

## Five Men or Seven Explained– 2 Kings 25:19 and Jeremiah 52:25

As may be seen in the passages below, the priests and nobles who were captured at the 586 BC final fall of Jerusalem were gathered up and taken some 250 miles north to Nebuchadnezzar who was at his field headquarters at Riblah on the Orontes River in the province of Hamath. There they were slain before that Babylonian monarch. So far, the account offers no problem.

<p>2KI 25:18 And the captain of the guard took Seraiah the chief priest, and Zephaniah the second priest, and the three keepers of the door: 19 And out of the city he took an officer that was set over the men of war, <b>and five men of them that were in the king's presence, which were found in the city,</b> and the principal scribe of the host, which mustered the people of the land, and threescore men of the people of the land that were found in the city: 20 And Nebuzaradan captain of the guard took these, and brought them to the king of Babylon to Riblah: 21a And the king of Babylon smote them, and slew them at Riblah in the land of Hamath.</p>	<p>JER 52:24 And the captain of the guard took Seraiah the chief priest, and Zephaniah the second priest, and the three keepers of the door: 25 He took also out of the city an eunuch, which had the charge of the men of war; <b>and seven men of them that were near the king's person, which were found in the city;</b> and the principal scribe of the host, who mustered the people of the land; and threescore men of the people of the land, that were found in the midst of the city. 26 So Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard took them, and brought them to the king of Babylon to Riblah. 27a And the king of Babylon smote them, and put them to death in Riblah in the land of Hamath.</p>
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However, a Bible error is perceived to exist here for when we total the number of those slain in Jeremiah we obtain 74 whereas the Kings passages yield only 72. As can be seen, the two read almost identically except when we compare 2 Kings 25:19 with Jeremiah 52:25 (designated in red). So which is it, were there seven or five men taken that were found in Zedekiah's presence? Surely it must be admitted by even the most conservative Bible believer that this is a contradiction – an undeniable egregious error.

Not so! Beginning in faith that God has kept His many promises to preserve His inerrant-inspired Word, we merely let the Holy Writ speak for itself.

First, we note that in the previous year Jeremiah had been falsely accused of treason. He was beaten by Israel's "princes" and cast into the dungeon at the house of Jonathan the scribe (Jer. 37:15). After "many days", King Zedekiah (fearing his nobles) secretly sent for Jeremiah and moved him "into the court of the prison" "*which was in the king of Judah's house*" (Jer. 37:17-21, cp. Jer. 32:2).

Afterward, cowardly Zedekiah surrendered Jeremiah to the princes who lowered Jeremiah into the dungeon of Malchiah where he sank down into its septic mire (Jer. 38:5-6). Ebedmelech, an Ethiopian eunuch who served in the king's house, petitioned the king to remove Jeremiah from the miry pit. Zedekiah mustered some courage and had Jeremiah again placed in the king's "court of the prison" (Jer. 38:7-13) that was "*in the king of Judah's*

house” (Jer. 32:2) where he remained “*until the day that Jerusalem was taken*” (38:28). Thus, when the city fell, Jeremiah was “near the king’s person” (Jer. 52:25), exactly as our beginning passage reads. Hence, Jeremiah 52:25 is correct – seven men were near Zedekiah when he was captured, and now we have discerned that one was the prophet Jeremiah. Nevertheless, as we shall soon see, the 2 Kings 25:19 verse is also truthful.

Now Nebuchadnezzar had allowed the poor people to remain in the land to farm the vineyards and fields for him, and he set Gedaliah as governor to oversee them (2 Kings 25:12, 22). Further, the Babylonian king charged Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard, to see that no harm came to Jeremiah when Jerusalem was captured and that the prophet should be allowed to come and go as he pleased. Jeremiah was found and taken “out of the court of the prison” which was “*in the king of Judah’s house*” (Jer. 32:2) and placed under Gedaliah’s care and protection (Jer. 39:11-14).

Thus we see that Jeremiah 52:25 has recorded seven, the total number “of them that were near the king’s person, which were found in the city” of which Jeremiah was one. Therefore, 2 Kings 25:19 must be acknowledged as recording the number that was actually taken to Riblah and slain (i.e., 5). Obviously, from the cited Scriptures given, Jeremiah was spared. No honest seeker of truth can now deny this. The cynic may remain unconvinced, but surely none of the redeemed will continue to doubt.

The only question remaining is – who was the other man? As he is not identified in the passages before us, we can neither be certain nor dogmatic. Nevertheless, he almost certainly is either Baruch, Jeremiah’s faithful and trusted scribe (see: Jer. 36), or Ebedmelech, the Ethiopian eunuch who had earlier saved the prophet of God’s life. Both should be seen as very likely and reasonable possibilities – especially Ebedmelech, as he was said to serve “in the king’s house” (Jer. 38:7-8) and thereby been near the king.

Thus, we see it is quite possible that Jeremiah returned the favor. Ebedmelech interceded and saved his life from the miry cesspool, and Jeremiah thereafter reciprocated by interceding with the captains of Babylon for the life of the Ethiopian.

Regardless of how one views the merit of this latter identification, there is no contradiction. All is merely a paradox – an apparent error and nothing more. Seven men were found near the king, of which two were set free. Only 72 of the 74 men were carried away to forfeit their lives at Riblah. Selah!

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