

ENCOUNTERS BETWEEN JEREMIAH AND ZEDEKIAH

37:1-21

The “Baruch Narrative,” 37:1–45:5

This long prose narrative (the only poetry is 38:22b) chronicles the ministry of Jeremiah during the last days before the destruction of Jerusalem and during its immediate aftermath. While chapters 37–44 are often the recognized unit of material, the inclusion of ch. 45 and its special promise to Baruch is not uncommon and should be followed (sometimes ch. 36, with the role given to Baruch, is included in the unit and provides an *inclusio* with ch. 45). The announcement of God’s salvation, so prominent in chapters 30–33, moves into the background in these chapters. Words of hope are found only in 39:15-18; 40:7-12; 42:9-12; 45:5.

Sometimes this extended narrative is called the “Baruch Narrative” because Baruch is commonly suggested as its author. Though this idea is only an educated guess, it makes a certain sense in view of the nature of the account and Baruch’s presence with Jeremiah throughout. The issue as to whether the prophet or the word of the prophet is the chief subject of this segment of Jeremiah presents a choice that does not need to be made. The rejection of word and prophet in these chapters takes shape particularly in terms of an internal conflict regarding Israel’s submission to Babylon—between those who counsel submission to Babylon and those who counsel rebellion (see **Connections: Prophet or Word of the Prophet**).

COMMENTARY

Chapters 37–38 narrate three encounters between Jeremiah and King Zedekiah in the course of which Jeremiah’s life is endangered and the city of Jerusalem threatened. The chapters are set during the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem in 588–587 BC (as were chs. 21; 32–34), the end of which is reported in chapter 39 (cf. ch. 52). After the introduction (vv. 1-2), chapter 37 may be outlined as follows: Zedekiah’s inquiry of Jeremiah and the prophet’s reception of a word