

JEREMIAH: THE SUFFERING PREACHER

Bible Background – JEREMIAH 37-38

Printed Text – JEREMIAH 38:14-23

Zedekiah Questions Jeremiah

¹⁴ One day King Zedekiah sent for Jeremiah and had him brought to the third entrance of the LORD's Temple. "I want to ask you something," the king said. "And don't try to hide the truth."

¹⁵ Jeremiah said, "If I tell you the truth, you will kill me. And if I give you advice, you won't listen to me anyway."

¹⁶ So King Zedekiah secretly promised him, "As surely as the LORD our Creator lives, I will not kill you or hand you over to the men who want you dead."

¹⁷ Then Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, "This is what the LORD God of Heaven's Armies, the God of Israel, says: 'If you surrender to the Babylonian officers, you and your family will live, and the city will not be burned down.

¹⁸ But if you refuse to surrender, you will not escape! This city will be handed over to the Babylonians, and they will burn it to the ground.'"

¹⁹ "But I am afraid to surrender," the king said, "for the Babylonians may hand me over to the Judeans who have defected to them. And who knows what they will do to me!"

²⁰ Jeremiah replied, "You won't be handed over to them if you choose to obey the LORD. Your life will be spared, and all will go well for you.

²¹ But if you refuse to surrender, this is what the LORD has revealed to me:

²² All the women left in your palace will be brought out and given to the officers of the Babylonian army. Then the women will taunt you, saying,

'What fine friends you have!
They have betrayed and misled you.
When your feet sank in the mud,
they left you to your fate!'

²³ All your wives and children will be led out to the Babylonians, and you will not escape. You will be seized by the king of Babylon, and this city will be burned down."

-----New Living Translation

Lesson Introduction

The prophet Jeremiah had an unwelcomed and controversial message for the Kingdom of Judah. The nation had turned from God, did not heed the warnings of God's prophets, therefore, judgment was inevitable. Jeremiah's message was that their only hope was to repent and surrender to the Babylonians to save their very lives. Now, to a rebellious people who had rejected their God and clung only to their "nationalism," the call to surrender was considered a treacherous act. But in spite of being imprisoned, branded a meddler and a traitor, Jeremiah never deviated from the message God sent him to deliver. As we study this lesson, let us contemplate on the steadfastness of God's prophet in the face of delivering this very challenging message to King Zedekiah.

Background: Jeremiah, whose name means “Yahweh appointed,” was set apart by God as a prophet from the womb (Jeremiah 1:5). For over forty years he was God’s mouthpiece as he called out judgment against Judah for their wickedness. In the fourth year of King Jehoiakim’s eleven-year reign, the Lord commanded Jeremiah to provide a written account of everything spoken about Israel, Judah, and all the nations from the time of King Josiah until that present which included His reminders of the disaster to come. God’s objective was to extend mercy if hearers would only repent (Jeremiah 36:1-3). King Jehoiakim and his officials heard the prophetic work but rather than repent, the scrolls were burned (Jeremiah 36:1-25). In spite of the tough words he had to deliver and personal pain experienced, Jeremiah followed through with everything the Lord commanded. In the last days of Jerusalem King Zedekiah, a weaker king was in power and the Lord sent word through Jeremiah that although Judah looked to Egypt as an ally, the other nation would leave them to fend for themselves. He further warned that Judah’s nemesis—the Chaldeans—would prevail against them, burn down the city, and scatter them as exiles. However, this destruction would be averted if the king and his leaders would turn back to the Lord. The officials were angered by his prophecy and sought to paint Jeremiah as a traitor to the Chaldeans; he was beaten and thrown into prison (Jeremiah 37:1-16).

-----*Precepts for Living*, the UMI Annual Commentary 2020-2021, p. 436.

A Final Interview

Jeremiah 38:14-18: After the first siege of Judah in which King Nebuchadnezzar carried off the reigning king of Judah (Jehoiachin), the Babylonian ruler made Zedekiah a puppet king. Zedekiah was a weak king and led Judah further into sin, as he “did what was evil in the Lord’s sight” (2 Kings 24:15-17; Jeremiah 31:1). Jeremiah continued to warn the nation of the consequences of their rebellion, but instead of listening to him, they imprisoned him three times. At the urging of an Ethiopian eunuch (Ebed-melech), King Zedekiah had Jeremiah released from the bottom of the muddy cistern where he had been imprisoned (Jeremiah 38:7-13).

Upon his release, the king had Jeremiah brought to him for a private consultation where he asked Jeremiah to tell him the complete truth. Now this is the third time that the king has called on Jeremiah to tell him the truth and each time he had been imprisoned for saying what the people did not want to hear. His apprehension is certainly understandable. His response—if he tells the truth won’t he be killed and still the king will not heed the message? The king’s response is telling: he promises to not harm Jeremiah or turn him over to those who wish to kill him—but he never promises to obey the Word of God.

The truth that Jeremiah speaks from God does not change, but that is not because of the assurances given by the king that Jeremiah will not be harmed. Jeremiah speaks the truth because he is a faithful servant of the Almighty God. He never waives in his obedience to God and His Word, therefore the message stays the same. The judgment at the hands of the Chaldeans (Babylonians) is certain. The only way to save the lives of the people and prevent the city from being totally destroyed is to surrender to the instrument of God’s judgment against an apostate nation. If they don’t surrender, there is no escape from the hands of the enemy and Jerusalem will be destroyed.

A Final Response

Jeremiah 38:19-23: But even though Jeremiah delivers a message that comes, not from himself, but from ‘the Lord, God of hosts, and the God of Israel,’ Zedekiah is more afraid of men than of God’s judgment. Perhaps he will be mistreated and abused by the Jews who have already defected to the Chaldeans. He puts forth ridiculous excuses for not following God. For if he truly trusted God, he would not have been afraid of the Babylonian officials or the deserters. Jeremiah pleads (Heb. *na’*) with King Zedekiah to obey the word of God. If God says that all will go well with him and his family if he surrenders, then he has absolutely nothing to fear. But failure to heed the word of God means the nation will be in the hands of the enemy, great harm—even death—will come to its inhabitants and the city will be burned and destroyed.

Being the man of no courage or wisdom that King Zedekiah was, he did not listen to the Word of God as was spoken through Jeremiah. Everything that Jeremiah had warned of came true. Judah was overcome by the Chaldeans. King Zedekiah’s sons were killed before his eyes. The king himself was blinded, bound and carried off to Babylon with the rest of the people. The king’s palace was burned, the walls of the city destroyed. (Jer. 39:6-9). But Jeremiah was spared (v.14) as well as Ebed-melech the Ethiopian who saved Jeremiah from the pit (v.17).

◆ *What are some reasons people dismiss godly advice?*

Conclusion

There are many Zedekiah-types in our society today. They are present in the form of national leaders who lead by the power of misinformation and untruths. Some are in the form of church leaders who compromise the Gospel of Jesus Christ and proclaim prosperity and wealth as symbols of success and church growth. And some are in the form of organizational leaders who shun godly advice and lack the courage to stand up for even the simplest cases of justice and equity. Let us commit to being more like Jeremiah, with a mission to give godly advice with courage; knowing that true peace and joy come to those who trust and obey God unwaveringly, no matter the cost.

Sources:

- Banks, M. (Ed.). (2020). Call in the New Testament. *Precepts for Living*, 23(Spring Quarter), 432-442. The Urban Ministries, Inc. Annual Commentary 2020-2021.
- Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation, Carol Stream, Illinois.
- Mindel, N. (2021). Zedekiah: The Last King of Israel. Retrieved on May 14, 2021 from https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/112328/jewish/Zedekiah.htm.

May 16, 2021 – Study Guide 11

Lesson for Next Week – May 23, 2021 – Study Guide 12

EZEKIAL: STREET PREACHER TO THE EXILES

Bible Background ♦ EZEKIEL 18
Printed Text ♦ EZEKIEL 18:1-9, 30-32
Devotional Reading ♦ PSALM 147

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Treat Each Other Fairly
(Deuteronomy 24:14-18)

TUESDAY

Taking Personal Responsibility
(Jeremiah 31:27-30)

WEDNESDAY

The Child Who Sins Suffers Punishment
(Ezekiel 18:10-13)

THURSDAY

The Righteous Child Is Rewarded
(Ezekiel 18:14-18)

FRIDAY

All are Accountable for Their Sins
(Ezekiel 18:19-24)

SATURDAY

God is Compassionate and Fair
(Ezekiel 18:25-29)

SUNDAY

Repent and Live Righteous Lives
(Ezekiel 18:1-9, 30-32)