

# Jeremiah's Rescue

Jer 38:7-13

SS Lesson for 11/02/2025

**Devotional Scriptures:** 2 Peter 2:4-9

## OUTLINE

### LESSON BACKGROUND AND KEY VERSE

*Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary*

*Key Verse: Jer 38:10*

### MAJOR THEME ANALYSIS

#### JEREMIAH'S CONFINEMENT IDENTIFIED (JER 38:7-10)

*Notified by the eunuch (7-8)*

Notification about those who cannot speak for themselves (Prov 31:8)

Notification of mistreatment (Jer 20:1-2)

Notification of imprisonment (Heb 13:3)

*Announced to the king (9)*

Announcement about condemnations (Heb 11:7)

Announcement about rebellion (Dan 9:4-6)

Announcement about ways and practices (Zech 1:6)

Announcement about accountability (Luke 11:49-51)

*King's action commanded (10)*

Actions that are revealed through God's word (1 Sam 3:19-21)

Actions that tell us what to do and where to go (Acts 9:5-8)

Actions that are directed by the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:19-20)

Actions that sometimes require the proclamation of God's word (Acts 13:4-5)

#### JEREMIAH'S RESCUE ACCOMPLISHED (JER 38:11-13)

*Provisions collected (11-12)*

Provisions through God using others (2 Cor 8:14)

Provisions through God's supplying directly (2 Cor 9:10)

Provisions of faith (1 Thess 3:10)

Provisions that should evoke thanksgiving to God (2 Cor 9:12)

Provisions through God's glorious riches (Phil 4:19)

*Solution accomplished (11)*

Accomplished because God determines the outcome (Prov 16:9)

Accomplished because God's purposes will prevail (Prov 19:21)

Accomplished because God has sworn to do what He has planned (Isa 14:24)

Accomplished because nothing is impossible for God (Matt 19:26)

### CONCLUSION AND OTHER THOUGHTS

COMMENTARY THOUGHTS FROM THOMAS CONSTABLE

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS FROM THE NIV STANDARD LESSON COMMENTARY

## Lesson Background and Key Verse

### Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Zedekiah was the last king of Judah before the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC. In 597 BC, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon seized control of Jerusalem. He deported the then-current king, Jehoiachin, to Babylon along with the royal family, court officials, 7,000 elite fighters, and other prominent citizens (2 Kings 24:14-16). Nebuchadnezzar installed Jehoiachin's 21-year-old uncle in his place, changing his name from Mattaniah to Zedekiah, which means "the Lord is righteous" (24:17). But Zedekiah did not honor the Lord. Zedekiah and the prophet Jeremiah had a complicated relationship. On the one hand, Zedekiah consulted Jeremiah and asked him to pray (Jeremiah 37:3). Zedekiah wanted a "word from the Lord," seeming to trust the prophet (37:17). But Zedekiah did not like what he kept hearing. He refused to humble himself and heed Jeremiah's message (2 Chronicles 36:12). Even under duress, Jeremiah advised surrender to the Babylonians to save lives (Jeremiah 38:2-3). This led to accusations of being a traitor, resulting in imprisonment (37:11-16). A subsequent audience with the king resulted in more lenient treatment for a time (37:17-21). Yet the enemies of Jeremiah still conspired with King Zedekiah to have the prophet put to death (38:4-6; compare 26:11). Jeremiah has long predicted the doom of Jerusalem, and this isn't the first time he has advocated outright surrender (see 27:11). A previous king in Jerusalem had actually done just that several years prior (2 Kings 24:12). All in all, Jeremiah is seen as a threat to the vested interests of the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem as he opposes their attitudes and practices again and again. One example is his criticism of their re-enslaving freed slaves (Jeremiah 34:8-22), a violation of the Law of Moses (compare Exodus 21:2-6; Deuteronomy 15:12). It has all led up to this point of being cast into a dungeon to die slowly of dehydration and malnutrition, the harshest punishment yet (Jeremiah 38:1-6).

### Key Verse: Jer 38:10

*Then the king commanded Ebed-Melech the Ethiopian, saying, "Take from here thirty men with you, and lift Jeremiah the prophet out of the dungeon before he dies."*

## Major Theme Analysis

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

### **Jeremiah's Confinement Identified (Jer 38:7-10)**

7 Now Ebed-Melech the Ethiopian, one of the eunuchs, who was in the king's house, heard that they had put Jeremiah in the dungeon. When the king was sitting at the Gate of Benjamin,  
8 Ebed-Melech went out of the king's house and spoke to the king, saying:  
9 "My lord the king, 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 likely to die from hunger in the place where he is. For there is no more bread in the city."  
10 Then the king commanded Ebed-Melech the Ethiopian, saying, "Take from here thirty men with you, and lift Jeremiah the prophet out of the dungeon before he dies."

### **Notified by the eunuch (7-8)**

*Notification about those who cannot speak for themselves (Prov 31:8)*

8 "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute.

*Notification of mistreatment (Jer 20:1-2)*

1 When the priest Pashhur son of Immer, the chief officer in the temple of the Lord, heard Jeremiah prophesying these things, 2 he had Jeremiah the prophet beaten and put in the stocks at the Upper Gate of Benjamin at the Lord's temple.

*Notification of imprisonment (Heb 13:3)*

3 Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.

**Announced to the king (9)**

*Announcement about condemnations (Heb 11:7)*

9 By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise.

*Announcement about rebellion (Dan 9:4-6)*

4 I prayed to the Lord my God and confessed: "O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with all who love him and obey his commands, 5 we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws. 6 We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes and our fathers, and to all the people of the land.

*Announcement about ways and practices (Zech 1:6)*

6 But did not my words and my decrees, which I commanded my servants the prophets, overtake your forefathers? "Then they repented and said, "The Lord Almighty has done to us what our ways and practices deserve, just as he determined to do."

*Announcement about accountability (Luke 11:49-51)*

49 Because of this, God in his wisdom said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and others they will persecute.' 50 Therefore this generation will be held responsible for the blood of all the prophets that has been shed since the beginning of the world, 51 from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, this generation will be held responsible for it all.

**King's action commanded (10)**

*Actions that are revealed through God's word (1 Sam 3:19-21)*

19 The Lord was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of his words fall to the ground. 20 And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba recognized that Samuel was attested as a prophet of the Lord. 21 The Lord continued to appear at Shiloh, and there he revealed himself to Samuel through his word.

*Actions that tell us what to do and where to go (Acts 9:5-8)*

5 "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. 6 "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." 7 The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. 8 Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus.

*Actions that are directed by the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:19-20)*

19 While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Simon, three men are looking for you. 20 So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them."

*Actions that sometimes require the proclamation of God's word (Acts 13:4-5)*

4 The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus. 5 When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. John was with them as their helper.

## ***Jeremiah's Rescue Accomplished (Jer 38:11-13)***

11 So Ebed-Melech took the men with him and went into the house of the king under the treasury, and took from there old clothes and old rags, and let them down by ropes into the dungeon to Jeremiah.

12 Then Ebed-Melech the Ethiopian said to Jeremiah, "Please put these old clothes and rags under your armpits, under the ropes." And Jeremiah did so.

13 So they pulled Jeremiah up with ropes and lifted him out of the dungeon. And Jeremiah remained in the court of the prison.

### **Provisions collected (11-12)**

*Provisions through God using others (2 Cor 8:14)*

14 At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. Then there will be equality,

*Provisions through God's supplying directly (2 Cor 9:10)*

10 Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness.

*Provisions of faith (1 Thess 3:10)*

10 Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith.

*Provisions that should evoke thanksgiving to God (2 Cor 9:12)*

12 This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God.

*Provisions through God's glorious riches (Phil 4:19)*

19 And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

### **Solution accomplished (11)**

*Accomplished because God determines the outcome (Prov 16:9)*

9 In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps.

*Accomplished because God's purposes will prevail (Prov 19:21)*

21 Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails.

*Accomplished because God has sworn to do what He has planned (Isa 14:24)*

24 The Lord Almighty has sworn, "Surely, as I have planned, so it will be, and as I have purposed, so it will stand.

*Accomplished because nothing is impossible for God (Matt 19:26)*

26 Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

## Conclusion and Other Thoughts

### *Commentary Thoughts from Thomas Constable*

Some scholars regard chapter 38 as a retelling of the event just narrated in chapter 37. There is some precedent for such a practice in this book. There are two accounts of Jeremiah's Temple Sermon (chs. 7 and 26) and perhaps two accounts of Jeremiah's release by the Babylonians (Jeremiah 38:28 b; Jeremiah 39:3; Jeremiah 39:14 and Jeremiah 39:11-12; Jeremiah 40:1-6). However, it is also plausible that Jeremiah had to endure two similar imprisonments, or even more than two. I believe that this chapter records a different, albeit similar, and subsequent incident, because of the differences in the two accounts.

#### **Verses 1-3**

Four prominent men in Jerusalem heard Jeremiah preaching that anyone who remained in Jerusalem would die, but those who surrendered to the Chaldeans would live. He prophesied, apparently at this time from the court of the guardhouse (Jeremiah 37:21), that Jerusalem would certainly fall to the Babylonians.

Gedaliah may have been the son of the Pashhur who beat Jeremiah and placed him in the stocks (Jeremiah 20:1-6). "Jucal" was probably the Jehucal who visited Jeremiah during the temporary withdrawal of the Babylonians (Jeremiah 37:3). Pashhur ben Malchijah also visited Jeremiah at the beginning of the siege of Jerusalem in 588 B.C. (Jeremiah 21:1).

The plot to arrest Jeremiah 38:1-6

#### **Verse 4**

These nobles complained to Zedekiah that Jeremiah was weakening the morale of the soldiers and discouraging the people from resisting the enemy. They accused the prophet of desiring to harm the people, rather than seeking their well-being. This was a seditious thing to do, and Jeremiah could have been put to death if his accusers proved him guilty of treason.

"It was ironical . . . that the leaders who had played the traitor against Babylon, their overlord, were such sticklers for internal loyalty, and that they should profess concern for the peace and welfare (shalom, Jeremiah 38:4 b) of the citizens whom they insisted on sacrificing." [Note: Kidner, p. 124.]

#### **Verse 5**

Zedekiah turned Jeremiah over to the nobles. He claimed he could not overrule their will. Obviously he should have stood up for Jeremiah, but he feared his state officials (cf. Jeremiah 38:25-27). He was an early-day Pontius Pilate who washed his hands of his responsibility (cf. Matthew 27:24).

#### **Verse 6**

The nobles had Jeremiah placed in a cistern of one of the royal princes, Malchijah, which was in the court of the guardhouse. Jeremiah had previously been confined in this court or stockade (Jeremiah 37:21), but now he was lowered into the cistern with ropes. The cistern had no water in it, but the bottom was very muddy, and Jeremiah sank into the mud. The nobles wanted him to die there of "natural causes," i.e., hunger-probably to alleviate their guilt (cf. Genesis 37:18-20; Genesis 37:24; Genesis 37:26-27).

"A typical cistern was dug out of limestone rock and consisted of a narrow neck perhaps three feet across and three or four feet in depth opening into a much longer bulbous cavity of varying depth. Water from catchment areas was directed to the opening." [Note: Thompson, p. 638.]

#### **Verses 7-8**

A courtier in the palace, Ebed-melech (lit. "servant of the king"), heard about Jeremiah's plight. He happened to be an Ethiopian or Cushite (from modern-day southern Egypt, northeastern Sudan, Eritrea, and northern Ethiopia). [Note: See J. Daniel Hays, "The Cushites: A Black Nation in the Bible," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153:612 (October-December 1996):404-6.] Often courtiers were eunuchs, but the Hebrew word translated "eunuch" here, *saris*, often means simply a male court official (cf. Jeremiah 29:2; Genesis 39:1; Daniel 1:7; et al.). Ebed-melech sought out the king, who was then at the Benjamin Gate, to speak to him. Kings went to city gates to hear complaints from their citizens (cf. 2 Samuel 15:2-4), so Ebed-melech went there with his complaint.

". . . only a despised foreigner cared enough for the prophet to risk trouble in saving him (cf. Jeremiah 39:15-18)." [Note: Graybill, p. 683. Compare the foreigner who carried Jesus' cross, Simon of Cyrene, also from Africa.]

### **Verse 9**

Ebed-melech informed the king that Jeremiah's enemies had acted wickedly by putting him in the cistern. The prophet would die if he remained there because there was no more food in Jerusalem and he would be neglected. Zedekiah had previously promised to provide food for Jeremiah as long as there was food available (Jeremiah 37:21), so Ebed-melech may have been appealing to this promise.

"God, as is His way so often, used an insignificant person to touch off Jeremiah's rescue." [Note: Jensen, p. 100.]

### **Verse 10**

Zedekiah authorized Ebed-melech to use 30 of the eunuch's own men to extract Jeremiah from the cistern. [Note: The Septuagint and one ancient Hebrew manuscript have "three" instead of "30," but 30 is probably correct.] Evidently Zedekiah expected that Ebed-melech might encounter some opposition and would need a lot of manpower.

### **Verse 11**

Ebed-melech assembled his men and gathered together old clothes and rags from the palace wardrobe storeroom and let them down by ropes to Jeremiah.

### **Verses 12-13**

The Ethiopian then told Jeremiah to use the clothes to cushion the ropes that he was to put under his armpits. Jeremiah did this, and the men were able to pull the prophet out of the mucky cistern. However, he remained confined in the court of the guardhouse.

### **Verse 14**

Shortly after this event, Zedekiah had Jeremiah brought to him at one of the temple entrances, possibly the king's private entrance (cf. 2 Kings 16:18). He told the prophet that he was going to ask him a question and he wanted a straight answer.

### **Verse 15**

Jeremiah replied that if he did give the king a straight answer, Zedekiah would execute him and disregard what he said.

### **Verse 16**

The king swore to Jeremiah, by the living Lord who gave life, that he would neither kill him nor turn him over to his enemies-who were plotting to kill him. The implication of this oath was that since Yahweh gives life, He could take Zedekiah's life if he proved unfaithful to his word.

### **Verse 17**

We do not know what Zedekiah's question was, but it must have been: "Has the Lord changed His mind?" No, He had not, but Zedekiah needed to change his. Jeremiah promised the king on the authority of Almighty Yahweh, Israel's God, that if he surrendered to the Babylonian military officers, he would live. Furthermore, they would not burn down the city, and his whole household would survive. This must have seemed like a very unlikely possibility to Zedekiah since he had proved to be a rebellious vassal of Nebuchadnezzar. Suzerains usually mutilated and killed rebel kings who surrendered to them. [Note: Harrison, Jeremiah and . . ., p. 156.] Ironically, Chaldean officials would have spared Zedekiah's life, but Judean officials were seeking to snuff out Jeremiah's life.

### **Verse 18**

If Zedekiah did not surrender, the Chaldeans would capture the city and burn it, and the king would not escape.

### **Verse 19**

Zedekiah admitted that he feared the Jews who had already surrendered. He feared that if he surrendered, the Babylonians would turn him over to those Jews, and they would torture him.

### **Verse 20**

Jeremiah assured him that what he feared would not happen if he surrendered. He also urged the king to obey the Lord and surrender, so that things would go well with him.

### **Verses 21-22**

If Zedekiah kept refusing to give himself up, the Lord promised that all the women in the palace would end up as the property of the enemy officers. It was customary for a conquering king to take over the harem of his defeated foe (cf. 2 Samuel 16:21-22). These women would curse Zedekiah for allowing his friends to mislead him. They would use the words that Jeremiah here composed or perhaps quoted from a traditional song about being betrayed and deserted by friends (cf. Jeremiah 20:10; Psalms 41:9; Psalms 69:14; Obadiah 1:7). While the king delayed, his officers would get away. What had happened to Jeremiah physically (Jeremiah 38:6) would happen to Zedekiah politically, militarily, and spiritually: both were stuck in the mud.

### **Verse 23**

Moreover, all the family members of Zedekiah would fall into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar along with himself and the Babylonian king would burn the city.

### **Verse 24**

Zedekiah made Jeremiah promise that he would not tell anyone that they had had this conversation. If he kept it a secret, the prophet could live.

### **Verses 25-26**

If Zedekiah's nobles asked Jeremiah what he and the king had talked about, he was to say that he had asked the king not to send him back to the house of Jonathan because he would die there. He had asked the king not to return him there earlier (Jeremiah 37:20).

### **Verse 27**

Sure enough, the state officials asked Jeremiah about his conversation with the king, but Jeremiah responded as Zedekiah had instructed him. He only told the nobles what was necessary and no more.

### **Verse 28**

Zedekiah kept his word to Jeremiah, who was able to stay in the court of the guardhouse until the city fell to the Babylonians.

"Nothing is more marked throughout all this story than the absolute and unswerving loyalty of Jeremiah to the message of judgment which he was called on to deliver." [Note: Morgan, p. 334.]

*(Adapted from URL: <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/dcc/jeremiah-38.html>)*

## **Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary**

The story of Jeremiah, Zedekiah, the plotting princes, and Ebed-Melek teaches several lessons. For Jeremiah, as with many of God's prophets, the task of accurately reporting the word of the Lord was a difficult path to walk. Jesus himself would later travel to Jerusalem and experience deadly resistance, like the prophets of Israel's past (see Matthew 23:37). Jesus warns those who wish to be his disciples that they too shall face resistance, shall be asked to "take up [a] cross" in order to follow him (Matthew 16:24). In the example of Zedekiah, we glimpse the consequences of cowardice, of caring only about a public perception instead of seeking truth. God's plans may have disrupted the self-serving actions of Jerusalem's nobles, but a just king should have stepped in to protect Jeremiah and listen to God's message. Ebed-Melek is an example of a courageous rescuer, one who risked the disapproval of his own boss to save the life of God's servant. And God responded to this individual's faithfulness, protecting him in the middle of a war zone. God is faithful to individuals, which is especially clear to those who are in desperate situations (see Joshua 6:22-23; 1 Samuel 23:26-29; Ruth 4:13-17). Modern "rescuers" may take the form of professionals with high-tech equipment and training. When someone needs physical rescue, we are taught to call these emergency services. But there are many other opportunities for believers to perform small acts of deliverance for one another: giving financial assistance, offering care for children, and sitting with those experiencing tragedy or loss. A faithful rescuer should not give up. Ebed-Melek risked his favorable position, perhaps even his life, to confront the king at the gate and direct Jeremiah's deliverance. He did what was right for someone who needed his help, and he did not look away.