**November 16 (Jer 38-42)**

**Eunuchs**

“Ch 38: 7When Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, a eunuch who was in the king's house, heard that they had put Jeremiah into the cistern—the king was sitting in the Benjamin Gate— 8Ebed-melech went from the king's house and said to the king, 9“My lord the king, these men have done evil in all that they did to Jeremiah the prophet by casting him into the cistern, and he will die there of hunger, for there is no bread left in the city.”

They were males who were deliberately castrated, referred to as *sarisim* in the Hebrew OT. they were common in various cultures featured in the Bible, such as ancient Egypt, Assyria, Babylonia, Persia, and ancient Rome. They performed a wide variety of functions in these cultures. Relevant to Jer 28:7, eunuchs functioned as courtiers or equivalent domestics, royal guards, government officials, and guardians of women or harem servants. They were servants or slaves who purportedly did not place their loyalties with the military or the aristocracy. They were seen as being uninterested in starting a political dynasty and so trusted as servants with physical access to a ruler. Because their condition usually lowered their social status, they could also be easily replaced or killed without repercussion.

**Babylonian Army Ranks and Policies of Conquered Territories**

Biblical Hebrew terms for Assyrian and Babylonian army ranks include Rab-saris, Tartan, Rabshakeh and Rab-mag. Rab-saris possibly means “Chief of Officers” in Assyria and Babylonia. The Rabshakeh was the vizier, or high-ranking political officer, of the Assyrian and Babylonian kings. The Rab-mag, interestingly, was the Babylonian chief prince or magician/wise man (cf. “magi” or “mage”). The Tartan was the commander-in-chief of the Assyrian army.

Babylonia had been part of the Assyrian Empire before gaining its independence, and the Babylonian kings learned their territorial governing policy from the Assyrians:

During the imperial period from the 9th to the 7th century BCE, an extensive, centrally directed resettlement programme saw population groups from all corners of the enormous geographical area under Assyrian control being moved across great distances, to be settled within the provinces making up the “land of Aššur.” Populations within the boundaries of the Empire were relocated, replacing and being replaced by people who were themselves moved, in complex circular movements that were carefully planned and executed over the course of several years…The explicit goal was the creation of an integrated, economically highly developed culture and society of “Assyrians”…Whenever the Assyrian sources specify who was to be relocated, they name the urban elites, craftsmen, scholars and military men. (Karen Radner, “The ‘Lost Tribes of Israel’ in the Context of the Resettlement Programme of the Assyrian Empire,” pp. 101, 102, 103)

Assyrian records even mention a unit of chariots made up of Israelites taken from the sack of the city of Samaria (Haggai Olshanetsky, “The Israelite-Judaean Military Service in the Armies of Assyria,” p. 35)

Jer 24:1 (“After Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had taken into exile from Jerusalem Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, together with the officials of Judah, the craftsmen, and the metal workers, and had brought them to Babylon…”) and 29:2 (“This was after King Jeconiah and the queen mother, the eunuchs, the officials of Judah and Jerusalem, the craftsmen, and the metal workers had departed from Jerusalem.”) both witness this Assyrian/Babylonian resettlement policy.

**Discussion Questions (Jer 38-42)**

1) In Jer 38, what kind of king did Hezekiah show he was in dealing with Jeremiah? What kind of court and officials did he have? What are the politics of this monarchy evident here? What is the political significance of a royal eunuch who’s not an Israelite rescuing the prophet?

2) Contrast Jeremiah’s treatment in Jer 39 with his treatment by Hezekiah and his officials before the city’s fall. And what does the prophet’s message to Ebed-melech the Ethiopian say about Jeremiah’s relationship with God under the dire circumstances?

3) Jer 41 does not include Jeremiah at all. What is covered in that chapter and why do you think it was included in the book? Sort out who was where and on whose side.

4) Another cosmic contrast: In Jer 42, how did God deal both differently and similarly with Johanan and the remnant left in Judah from those who went into exile in Babylon? How did the respective people involved differ from each other?

5) How can you personally apply these verses?

6) Make up your own question and answer it.