not be got out but with great labour and difficulty. Jarchi and Kimchi say, the men were so weakened with the famine, that so many were necessary to draw out one man; but the true reason seems rather to be, that should the princes, whom the king might suspect, or any other, attempt to hinder this order being put in execution, there might be a sufficient force to assist in it, and repel those that might oppose it:

and take up Jeremiah the prophet out of the dungeon before he die; the king speaks honourably of Jeremiah, giving him his title as a prophet, and expresses great concern for him; and orders them to hasten the taking him up, lest he should die before, which he suggests would give him great concern.

Ver. 11. *So Ebedmelech took the men with him*, etc.] The thirty men, as the king ordered: as soon as ever he had got the grant, he immediately set about the work, and lost no time to save the prophet's life:

and went unto the house of the king under the treasury; from the gate of Benjamin he went to the king's palace, and to a particular place under the treasury; by which "treasury" may be meant the treasury of garments, or the royal wardrobe, under which was a place, where clothes worn out, or cast off, were put: the Septuagint represent it as underground, a cellar under the wardrobe:

and took thence old cast clouts, and old rotten rags: the Syriac version has it, such as cattle were wiped and cleaned with:

and let them down by cords into the dungeon to Jeremiah; for it was so deep, that men could not reach to put them into the hands of the prophet; and, had they been thrown in, they might have been scattered about and be out of his reach, who stuck in the mire; or they would have been in all likelihood greatly bedaubed with the mire.

Ver. 12. *And Ebedmelech the Ethiopian said unto Jeremiah*, etc.] Being come to the dungeon, and at the mouth of it, he addressed him in a very humane and friendly manner, and directed him how to make use of the rags he let down for his ease and benefit:

put now these old cast clouts and rotten rags under thine arm holes under the cords; the cords were first put under his arm holes to draw him up with, and then these clouts and rags were put under the cords; lest they should cut into his flesh, at least hurt him, and give him pain, the whole weight of his body resting on them; and perhaps these parts had received some hurt when he was let down into the dungeon with cords, when they were not so careful of him; and therefore needed some soft rags the more to be put under them at this time; all which shows what an affection this man had for the prophet and holy tender he was of him:

and Jeremiah did so; he put the rags between the cords and his arm holes.

Ver. 13. *So they drew up Jeremiah with cords*, etc.] The men that were with Ebedmelech, as many as were necessary; he overlooking, directing, and encouraging:

and he took him out of the dungeon; alive, according to the king's orders and design, and in spite of the prophet's enemies: the thing succeeded according to wish; the Lord ordering and prospering every step:

and Jeremiah remained in the court of the prison; from whence he had been taken, and where he was replaced; Ebedmelech having no warrant to set him at entire liberty; nor would it have been prudent to have solicited that, which might too much have exasperated the princes; and besides, here, according to the king's order, bread was to be given him, as long as there was any in the city; so that it was the most fit and proper place for him to remain in; wherefore what Josephus¹⁷²⁰ says, that he dismissed him, and set him free, is not true.

Ver. 14. *Then Zedekiah the king sent and took Jeremiah the prophet unto him*, etc.] When the prophet was taken out of the dungeon, and brought to the court of the prison, of which the king had knowledge, he sent some person or persons to bring him to him, to have some private conversation with him:

into the third entry that [is] in the house of the Lord; what place is meant Jarchi confesses his ignorance of, but conjectures it was the court of the Israelites; the outward court, and the court of the women, being before it. Kimchi rightly takes it to be a place through which they went from the king's house to the house of the Lord; no doubt the same that is called the king's ascent, by which he went up thither, shown to, and admired by, the queen of Sheba, (^{<1105>}1 Kings 10:5); in which there were three gates or entrances, as Dr. Lightfoot observes^{f721}; the first, the gate of the foundation; the second, the gate behind the guard; and the third, the gate Coponius; and here the king and the prophet had their interview:

and the king said to Jeremiah, I will ask thee a thing, or “a word”; a word of prophecy; or whether there was a word of prophecy from the Lord, concerning him, his people, and city, and what it was; and what would be the event of the present siege, whether it would issue well or ill:

hide nothing from me; be it what it will, whether grateful or not; he had been told again and again how things would be; but still he was in hopes that something more favourable and consolatory would come from the Lord to him.

Ver. 15. *Then Jeremiah said unto Zedekiah*, etc.] Here follows the prophets answer, in which he tacitly desires to be excused saying any thing upon this head, since it might be attended with danger to himself, and be of no service to the king; and therefore prudently thought fit to come into some agreement with the king, to secure himself, if he insisted upon it:

if I declare [it] unto thee, wilt thou not surely put me to death? this he might fear, from past experience of the king's conduct; for, though he might not slay him with his own hands, or give orders to others to do it; yet he might deliver him up to the will and mercy of his princes, as he had done before; not that the prophet was afraid to die, or was deterred through fear of death from delivering the word of the Lord, and doing his work; but he thought it proper to make use of prudent means to preserve

his life; besides, he had no express order from the Lord to say anything concerning this matter at this time:

and if give thee counsel, wilt thou not hearken to me? or, “thou wilt not hearken to me”^{f722}; so the Targum, Syriac, and Vulgate Latin versions; and therefore it was to no purpose to give him any advice; from all this the king might easily understand the prophet had nothing to say that would be agreeable to him; however, he was very desirous to know what it was, and therefore promises indemnity and security, as follows:

Ver. 16. *So Zedekiah the king swore secretly unto Jeremiah,* etc.] The king not only gave the prophet his word, but also annexed to it his oath, that his life should be in no danger, either from him or his princes; this oath was made secretly, both for the honour of the king, he swearing to a subject, and that it might not be known by the princes, and for fear of them:

saying, [as] the Lord liveth, that made us this soul; or “these souls”, as the Targum: here a superfluous word, **ta**, is used; which, as the Jews observe, is one of the eight words which are written, but not read: he swears by the living God, by whom only men should swear, whenever it is necessary; this is the proper form of an oath; the appeal is to be made to the eternal God, that knows all things, the Father of spirits, the Maker of souls, and giver of the lives of all men, and who can take them away when he pleases. The sense is, may the living God, who has made my soul and yours, and given life to us both, may he take away my soul, my life, from me, if ever I make any attempt upon yours;

I will not put thee to death, neither will I give thee into the hand of those that seek thy life; he not only promises and swears to it, that he would not take away his life with his own hands, or give orders to take it away; but he would not deliver him into the hands of his princes, who he knew were implacable enemies, and sought all opportunities and advantages against him; but then he makes no promise that he will take any counsel or advice that should be given him; as to this, he would lay himself under no obligation to observe, resolving to take his own way; if he liked it, to follow it; if not, to reject it; he would not be bound by it.

Ver. 17. *Then said Jeremiah unto Zedekiah,* etc.] Being thus indemnified and secured by the king’s word and oath, he proceeds freely to lay before the king the whole matter as from the Lord:

thus saith the Lord, the God of hosts, the God of Israel; the prophet does not give the following advice in his own name, but in the name of the eternal Jehovah, the Lord of armies above and below, and who had a special regard to the people of Israel, and their welfare; and therefore it became the king to show the more regard unto it:

if thou wilt assuredly go forth unto the king of Babylon's princes; the generals of his army, whose names are mentioned, (^{249B}Jeremiah 39:3); the king not being with his army at this time, but at Riblah, (^{249B}Jeremiah 39:5); the meaning is, if he would open the gates of Jerusalem, and go forth from thence to the Chaldean army, and surrender himself and the city into the hands of the princes in it, and general officers of it:

then thy soul shall live; in thy body, and not be separated from it; or live comfortably, in peace and safety, though not in so much splendour and glory as he had done:

and this city shall not be burned with fire; as had been threatened; and as the Chaldeans would be provoked to do, should it hold out to the last extremity; but should preserve it upon a surrender:

and thou shall live, and thine house; not only himself, but his wives and children, and servants.

Ver. 18. *But if thou wilt not go forth to the king of Babylon's princes,* etc.] And surrender to them:

then shall this city be given into the hands of the Chaldeans; if not willingly delivered up by the king of Judah, it shall be forcibly taken by the king of Babylon's army, through the permission of God; with respect to whom it is said to be given unto them, even by him who has the disposing of cities and kingdoms:

and they shall burn it with fire; as it had been often foretold it should, and as it accordingly was, (^{249B}Jeremiah 39:8);

and thou shalt not escape out of their hand; though he might hope he should, and would attempt to do it, yet should be taken; and though he should not be slain, yet should never regain his liberty, or get out of their hands, when once in them; (see ^{249D}Jeremiah 52:7-9,11).

Ver. 19. *And Zedekiah the king said unto Jeremiah,* etc.] In answer to this advice he gave him, persuading him to give up himself and the city into the hands of the Chaldeans:

I am afraid of the Jews that are fallen to the Chaldeans; who did go out of the city, and surrendered to the Chaldeans, whom Zedekiah had cruelly used, or severely threatened:

lest they deliver me into their hands, and they mock me; that is, lest the Chaldeans should deliver him into the hands of the Jews, and they should jeer and scoff at him, for doing the same thing he had forbidden them on the severest penalty; or lest they should put him to death in the most revengeful and contemptuous manner, as Kimchi's note is: but all this was either a mere excuse, or showed great weakness and pusillanimity, and was fearing where no fear was; for, on the one hand, it was not reasonable to think that the Chaldeans, when they had got such a prize as the king of the Jews, that they should easily part with him, and especially deliver him up into the hands of his own people; and, on the other hand, it is not likely, that, should he be delivered into their hands, they would ever have treated him in so scornful and cruel a manner, who was their prince, and a partner with them in their captivity.

Ver. 20. *But Jeremiah said, they shall not deliver [thee],* etc.] To take off the above excuse, or remove that objection, the prophet assures the king that the Chaldeans would never deliver him into the hands of the Jews; he might depend upon it, it would never be done:

obey, I beseech thee, the voice of the Lord, which I speak unto thee; the counsel he had given him, to surrender to the Chaldeans, was not from himself, but from the Lord: and though he had no express order to give it at that time, yet it was what was agreeable to the will of God, and what he had exhorted the people to in the beginning of this chapter; and therefore, since it came from the Lord, as it ought to be attended to, so he might be assured of the divine protection, should he act according to it:

so it shall be well with thee, and thy soul shall live; that is, it would not only be much better with him than he feared, but than it would be with him should he obstinately stand out to the last; he should have more respect and honour from the king of Babylon; and not only have his life spared, but enjoy more of the comforts of life; particularly the sight of his eyes, which he lost when taken.

Ver. 21. *But if thou refuse to go forth*, etc.] Out of Jerusalem, to the Chaldean army, and submit to them:

this [is] the word that the Lord hath showed me, or the thing which should certainly come to pass; the word of prophecy the Lord had showed to the prophet, and which he now declares to the king; who asked of him a word, was desirous to know whether there was a word from the Lord, and what it was; and this it is which follows, in case he continued impenitent, obstinate, and disobedient.

Ver. 22. *And, behold, all the women that are left in the king of Judah's house*, etc.] That were left in the royal palace when Jehoiakim and Jeconiah were carried captives; or which were left of the famine and pestilence in, Zedekiah's house; or would be left there when he should flee and make his escape; meaning his concubines, or maids of honour, and court ladies;

[shall be] brought forth to the king of Babylon's princes: who shall use them as they think fit, and dispose of them at pleasure:

and those [women] shall say, thy friends have set thee on, and have prevailed against thee: or, "the men of thy peace"^{f723}; the false prophets, and the princes that hearkened to them, and promised and flattered him with peace and prosperity, these deceived him; they set him on to hold out against the Chaldeans, and not believe the Prophet Jeremiah; and they prevailed with him to do so, though it was against himself, and his own interest:

thy feet are sunk in the mire; not literally, as some Jewish writers suppose, that he got into a quagmire when he fled; though there may be a hint in the expression to the miry dungeon in which he suffered the prophet to be cast; and was now got into one himself, in a figurative sense, being involved in difficulties, out of which he could not extricate himself:

[and] they are turned away back; meaning either his feet, which were distorted, and had turned aside from the right way; or now could go on no further against the enemy, but were obliged to turn back and flee; or else the men of his peace, the false prophets and princes, who had fed him with vain hopes of safety, now left him, and every man shifted for himself. This would be said by the women, either in a mournful manner, by way of complaint; or as scoffing at the king, as a silly foolish man, to hearken to such persons; and so he that was afraid of being mocked by the Jews is jeered at by the women of his house.

Ver. 23. *So they shall bring out all thy wives and thy children to the Chaldeans*, etc.] Not the citizens of Jerusalem; but, as Kimchi observes, the Chaldeans that should enter the city shall bring them out to the Chaldeans without: or it may be rendered impersonally, “they shall be brought out”: not only the ladies at court, that waited on him and his queen, as before; but all his wives and concubines, and his children, or his sons rather; for at the taking of the city no mention is made of daughters, only of sons, who were slain before his eyes, (²⁸¹⁶Jeremiah 39:6);

and thou shalt not escape out of their hand, but shalt be taken by the hand of the king of Babylon; not by him personally, for he was not present at the taking of him, but by his army, who having taken him, brought him to him, and delivered him into his hand, (²⁸¹⁵Jeremiah 39:5);

and thou shalt cause this city to be burnt with fire; or, “thou shall burn this city with fire”^{f724}; be the moral cause of it; through his sin and obstinacy, impenitence and unbelief, the burning of the city might be laid to his charge; his sin was the cause of it; and it was all one as if he had burnt it with his own hands. All this is said to work upon him to hearken to the advice given; but all was in vain.

Ver. 24. *Then said Zedekiah to Jeremiah*, etc.] Not a word signifying his approbation of the counsel given him, or that he intended to take it; his silence showed the reverse:

let no man know of these words: that had passed between them; of the conference and conversation they had had together, at least not the particulars of it; the thing itself was known, as appears by what follows, that the king and prophet had been discoursing together; but what they talked of, he desires might be concealed, pretending the prophet’s good, though it was his own honour and safety he sought:

and thou shall not die; as he had promised he should not, and had sworn to it; but suggests by this, that if he disclosed the conversation, he should took upon himself free from his word and oath; so that this carried something menacing in it: or it may be rendered “that thou die not”^{f725}; intimating, that if the princes should come to the knowledge of what he had said, of the advice he had given, they would surely put him to death; and therefore, for his own safety, he desires the whole may be kept a secret.

Ver. 25. *But if the princes hear that I have talked to thee*, etc.] Which the king suspected they would; and could hardly think but somebody or other

would see him and the prophet talking together; who would be officious enough to go and acquaint the princes with it, though he had endeavoured to be as private as possible; however, to provide against the worst, he instructs Jeremiah what to say to them, should they hear of their being together:

and they come unto thee: as he did not doubt but they would, as soon as ever they had notice of it:

and say unto thee, declare unto us now what thou hast said unto the king; hide it not from us, and we will not put thee to death; also what the king said unto thee: the king knew how inquisitive they would be, and sift the prophet to the bottom, to know both what the prophet said to the king, about the state of affairs respecting the Chaldeans, and the surrender of the city to them, which they supposed to be the subject of the discourse; and what were the king's thoughts about it, and his determinations concerning it; and in order to make the prophet easy, and more free and open to tell the whole matter, he suggests they would promise him his life should not be taken away.

Ver. 26. *Then thou shalt say unto them,* etc.] Here the king puts words into the prophet's mouth, what he should say to the princes, to put them off from inquiring further, and so keep the matter a secret:

I presented my supplication before the king; or "caused [it] to fall"^{f726}; delivered it in an humble and submissive manner:

that he would not cause me to return to Jonathan's house, to die there; this he had entreated of the king before, (⁽⁻²⁴⁵⁷⁾Jeremiah 37:20); and now, no doubt, renewed his request, having this fair opportunity with the king alone to do it; or, however, it is highly probable he did it upon this hint of the king. This shows how much the king stood in fear of his princes in this time of his distress; and that he had only the name of a king, and had not courage and resolution enough to act of himself, according to the dictates of his mind; yea, that he feared men more than he feared the Lord.

Ver. 27. *Then came all the princes to Jeremiah, and asked him,* etc.] After he had parted with the king, and was come back to the court of the prison; as soon as the princes had been informed of the interview between the king and the prophet, which soon came to their ears, they came in a body to him, to the court of the prison, where he was, and asked him of what passed between him and the king:

and he told them according to all those words that the king had commanded; what he told them, no doubt, was truth; though he did not tell them all the truth; which he was not obliged to do, having no command from God, and being forbid by the king:

so they left off speaking with him; or, “were silent from him”^{f727}; went away silent, not being able to disprove what he had said, or object unto it, and finding they could get nothing more out of him:

for the matter was not perceived; or, “was not heard”^{f728}; though there were persons that saw the king and the prophet together, yet nobody heard anything that passed between them; and therefore Jeremiah could not be confronted in what he had said, or be charged with concealing anything.

Ver. 28. *So Jeremiah abode in the court of the prison*, etc.] Where he was ordered to be by the king, before he was cast into the dungeon, and where he was replaced by Ebedmelech; and which was now confirmed by the king, and here he continued:

until the day that Jerusalem was taken; but how long it was from his conversation with the king, to the taking of the city, is not certain:

and he was [there] when Jerusalem was taken; as appears from (²³⁹⁴Jeremiah 39:14). Kimchi connects this with the beginning of the next chapter; and so the Targum, rendering it,

“and it came to pass when Jerusalem was taken;”

namely, what is related in the following chapter.