

Preaching Doom

Jeremiah 38:14-23

SS Lesson for 05/16/2021

Devotional Scripture: Prov 12:15

OUTLINE

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Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Key Verse: Jer 38:15

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

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Seeking God's Word because it is trustworthy and true (2 Peter 3:5-7)

Seeking God's Word because it has the power of God (Rom 1:16-17)

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Lesson Background and Key Verse

Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

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 cistern (38:6). But a high official named Ebed-Melek gathered 30 men (also with Zedekiah's concession) to lift Jeremiah out of the mud and rescue him from certain death (38:8-13).

Key Verse: Jer 38:15

Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, "If I declare it to you, will you not surely put me to death? And if I give you advice, you will not listen to me."

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

38:1-3. By being confined to the courtyard of the guard (37:21) Jeremiah had some freedom to meet with people (cf. 32:1-2, 6). He used this time as an opportunity to deliver God's message to any who would listen. His message was overheard by four high-ranking officials: **Shephatiah son of Mattan** (not mentioned elsewhere), **Gedaliah son of Pashhur** (possibly a son of the Pashhur who beat Jeremiah, 20:1-3), **Jehucal son of Shelemiah** (sent by Zedekiah to inquire about the lifting of Babylon's siege, 37:3), and **Pashhur son of Malkijah** (sent by Zedekiah to inquire about Babylon's initial attack on Jerusalem, 21:1-2). These four powerful officials **heard** Jeremiah speaking to **all the people**. The contents of Jeremiah's message are summarized in 38:2-3. The message was the same one that Jeremiah gave before (21:3-10). Those who remained in Jerusalem would **die by the sword, famine, or plague** (cf. 14:12). Only those who deserted **to the Babylonians** would **live**. Jerusalem's only hope was to surrender. Any thought of withstanding Babylon's siege was futile since God had said the **city** would be **handed over to Nebuchadnezzar who would capture it**.

38:4-6. The officials went to Zedekiah and demanded that Jeremiah **be put to death** for his words. His "treasonous" remarks were **discouraging** both **the soldiers** and **all the people**. In their twisted nationalistic logic these officials believed that Jeremiah was **seeking** the **ruin** of his **people** when, in fact, Jeremiah wanted just the opposite (v. 2). Zedekiah's weakness was most evident in his response to these officials. Though earlier he had agreed to protect Jeremiah (37:18-21), Zedekiah now handed him over to those who sought his life. Zedekiah's lame excuse was that **the king** could **do nothing to oppose** them. Zedekiah was a political puppet, incapable of making strong, independent decisions. He was controlled either by Nebuchadnezzar (cf. 2 Kings 24:17) or by the city officials who urged him to rebel against Babylon and then influenced his decisions (Jer. 27:12-15; 38:5, 19, 24-28). The officials **took Jeremiah** and **put him into** Malkijah's **cistern**, in **the courtyard of the guard**. A cistern was a large pit cut into rock and covered with plaster. It was used to gather rainwater in the winter for use during the dry summer (cf. 2:13). This **cistern** was so deep that they had to lower **Jeremiah** into it **by ropes**. Possibly because of the prolonged

drought (cf. 14:1-4) the cistern **had no water in it**. All it contained was the **mud** that collected in the bottom of the pit from the dirt carried there by the rain. **Jeremiah** then **sank down into the mud**. His life was indeed threatened. Had the water or mud been deeper he would certainly have drowned or suffocated, and death by starvation was a near prospect. Also perhaps individuals threw stones at Jeremiah while he was in the cistern, hoping to kill him outright or to knock him unconscious so he would sink into the muddy water and die (cf. Lam. 3:52-54).

38:7-9. Many of Jeremiah's countrymen wanted him killed. The only official who cared enough to intercede on his behalf was **Ebed-Melech** (lit., "servant of the king") who was a **Cushite** from the area of upper Egypt (modern-day southern Egypt, Sudan, and northern Ethiopia). He was serving as **an official** (*sārs*, lit., "a eunuch"; cf. Dan. 1:7) **in the royal palace**. His exact position in the palace was not described, but he had access to the king. **Ebed-Melech went to the Benjamin Gate** (cf. Jer. 20:2; 37:13) where **the king was sitting**—either conducting official business or supervising the strengthening of Jerusalem's defenses against the siege. His urgent message to **the king** was that the other officials had **acted wickedly** by throwing **Jeremiah... into a cistern where he would starve to death**. Evidently Zedekiah had not known the officials' specific plan to kill Jeremiah or else he had not believed that they would carry it out. But now he knew Jeremiah's death was imminent.

38:10-13. Zedekiah ordered **Ebed-Melech to take 30 men from there**—possibly soldiers on duty at the gate—**and lift Jeremiah from the cistern before he died**. Thirty men would be needed to pull Jeremiah out of the mud and to stand guard against the officials who might oppose the rescue attempt. **Ebed-Melech** led the soldiers **to a room under the treasury in the palace** where the opening to the cistern was located. **Old rags and worn-out clothes** were passed down **to Jeremiah** to place **under his arms to pad the ropes**. **Jeremiah** was then **pulled... up with the ropes** and freed from **the cistern**. He was again put in **the courtyard of the guard** (cf. 37:21).

38:14-16. **Zedekiah sent for Jeremiah** again and met him in secret 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 wanted **to ask Jeremiah something**, and he told the prophet **not to hide anything from him**. **Jeremiah** voiced two objections. First, if he did **answer** with a message the king did not want to hear he had no guarantee that the king would **not kill him**. Second, any **counsel** Jeremiah gave was wasted because the king **would not listen to him**. **Zedekiah** answered the first objection but not the second. He promised that he would **neither kill Jeremiah himself nor hand him over to people who were seeking his life**. But the king made no promise to heed Jeremiah's message.

38:17-23. Jeremiah's message remained the same as before (cf. 21:1-10; 37:17; 38:1-3). **If Zedekiah would surrender to the Babylonians his life would be spared, the city would not be burned down, and his family would live**. However, **if he would not surrender, the city would be handed over to the armies of Babylon who would burn it down** (cf. 21:10; 32:29; 34:2, 22; 37:8, 10; 38:23); and Zedekiah would **not escape from their hands**. **Zedekiah** refused to heed Jeremiah's advice because of fear. He was **afraid of the Jews** who had already **gone over to the Babylonians** because he thought **the Babylonians** would **hand him over to** those Jews who now opposed him. Given the opportunity, they would **mistreat** him for his past acts of cruelty to them. **Jeremiah** tried to assure Zedekiah that this would not happen. If he would **obey the LORD by following Jeremiah's word, his life would be spared. But if he refused to surrender** because of fear he would suffer the very ridicule and humiliation he sought to avoid. **The women** from his own **palace** (the royal harem) would scoff at Zedekiah as they were **brought out to the officials of... Babylon**. The theme of their song would be the gullibility of the king in trusting his advisers who had **misled** him while posing as his **trusted friends**. But when Zedekiah's **feet had sunk in the mud** of Babylon's pit (cf. 38:6) he would look around to discover that his **friends** who had brought him there had **deserted** him. If he refused to surrender to Babylon he would see his **wives and children** being led away (cf. 39:6). He himself would **be captured** and the **city of Jerusalem would be burned down** (cf. 38:18).

38:24-28. **Zedekiah** refused to follow Jeremiah's advice. Such a bold step was beyond the ability of this spineless monarch. Instead he warned Jeremiah **not to let anyone know about their conversation**. If word got out, the officials would try to kill Jeremiah. Palace spies were everywhere so Zedekiah gave Jeremiah an alibi in case he was questioned. **If the officials asked Jeremiah what he said to the king and what the king said to him, he was to tell them that he was pleading with Zedekiah not to send him back to the dungeon in Jonathan's house** (cf. 37:15). Jeremiah had indeed made such a request during his first meeting with Zedekiah (37:20). Zedekiah's caution was well-founded because **the officials did** hear about the meeting and went **to Jeremiah to question him**. Jeremiah repeated the words Zedekiah told him **to say**; and since **no one had heard the conversation**, they accepted Jeremiah's story. **Jeremiah remained in**

the courtyard of the guard (cf. 38:13) as a political prisoner till **Jerusalem was captured** by Nebuchadnezzar

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

Seeking God to Avoid Doom (Jer 38:14-18)

14 Then Zedekiah the king sent and had Jeremiah the prophet brought to him at the third entrance of the house of the Lord. And the king said to Jeremiah, "I will ask you something. Hide nothing from me."

15 Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, "If I declare it to you, will you not surely put me to death? And if I give you advice, you will not listen to me."

16 So Zedekiah the king swore secretly to Jeremiah, saying, "As the Lord lives, who made our very souls, I will not put you to death, nor will I give you into the hand of these men who seek your life."

17 Then Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, "Thus says the Lord, the God of hosts, the God of Israel: 'If you surely surrender to the king of Babylon's princes, then your soul shall live; this city shall not be burned with fire, and you and your house shall live.'

18 But if you do not surrender to the king of Babylon's princes, then this city shall be given into the hand of the Chaldeans; they shall burn it with fire, and you shall not escape from their hand.'"

Seeking God's Word (14)

Seeking God's Word because it is useful to equip (2 Tim 3:16-17)

16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Seeking God's Word because it is trustworthy and true (2 Peter 3:5-7)

5 But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. 6 By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. 7 By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

Seeking God's Word because it has the power of God (Rom 1:16-17)

16 I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. 17 For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

Seeking God's Word because it is the sword of the Holy Spirit (Eph 6:17)

17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Seeking God's Word because it is living and enduring (1 Peter 1:23)

23 For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.

Seeking God's Word because it revives the soul (Ps 19:7)

7 The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple.

Seeking God requires godly motives (15-16)

Motives that are not for gain (Titus 1:11)

11 They must be silenced, because they are ruining whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach — and that for the sake of dishonest gain.

Motives filled with love (1 Cor 13:1-3)

1 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3 If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Motives that have actions based on faith (James 2:17-18)

17 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. 18 But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do.

Motives with an upright motive and heart (Prov 15:8)

8 The Lord detests the sacrifice of the wicked, but the prayer of the upright pleases him.

Motives of being a living sacrifice (Rom 12:1)

12 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship.

God's Word revealed (17-18)

Revealed from God to man (Matt 16:17)

17 Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.

Revealed through God's hidden things to His children (Matt 11:25-26)

25 At that time Jesus said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. 26 Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.

Revealed through teaching those who listen to God (John 6:45)

45 It is written in the Prophets: 'They will all be taught by God.' Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me.

Revealed through His Holy Spirit (Eph 1:17-18)

17 I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. 18 I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,

Revealed through giving an understanding (1 John 5:20)

20 We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true — even in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.

Fear of Doom Causes Distrust of God (Jer 38:19-23)

19 And Zedekiah the king said to Jeremiah, "I am afraid of the Jews who have defected to the Chaldeans, lest they deliver me into their hand, and they abuse me."

20 But Jeremiah said, "They shall not deliver you. Please, obey the voice of the Lord which I speak to you. So it shall be well with you, and your soul shall live.

21 But if you refuse to surrender, this is the word that the Lord has shown me:

22 'Now behold, all the women who are left in the king of Judah's house shall be surrendered to the king of Babylon's princes, and those women shall say: "Your close friends have set upon you And prevailed against you; Your feet have sunk in the mire, And they have turned away again."

23 'So they shall surrender all your wives and children to the Chaldeans. You shall not escape from their hand, but shall be taken by the hand of the king of Babylon. And you shall cause this city to be burned with fire.'"

Fearing man versus God (19)

Fear of man is not wise (Ps 56:11)

11 in God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?

Fear God because He can destroy the soul (Matt 10:28)

28 Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

Fear and obey God rather than man (Acts 5:29)

29 Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than men!

Fear of man more than God is a sin (1 Sam 15:24)

24 Then Saul said to Samuel, "I have sinned. I violated the Lord's command and your instructions. I was afraid of the people and so I gave in to them.

Fear and please God rather than man (Gal 1:10)

10 Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.

Fear is overcome by obedience (20)

Obedience overcomes because of listening and having faith (2 Chron 20:20)

20 Early in the morning they left for the Desert of Tekoa. As they set out, Jehoshaphat stood and said, "Listen to me, Judah and people of Jerusalem! Have faith in the Lord your God and you will be upheld; have faith in his prophets and you will be successful."

Obedience overcomes because of repentance (Jer 26:13)

13 Now reform your ways and your actions and obey the Lord your God. Then the Lord will relent and not bring the disaster he has pronounced against you.

Obedience overcomes because of accepting God's advice (Dan 4:27)

27 Therefore, O king, be pleased to accept my advice: Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue."

Obedience overcomes through being willing to obey (Isa 1:19-20)

19 If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the best from the land; 20 but if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword." For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

Obedience overcomes because it proves faith genuine (1 Peter 1:7)

7 These have come so that your faith — of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire — may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

Disobedience and distrust of God causes calamities (21-23)

Calamities because of being rebellious (Ezek 21:24)

24 "Therefore this is what the Sovereign Lord says: 'Because you people have brought to mind your guilt by your open rebellion, revealing your sins in all that you do — because you have done this, you will be taken captive.

Calamities because of association with wicked people (Prov 24:21-22)

21 Fear the Lord and the king, my son, and do not join with the rebellious, 22 for those two will send sudden destruction upon them, and who knows what calamities they can bring?

Calamities because of rejection of God (Prov 1:24-27)

24 But since you rejected me when I called and no one gave heed when I stretched out my hand, 25 since you ignored all my advice and would not accept my rebuke, 26 I in turn will laugh at your disaster; I will mock when calamity overtakes you — 27 when calamity overtakes you like a storm, when disaster sweeps over you like a whirlwind, when distress and trouble overwhelm you.

Calamities of banishment because of wickedness (Prov 14:32)

32 When calamity comes, the wicked are brought down, but even in death the righteous have a refuge.

Calamities because of God's judgment of conduct (Ezek 7:24-27)

24 I will bring the most wicked of the nations to take possession of their houses; I will put an end to the pride of the mighty, and their sanctuaries will be desecrated. 25 When terror comes, they will seek peace, but there will be none. 26 Calamity upon calamity will come, and rumor upon rumor. They will try to get a vision from the prophet; the teaching of the law by the priest will be lost, as will the counsel of the elders. 27 The king will mourn, the prince will be clothed with despair, and the hands of the people of the land will tremble. I will deal with them according to their conduct, and by their own standards I will judge them. Then they will know that I am the Lord."

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from H. A. Ironside

"Thus saith the Lord: He that remaineth in this city shall die by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence: but he that goeth forth to the Chaldeans shall live; for he shall have his life for a prey, and shall live." It was also told them that he had declared, **"Thus saith the Lord: This city shall surely be given into the hand of the king of Babylon's army, which shall take it"** (Jeremiah 38:1-3).

As we know, these prophecies had indeed been uttered. Almost the identical words are recorded in Jeremiah 21:9, when Pashur, the son of Malchiah (or Melchiah, as he is there called), was one of the messengers sent to him by king Zedekiah. He is now one of Jeremiah's accusers, with three others, Shephatiah, Gedaliah (the son of another Pashur), and Jucal.

Again and again, on divers occasions, the fall of Jerusalem had been clearly foretold. Like his Lord, Jeremiah could say, **"In secret have I said nothing."** (John 18:20) Openly, in the presence of the populace, nobles, priests, and the king, had he faithfully declared the truth of GOD regarding the doomed city. For this he was hated. His words seemed to put a premium upon what to the nobles and captains looked like treachery.

Burning with indignation against the man who so solemnly declared the utter futility of all their schemes and devices, they accused Jeremiah before the king, and urged that he be executed as a traitor.

"We beseech thee," they pleaded, **"let this man be put to death, for thus he weakeneth the hands of the men of war that remain in this city, and the hands of all the people, in speaking such words unto them, for this man seeketh not the welfare of this people, but the hurt"** (Jeremiah 38:4).

How little can worldly men understand that true love for the people leads one faithfully to show them their sins and their danger!

Little indeed could these four accusers enter into the deep sorrows and anguish of heart that the "weeping prophet" had experienced on their account. Like Paul, the more abundantly he loved them, the less he was loved in return. It is one of the hardest trials a devoted servant has to bear when his good is thus evil spoken of, and his very affection mistaken for malice, because it makes it impossible for him to hold his peace and to permit the people to sleep on in their sins without lifting a warning voice. Yet, in some measure, such has been the cup that every truly godly soul has had to drink; and none ever tasted it so deeply and frequently as our blessed Lord Himself. It is of the false prophets that the world speaks well. The true are accounted as the offscouring of the earth.

In this case Zedekiah, ever a weakling, succumbs to the demands of his ministers. He consents to the death of Jeremiah in words that well betray his impotency, but which, like Pilate's, in no sense lessen his guilt. **"Behold, he is in your hand: for the king is not he that can do anything against you"** (Jeremiah 38:5).

Having obtained the royal consent, the four conspirators took Jeremiah and cast him into the dungeon of Malchiah, which was in the court of the prison, letting him down with cords - a filthy pit, with no water, but offensive mire, in which Jeremiah sank, and was heartlessly left in this wretched plight. The object, doubtless, was to let him die, unknown to the populace, who might have had superstitious or conscientious scruples about making away with the man who professed to speak in the name of the Lord. Shephatiah and his associates would allow him to starve to death, alone and unsought, in this abominable, miry dungeon.

GOD had other thoughts, however, and would not thus permit His servant's martyrdom.

The suffering and shame were all part of the discipline His love saw to be necessary, and He would not allow him to be spared the humiliation and anguish they entailed; but, like Job, his life was inviolable.

In the prophet's hour of need a friend is raised up of whom otherwise we might never have heard. He is a servant in the king's household, an Ethiopian eunuch, Ebed-melech - perhaps nameless, so far as our narrative is concerned; for Ebed-melech, translated, is simply "*servant of the king*," and may not be a proper name at all. In this servant's heart glowed a pity and a sympathy, as well as a recognition of the divine office of Jeremiah, to which the four accusers were strangers.

Like the young man in Acts 23:16 used for Paul's deliverance, here also GOD had prepared this His servant for Jeremiah's deliverance. Hearing that the prophet had been left to perish in the filthy pit of the prison court, this Ethiopian went boldly to entreat the king's favor, who was **"then sitting in the gate of Benjamin"** (Jeremiah 38:7) - the professed representative of the law, in the gate to dispense justice, when this inexcusable injustice had been perpetrated with his consent (Jeremiah 38:7-8). Earnestly and faithfully the eunuch presents the cause of the man of GOD: **"My lord the king,"** he pleads, **"these men have done evil in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet, whom they have cast into the dungeon; and he is like to die for hunger in the place where he is: for there is no more bread in the city"** (Jeremiah 38:9).

Again, Zedekiah, a typical changeling, whose mind is controlled by the last man who gains his ear, reverses his judgment. Ebedmelech is commanded, **"Take from hence thirty men with thee, and take up Jeremiah the prophet out of the dungeon, before he die"** (Jeremiah 38:10).

The king makes no confession of sin in thus having treated the Lord's messenger; nor is there a word of apology to the prophet for the indignities so unrighteously heaped upon him after his pledged word as to provision for his comfort!

It is enough for the Ethiopian that he has permission to relieve the loved prisoner's sufferings, and he hastens to deliver him. Thoughtfully and tenderly he provides from the house of the king, under the treasury, old cloths and rags, which he let down by cords into the dungeon to Jeremiah, with directions to put them under his armholes under the ropes (Jeremiah 38:11-12). Apparently a trifling thing this, but a loving heart directed it, and GOD has been pleased to place it on record where it will stand forever.

In that day when every cup of cold water given in the name of the Lord shall not fail of reward, Ebedmelech's **"old cast cloths and rotten rags"** (Jeremiah 38:11) used to lessen the pain of the man of GOD will be remembered and duly taken into account.

Thus protected, the weak and emaciated prophet is gently lifted out of the miry dungeon by the eunuch and his thirty helpers. Only once again is Ebedmelech mentioned, in the next chapter, for the Lord's commendation, ere he disappears from the scene until he takes his place with the host of the redeemed, when his good deeds will have their due reward.

Jerusalem's case had become desperate, and in his distress Zedekiah once more sent for Jeremiah for a secret interview. Knowing in the depths of his heart that this man, whom he had so shamefully treated, had the mind of the Lord, he said to him, "**I will ask thee a thing; hide nothing from me**" (Jeremiah 38:14).

Fear now makes him desire to know what GOD had revealed; but, as his previous career had manifested, there was no true bowing of heart to that word when made known. A double-minded man was he, therefore unstable in all his ways. Self and selfish interests ruled in his heart, not the glory of the GOD of Israel.

The well-merited and withering reply comes to him, "**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).

Thus boldly does the prophet answer him. Cruel treatment had in no sense filled his soul with slavish fear. As GOD's free man, he speaks to the conscience of the king.

Secretly, the guilty monarch swore neither to harm him himself, nor, as before, to give him into the hand of the men who sought his life (Jeremiah 38:16). Accepting the pledge, Jeremiah gives him the word of the Lord, saying:

"Thus saith the Lord, the God of hosts, the God of Israel: If thou wilt assuredly go forth unto the king of Babylon's princes, then thy soul shall live, and this city shall not be burned with fire; and thou shalt live, and thy house; but if thou wilt not go forth to the king of Babylon's princes, then shall this city be given into the hand of the Chaldeans, and they shall burn it with fire, and thou shalt not escape out of their hand" (Jeremiah 38:17-18).

For Zedekiah to accept the advice tendered so solemnly in the name of the Lord would mean a complete and unconditional surrender. The victorious Chaldean army had once more spread its tents around Jerusalem, and was carrying on the siege with vigor; the Egyptian army having returned in discomfiture to their own land. This was in itself an evidence of the truth of Jeremiah's predictions.

When the false prophets declared that Nebuchadrezzar's power was broken, he had insisted on the overthrow of Pharaoh's forces and the early return of the Babylonians to invest the capital once more. Zedekiah evidently feared him, and in a vague, uncertain kind of way realized that GOD was with him. But he was of the number of those who cannot stand the sneers or the anger of their fellows, though they can sin against their Creator unblushingly. It is natural to fallen man to be ashamed to do what is right, if contrary to public opinion, and to do evil with a certain kind of pride. Of this stamp was the unworthy son of Josiah. He "**loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.**" (John 12:43)

In his faltering reply to Jeremiah, he shows the smallness of his soul, as also the haughtiness of his heart. "I am afraid," he owned, "**of the Jews that are fallen to the Chaldeans, lest they deliver me into their hand, and they mock me**" (Jeremiah 38:19).

What gross unbelief, when the Lord had just given the word that he should be spared if he surrendered; and what wretched pride that made the thought of mockery so bitter to the already ruined man!

Faithfully, even tenderly, the prophet urged him to obedience, assuring him that they should not deliver him up as he feared. "**Obey, I beseech thee,**" he entreated, "**the voice of the Lord, which I speak unto thee: so it shall be well unto thee, and thy soul shall live**" (Jeremiah 38:20).

On the other hand, he warned him solemnly that if he refused to go forth, he should be reduced to the degradation of seeing "**all the women that are left in the king of Judah's house**" brought forth in captivity to the princes of the king of Babylon, who should mock in their turn, and reproach him for his inglorious rebellion and its awful consequences. He, too, should be taken captive, and the city burned with fire; with himself alone to blame (Jeremiah 38:22-23).

The moody and well-nigh distraught king deigned no reply that would indicate whether he intended to bow to the authority of the Lord or not, but strictly commanded silence on the part of Jeremiah as to the purport of the conversation they had had together. If the princes importuned him as to what had taken place, he was to mention the matter of his request to be released from prison, but nothing more (Jeremiah 38:24-26).

As anticipated, the princes did seek to know the drift of the conference, but he replied discreetly, as he had been bidden - the truth, though not all the truth - and they are satisfied to leave him in the court of the prison, where he remained until the fulfilment of his prophecies regarding the siege, for "**he was there when Jerusalem was taken**" (Jeremiah 38:27-28).

(Adapted from URL: <https://www.studydrive.net/commentaries/eng/isn/jeremiah-38.html>)

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

What other ministry of doom would we hold in such high esteem as Jeremiah's? He was a failure by human standards: accused falsely instead of believed, persecuted by officials, betrayed by family. No one obeyed Jeremiah's words. Even after his predictions about Zedekiah and Jerusalem were fulfilled, Jeremiah continued to be disbelieved and dismissed (Jeremiah 43:1-3). Yet from the standpoint of faith, the life of Jeremiah was successful by God's standards. The contrast between him and Zedekiah could hardly be starker. Zedekiah was one whose mind wavered moment by moment as he tried to save his own skin in his own way. He had no meaningful faith, no courage, no enduring principles. All the while Jeremiah remained true to his calling, willing to deliver the word of God, even though he knew it could cost him dearly. He was open to God's leading even through doubts, tears, and fears. Those are the marks of real success. Jeremiah is a book for today's times. Christians too can expect the world to ignore our message and ridicule our convictions. We can expect hostility to arise in areas where the gospel is proclaimed boldly. In some nations, this results in loss of relevancy and influence. In others, it results in torture, rape, or beheading. Though Christ is with us always (Matthew 28:20), Christian discipleship carries no guarantee of personal comfort or applause. But like Jeremiah, we must learn to see the world as God sees it and remain true to our calling. We must continually pray that we will speak the truth boldly (Ephesians 6:19-20).

Concluding Thoughts from the Echoes Commentary

Listen to God's Messengers - King Zedekiah, the ruler over Judah, sought to meet face to face with God's prophet, Jeremiah. This passage records the fourth and last time the two talked together before the Babylonian conquest. The king pleaded for Jeremiah to tell him the truth, so Jeremiah said that God was offering the king one last chance to repent. Jeremiah begged the king to listen to God!

Behold Your God - Jeremiah praised the Lord Almighty, the covenant keeper of Israel, and told the king to stop fighting the Babylonians so his life would be spared and the city would not be burned to the ground. These Babylonians were serving God's judgment upon Judah. Fighting their army was equal to fighting God. But Zedekiah was afraid of the people, that they might blame him for the downfall of the city and punish him. He seemed more concerned about his honor than the welfare of the city.

Listen and Obey - Jeremiah pleaded with Zedekiah to simply follow the voice of the Lord, but the king refused to listen. Listening is a discipline. It's sometimes hard to do person to person. It's even more complicated when attempting to quiet yourself and pay attention to an invisible God. But committing yourself to listen and obey the Lord results in things in your life going more smoothly. That does not mean no troubles whatsoever, but it does mean hearing a voice delivering the greatest wisdom for your life. Don't make Zedekiah's mistake.