

## **JEREMIAH IS PUT INTO THE PIT**

Rt. Rev. George de Charms

*Lessons: Jeremiah 37*

We have seen how the Prophet Jeremiah was so hated by the princes and the nobles in Jerusalem that he had to remain in hiding, lest he should be stoned to death in the streets. The King Jehoiachim searched for him everywhere after he had burned the roll of Jeremiah's prophecy; but he did not find him, and it was not long before the curse which the Lord had commanded Jeremiah to add to the prophecy when he wrote the second roll, came to pass. Hehoiachim was killed by the Babylonians and Jehoiachim his son was made king in his stead. He was allowed to reign only three months, however, when he was removed from the throne, and Zedekiah, his uncle, was made the king. Many of the Jews had already been carried away into captivity. All the prophecies of Jeremiah were being fulfilled. Yet Zedekiah would not return to the worship of the Lord. Even if he wanted to do so he was not able, because all the princes so hated the Lord. They all hoped that by making a league with Egypt, which the Lord had forbidden, they might yet regain their liberty. The Babylonians, hearing that they were plotting with Egypt, came again with another army to besiege the city. And then it was that Zedekiah sent for Jeremiah, to ask him to inquire of the Lord whether the city would not be delivered by the Egyptians. Jeremiah said, however, that the Babylonians would take the city and burn it with fire.

Believing there was nothing more he could do for his city, Jeremiah now thought he would return for a brief visit to his home in Anathoth, where he had been born. But as he was leaving the city, he was stopped by the soldiers at the gate, and brought before the princes, accused of deserting to the enemy. He denied that he was going to the Babylonians, but the princes were only too glad of this opportunity to punish him, and so without a trial they cast him into a prison. This prison was dug down underground, with dark holes in which the prisoners were kept. It was a damp, unhealthy place, in which he would surely have died. And this was what the princes wanted.

However, after he had been there for many days, Zedekiah sent for him, and asked if there was any word from the Lord. The city was now closely besieged by the Babylonians. None could come in or go out, and they were getting short of food. The king wanted to know if there was any way for them to escape.

Jeremiah knew that his life was in the hands of this weak, but wicked monarch. Yet he feared not to tell the truth. "There is word from the Lord," he said. "Thou shalt be delivered into the hand of the King of Babylon" (Jeremiah

## Family Talk

37: 17) Jeremiah then asked the king to take him out of that terrible dungeon, where he must surely die. "Have I not told the truth? Has not my prophecy come to pass? What have I done that ye should put me into prison?" (Jeremiah 37: 18) The king was touched with pity, yet he dared not set him free. But he ordered that he should be taken out of the dungeon and allowed to walking the court of the prison, where he might have sunshine and fresh air, and that he should be given a portion of bread as long as food lasted in the city.

This kindness made the princes angry. They went to the king and accused Jeremiah of new treachery. They said he was persuading many not to resist. He was frightening the soldiers by holding before their eyes the thought of defeat and death, and so he was a traitor, who ought to be put to death. The king knew that it was not true. He knew that Jeremiah spoke only what the Lord told him, and that he loved his country more than his life. Yet he was afraid to do anything against the will of the princes, and so he told them to do with Jeremiah what they would.

Now there was in the prison a very deep pit, and they let Jeremiah down into this pit by long ropes. In the bottom of the pit there was mud and mire, into which he would slowly sink, and die. There these cruel princes, who hated him only because he spoke the Word of the Lord, left him.

But there was a servant of the king, a man from Ethiopia, whose heart was kind, and who felt very sorry for Jeremiah. He went to the king, and told him all that the princes had done, and asked if he might not be allowed to take Jeremiah up out of the pit. And Zedekiah gave him permission. So he took with him thirty men who were friendly to Jeremiah, and he took some strong cords, and some old rags, and let them down into the pit, calling to Jeremiah, to put the ropes under his arms, and to wrap them with the rags so that they would not hurt him. And then they drew him up out of the pit, and set him back in the court of the, prison, where he remained until Nebuchadnezzar took the city, and burned it with fire. But he saved Jeremiah alive, and was very kind to him.

This is a very sad story. But it shows how very much Jeremiah was willing to suffer in order to tell the truth. If he had not been true to the Lord; if he had not told what the Lord said to him, but had answered the king and the princes in the way they wanted him to answer, then they would have called him a great prophet. They would have given him wealth, and made him a great man in the king's court. But he refused to tell what was not true. He loved the truth more than his life. He was willing to suffer, to be cast into prison, to be put to death, rather than betray the trust the Lord had given him. This is the mark of a truly great man—a man of strength, of courage, of true love to the Lord, and to his country. Think of him when you are tempted to do something wrong, to tell what is not true, or to break one of the Lord's Commandments, and you will be ashamed. You will be given strength to do what is right.