

FPFWC Christian Development



Courageous Prophets of Change

May 2021

Spring Quarter

May 15, 2021

Lesson #3 -Preaching Doom

SCRIPTURE TEXT – Jeremiah 38:14-23

ICE BREAKERS-

1. How do we gain boldness to be a witness for Jesus Christ?
2. Why is it necessary for us to turn to God in times of confusion or trouble?

Key Verse- Jeremiah said unto Zedekiah, If I declare it unto thee, wilt thou not surely put me to death? and if I give thee counsel, wilt thou not hearken unto me?—Jeremiah 38:15

LESSON BACKGROUND –

The prophet Jeremiah delivered God's message to the nation of Judah from 627 until the mid-580s BC. That was roughly a century after the prophet Isaiah. Five kings reigned over Judah during Jeremiah's ministry. Josiah, the first of these five, was righteous (2 Kings 23:25). The four following him, however, were all wicked. These included Jehoiachin, who was removed from the throne and taken into captivity when the Babylonians invaded in 597 BC (24:12). King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon replaced Jehoiachin with that man's uncle, Mattaniah, renaming him Zedekiah in the process (24:17).

Zedekiah wavered between service to the Babylonian king and rebellion against that overlord. Zedekiah ruled for Judah's final decade as a nation before it fell in 586 BC.

The destruction of Judah at the hands of Babylon that Isaiah had foreseen decades earlier (see 2 Kings 20:16–18) drew near during Jeremiah's day. Like the northern kingdom of Israel before, Judah's unfaithfulness to the covenant had exhausted the Lord's great patience. Jeremiah proclaimed that the Lord would use the Babylonians as instruments of judgment against Judah (Jeremiah 20:4–6).

Throughout his prophetic ministry, Jeremiah warned Jerusalem in word and in deed of the coming destruction. He illustrated this message in symbolic actions (examples: Jeremiah 13:1–11; 19:1–15; 27:1–11). Yet rarely did anyone take this prophet seriously (37:2). His oracles were misunderstood and dismissed as the rhetoric of a traitorous, pro-Babylonian sympathizer (37:11–13). Jerusalem's more "loyal" prophets proclaimed peace, safety, and deliverance. Their fabricated, uninspired message was believed among the populace.

Twice in Judah's closing months, while Jerusalem was under siege, Jeremiah endured punishments for his message of doom. First, he was beaten and held in a dungeon cell for many days (Jeremiah 37:15–16). Zedekiah, however, summoned him from the dungeon and released him into the courtyard of the guard

(37:21). There he continued to reveal the unpleasant things God told him (38:1–3).

Zedekiah's officials took exception to Jeremiah's preaching because his warnings were deemed treasonous and demoralizing (Jeremiah 38:4). With Zedekiah unwilling to oppose them, the officials had Jeremiah put down into a muddy dungeon (38:6). But a high official named Ebedmelech gathered 30 men (also with Zedekiah's concession) to lift Jeremiah out of the mud and rescue him from certain death (38:8–13).

LESSON COMMENTARY –

Again **Zedekiah sent for Jeremiah** to meet him at the **third entrance** to the temple. This entrance, not mentioned elsewhere, may refer to a private entrance that connected the king's palace with the temple. Zedekiah told the prophet to **not hide anything from him**.

Jeremiah voiced two objections. First, if he answered with a message the king did not want to hear he had no guarantee that the king would not **put [him] to death**. Second, any counsel Jeremiah gave would be wasted because the king would **not listen** to him. Zedekiah answered the first objection but not the second. He promised **in secret** that he would not put Jeremiah **to death** or **give him over** to men **seeking his life**; but the king made no promise to heed Jeremiah's message.

38:17–23. Jeremiah's message was unchanged (cf. 21:1–10; 37:17; 38:1–3). If Zedekiah would surrender to the Babylonians he would **live**, the city would **not be burned** down, and his household would **survive**. However, if he would not surrender, Zedekiah would **not escape** but would be seized by **the king of Babylon** (cf. 39:5–7; 52:8–11) and the **city** would be handed **over to the Chaldeans** who would **burn it** (cf. 21:10; 32:29; 34:2, 22; 37:8, 10; 38:23).

Zedekiah refused to heed Jeremiah's message because he had a **dread of the Jews** who had already **gone over to the Chaldeans**. He believed if he went to Babylon he would be handed over to these Judahites who would **abuse** him for his past acts of cruelty and bad leadership. Jeremiah assured Zedekiah that this would not happen. He begged him to listen: **Please obey the LORD**, that **you may live**. Then Jeremiah detailed the horrible results of **refusing to go out**. Zedekiah would suffer the very ridicule and humiliation he sought to avoid. The **women** from his **palace** would be given to the **officers of the king of Babylon** to be raped. The women would mock Zedekiah's weak leadership for following the advice of his **close friends**. Zedekiah would be **misled and overpowered**, his **feet** would sink **in the mire** of a dungeon, and his friends will have **turned back** from him. If Zedekiah refused to surrender to Babylon he would see his **wives and ... sons** being led away (cf. 39:6), he would **not escape**, and Jerusalem would be **burned** (cf. v. 18).

LESSON NUGGET – There are a lot of people whose primary interest in the Bible is prophecy. They're interested in the future. They want to know what the Bible has to say about the events that are taking place in the world today. They find that quite fascinating. And indeed it is! But, you know, the Word of God is

not of any true value to you unless you are keeping the Word of God. Jeremiah was complaining to Zedekiah, “You want to hear it, but you’re not going to do it.”

Sources: *Moody Bible Commentary, Standard Lesson Commentary, The Essential Everyday Bible Commentary and Wiersbe Expository Outlines on the New Testament*