

Jeremiah Threatened With Death

26: 1-24

DIG: Why do the other priests and prophets want Jeremiah sentenced to death? In defending his case, how does Yirmeyahu distinguish himself from the other prophets who would justly deserve death (Jeremiah 23:21; Deuteronomy 13:5)? Who takes his side and why? Who is Micah of Moresheth and what impact did he have on King Hezekiah (Micah 1:1 and 3:12)? What parallel does that suggest? Who is this Shaphan and family (Second Kings 22:8-13)? How does the argument of these Jewish elders compare with that of Gamaliel in a similar situation (Acts 5:34-40)? What principle of interpreting Scripture and signs of the times is at work here? Why do you think the rulers killed Uriah but not Jeremiah?

REFLECT: Why does God seem so indifferent to the earthly fate of His servants (Hebrews 11:32-38)? What do you fear the most? How can you overcome it? Are you at ease taking sides in a debate before all the votes are in? Or do you usually hedge your bets by waiting to see how things will pan out? Give an example? When was the last time you stuck up for someone unpopular? Why did you do it? How were you treated? How might the principle of interpretation evident in Jeremiah 26:16-19 and Acts 5:34-40 used today in deciding who speaks for ADONAI?

609/608 BC early in the reign of Jehoiakim

Summary of the Temple Sermon: Early in the reign of Jehoiakim, son of Josiah king of Judah, this is a technical term meaning from the beginning of the actual reign. This, then, took place sometime between the king's accession to the throne, on the deportation of Jehoiakim's brother Jehoahaz to Egypt in the autumn or late summer of 609. In Judah renal years were counted from the month of Nisan of the first full year of a king's reign. So Jehoiakim would have begun to sit on Jerusalem's throne early the next year in 608 BC. Then word came from the LORD (26:1). This passage gives us a glimpse into the legal proceedings of the day and brings us before several significant groups of people - the prosecutors (the priests, false prophets and officials) and the accused. The trial took place at the entrance of the New Gate of the Temple. The prosecution demanded the death penalty. Jeremiah conducted his own defense.¹³³

This is what ADONAI says, "Stand in the outer courtyard of the LORD's house where all the people of the towns of Judah come to worship in the house of ADONAI, and speak to them. This sermon, or series of sermons, had been given during one of three major feasts: Pesach, Sukkot, and Shavu'ot. Tell them everything I command you; do not omit a word (26:2). The very words have been inspired in the original writings. In fact, this scene is a lot like Shavu'ot when the messianic community first began (Acts 2:1-47). The purpose of the message is then given: Perhaps they will listen and each will turn (shuwb) from their evil ways. Then I will relent and not bring on them the disaster I was planning because of the evil they have done" (26:3). Here, ADONAI is giving the nation an opportunity to repent (shuwb) from her evil sin and perhaps delay her judgment even further. As we have noted previously, judgment would come because of the sin of Manasseh. So while it could not be averted, it could be delayed. If the nation had responded positively to Jeremiah's preaching, YHVH would have relented, and His judgment would have been delayed (18:8). If the people had responded to God, He would have responded with grace.

Then God spells out the responsibility of the people and the consequences if they did not obey. He told Jeremiah to say to them, "This is what the LORD says: If you do not listen to Me and follow the Torah, which I have set before you, and if you do not listen to the words of My servants the prophets, whom I have persistently sent to you (though you have not listened), then I will make this house like Shiloh and this City an object of cursing among all the nations of the earth" (26:4-6). Jehoiakim was a model of disobedience. From the outset of his reign, the word of YHVH was an unwelcome word, systematically rejected and resisted by the king and his government.

We also learn in the chapter that Jeremiah was faithful in spite of the opposition to him. Where earlier the prophet expressed degrees of doubt, it will not happen from now on. He will be a fortified city. His opposition will come from three sources: false prophets, evil priests and wicked kings.

Jeremiah Threatened With Death: The priests, the false prophets and all the people heard Jeremiah speak these words in the house of the LORD (see Cb - [Jeremiah's Temple Sermon](#)). But as soon as Yirmeyahu finished telling the people everything ADONAI had commanded him to say, the priests, the false prophets and all the people seized him and said: You must die (they were trying to obey the Torah according to Deuteronomy 18:20)! Why do you prophesy in the LORD's name that this house will be like Shiloh and this City will be desolate and deserted? Ominously, all the people crowded around Jeremiah in the Temple (26:7-9). The specific charge was the possible destruction of both the Temple and Jerusalem. It became a mob scene.

The noise of the uproar was heard in the royal palace, where the officials of Judah were assembled. Hurrying to the Temple, their arrival seems to have quieted the people and took their places at the entrance of the New Gate of the Temple, the place for an official court (Genesis 23:10-16; Ruth 4:1-12). The New Gate was the same as the Upper Gate and is usually identified with the gate leading to the inner, or priests court (36:10). According to Second Kings 15:35 this particular gate was built by King Jotham. Then the prosecution, consisting of the priests and the false prophets, said to the officials and all their people, "This man should be sentenced to death because he has prophesied against his City. You have heard it with your own ears" (26:10-11)! To the elders this would make the issue appear to be treason in addition to a religious dispute. Such an accusation pronounced against the Temple was considered blasphemy . . . a mortal crime (Exodus 20:7; Leviticus 24:26; Acts 6:11-14).

Jeremiah's response to the charge was sincere and dignified. Then Yirmeyahu said to all the officials and all the people, "ADONAI sent me to prophesy against this house and this City all the things you have heard." He was only doing what a prophet was supposed to do! Their responsibility was not to kill Jeremiah, but to reform their ways and their actions and obey the LORD your God. Jeremiah continued: Then the LORD will relent (give you grace) and not bring the disaster He has pronounced against you (26:12-13).

Jeremiah derived courage from the greatness of his cause. The battle was not between himself and his accusers, but between good and evil, right and wrong, YHVH and the powers of darkness. His defense was simple. As for me, I am in your hands; do with me whatever you think is good and right because I am innocent of the charge of disrespecting the Temple. Be assured, however, that if you put me to death, you will bring the guilt of innocent blood on yourselves and on this City and on those who live in it, for in truth the LORD has sent me to you to speak all these words in your hearing" (26:14-15). The message itself cannot be ignored because it is from God.

This statement had the effect of arousing the religious fears, and the elders found the complaint against Yirmeyahu without basis. Then the elders and all the people said to the priests and the false prophets, "This man should not be sentenced to death!" The elders turned the matter back to the priests and false prophets, saying, in effect, "This does not concern us, it's your responsibility." After all: He has spoken to us in the name of ADONAI our God (26:16). Normally, the term: the elders, means men who held an official status in the community. But here it is better understood in its literal sense. These men of advanced age had themselves heard, or been told by their fathers, the statement made by an earlier prophet which corroborated the divine origin of Jeremiah's words.

Undoubtedly, Yirmeyahu would have met with the same fate as **Stephen (Acts 7:54-60)** had not **ADONAI** come to the aid of **His loyal servant**. **Jeremiah's** time had not yet come. **His** ministry had not yet been completed. **His** sufferings and persecutions had only begun. **He** was to become a still greater hero of faith and loyalty than **he** had been under the protecting support of Josiah. **He** was to overcome not only doubts, and fears, and dissatisfaction and disappointment, but **stand like a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall (1:18)** against the fiercest attacks in the form of hatred, persecution and imprisonment. In the strength of **YHVH**, **he** was to overcome every trial more than a conqueror.¹³⁴

Then an official broke the impasse: just as **Jeremiah** had cited **Shiloh** as a precedent, so the **elder** cites a precedent for this situation. **He** brought up the example of a previous prophet who had prophesied over a century earlier. **They stepped forward and said to the entire assembly of people**, "**Micah of Moresheth** (a contemporary of **Isaiah**) prophesied in the days of **Hezekiah** king of Judah. He told all the people of Judah, "This is what **ADONAI** of heaven's angelic armies says: **Tziyon** will become a heap of rubble, the Temple hill a mound overgrown with thickets" (**Micah 3:12**). **A direct quote of this kind appears nowhere else in the TaNaKh**. Did **Hezekiah** king of Judah or anyone else in Judah put him to death for disrespecting the Temple? No! Did not **Hezekiah**, a century earlier, **fear the LORD and seek His favor** (see the commentary on **Isaiah Gu - Hezekiah Spread the Letter Before the LORD**)? And did not **ADONAI** relent, so that he did not bring the disaster he pronounced against them? **As a direct result of Micah's warnings, Jerusalem was then spared**. Then the elders applied that situation to their own day, saying: **We are about to do great harm to ourselves if we condemn Yirmeyahu to death (26:17-19)!** The precedent was enough to save **Jeremiah's** life.

Deliverance for Jeremiah; but death for Uriah: On the other hand, there was also a man who prophesied in the name of **ADONAI**, **Uriah** son of **Shemaiah** from **Kiriath Jearim**, a contemporary of **Jeremiah**, was another man who prophesied in the name of the **LORD**. **Nothing is known about him apart from what is written here**. He prophesied the same things against this City and this Land as **Jeremiah** did, but he was not as fortunate as **Micah** or the prophet from **Anathoth**. When **King Jehoiakim** and all his military officers and officials heard his words, the king sought to put him to death. But **Uriah** heard of it and fled in fear to **Egypt** because he didn't have the same promise of protection that **Yirmeyahu** did. **King Jehoiakim, however, sent Elnathan** son of **Acbor** to **Egypt**, along with some other men (**26:20-22**). Later, **Elnathan** would urge **Jehoiakim** not to burn **Jeremiah's** first scroll (**36:12**).

Jehoiakim was a vassal of **Egypt** (**Second Kings 23:34-45; Second Chronicles 36:4**), which would include an extradition treaty between the two nations. So **Egypt** would give up **Uriah** to **Jehoiakim**. They brought **Uriah** out of **Egypt** and took him to King **Jehoiakim**, who had him struck down with the sword and his body thrown into the burial place of the common people (**26:23**). This would have been in the **Kedron Valley** (**Second Kings 23:6**) on the east side of **Jerusalem** and separated the **City** from the **Mount of Olives**. The prophet **Zechariah** (**2 Chronicles 24:20-22**) is the only other prophet whose execution is recorded in the **TaNaKh**. The **Ruach HaKodesh** inspired the prophet to include this incident to stress the very great danger he was in when he continued to preach the way he did.

Unlike **Uriah**, however, **Ahikam** son of **Shaphan** used his influence to save **Jeremiah**, so that he was not handed over to the people to be put to death (**26:24 CJB**). Added to the precedent of **Micah**, the rescue is reported in terms of political realism. **Jeremiah** had a powerful advocate in the family of **Shaphan**. He was a servant of good King **Josiah**, and was sent to inquire of the prophetess **Hilda** in **Second Kings 22:12-14**. **Shaphan** had at least **four sons** - three of whom were mentioned in a positive light by **Yirmeyahu**. **Nebuchadnezzar** appointed **Ahikam's son**, **Gedaliah** governor of **Judah** after the fall of **Jerusalem** (see **Gd-Gedaliah Ruled For 3 Months in 586 BC**). **Gemariah** also tried to urge **Jehoiakim** not to burn **Yirmeyahu's** first scroll (**36:25**), and his son was **Micaiah** who told the court officials that **Baruch** should read the prophet's scroll (**36:11-25**). **Jeremiah** entrusted **Elasah** to carry his letter to the exiles in **Babylon** (**29:3**). But the fourth son, **Jaazaniah**, was the "black sheep" of the family; he was caught by surprise by **Ezekiel** with other idol-worshippers in the **Temple** (**Ezeki'el 8:11**). The three godly brothers were some of the very few who truly sought after **ADONAI** and believed in **Yirmeyahu**. **God** said **He** would protect **Jeremiah** and **He** did. While the prophet was acquitted, his opponents, smarting under their failure to get rid of **Jeremiah**, continued to conspire against him, watching every move he made and wherever the opportunity arose to disparage the faithful ambassador of **YHVH**, they took it with relish.

As **Andrew Dearman** reports in his **NIV Application Commentary on Jeremiah**, in April 1999 the **United States** was brought to a state of collective shock over the pointless murders of students and teachers at **Columbine High School** in **Denver, Colorado**. Much has been written about the multiple tragedies of that fateful day. Two disturbed and disaffected students took senseless vengeance on their school and community before turning the guns on themselves. One chilling account comes with the testimony of students who saw or heard the killers stalking their prey in the school building, then stopping and asking one young woman, **Cassie Bernall**, if she believed in **God**. When she answered "yes," they shot her. She was one of thirteen victims to die. There are reports that the killers asked the same question of another young woman and that she answered "yes" before being shot.

One cannot know what went through the minds of the young women in the last seconds before their murder. One thought perhaps was the murderers felt rage at **God** and the pretentiousness of classmates to believe and trust in **Him**, and that now these demented boys were going to make the girls victims of that rage. Indeed, they were victims, but more than that, they were witnesses. We have only the brief reference to **Uriah** or to the courage of **Ahikam**. **They** did what **they** did and stood where they stood because **they** believed in **YHVH**. We need not ask the modern psychological question of what they thought at the moments of decision; we should, however, give thanks that **they** acted on what **they** believed. And we should be reminded that **God the Father** asks that of all the children of **His Son**.¹³⁵