

# Jeremiah: The Suffering Preacher of Doom

Bible Background • JEREMIAH 37-38

Printed Text • JEREMIAH 38:14-23 | Devotional Reading • JEREMIAH 38:7-13; 39:15-18

## Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will IDENTIFY Jeremiah's hesitation to give controversial advice to Zedekiah, SENSE Jeremiah's apprehension when talking to Zedekiah, and COMMIT to giving challenging godly advice.

## In Focus

Walter was stuck between the proverbial "rock and a hard place." Walter still liked to hang out with his single friends, reveling in his former life, but sought to change his ways, especially for the sake of his marriage. In the past, Walter used his brother Ronald as a cover without his knowledge and rationalized that it was just more comfortable for him not to know so he could avoid the lecture. He hadn't meant to do it again, but then his single friends planned a once-in-a-lifetime trip to Jamaica. Walter promised this would be the last time he tried to cover up his actions with these friends, and told his wife just he and Ronald were going for brother time.

While out at a family function, Tonya asked, "So Ronald, how are plans for your trip to Jamaica? Walter told me you all would be using our timeshare." Ronald was at a loss for words and gracefully excused himself from Tonya to calm down.

Later, Ronald confronted his brother "Hey man, enough is enough, I am not going to be a part of your lies and deception. If you don't tell Tonya the truth, I will!" Walter replied, "Ronald, what do I do? I just wanted to get away and have some fun with the fellas, and I figured if Tonya thought you were going, she would not ask too many questions."

Walter had no idea how to get himself out of the mess he made, both with his wife and with his brother, but he could not bring himself to face the truth.

*Which is harder to expose the truth or remain silent?*

***"Then 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, KJV)***

## KJV

**Jeremiah 38:14** Then Zedekiah the king sent, and took Jeremiah the prophet unto him into the third entry that is in the house of the LORD: and the king said unto Jeremiah, I will ask thee a thing; hide nothing from me.

**15** Then 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?

**16** So Zedekiah the king sware secretly unto Jeremiah, saying, As the LORD liveth, that made us this soul, I will not put thee to death, neither will I give thee into the hand of these men that seek thy life.

**17** Then said Jeremiah unto Zedekiah, 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 thine house:

**18** 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.

**19** And Zedekiah the king said unto Jeremiah, I am afraid of the Jews that are fallen to the Chaldeans, lest they deliver me into their hand, and they mock me.

**20** But Jeremiah said, They shall not deliver thee. Obey, I beseech thee, the voice of the LORD, which I speak unto thee: so it shall be well unto thee, and thy soul shall live.

**21** But if thou refuse to go forth, this is the word that the LORD hath shewed me:

**22** And, behold, all the women that are left in the king of Judah's house shall be brought forth to the king of Babylon's princes, and those women shall say, Thy friends have set thee on, and have prevailed against thee: thy feet are sunk in the mire, and they are turned away back.

**23** So they shall bring out all thy wives and thy children to the Chaldeans: and thou shalt not escape out of their hand, but shalt be taken by the hand of the king of Babylon: and thou shalt cause this city to be burned with fire.

## NLT

**Jeremiah 38:14** 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."

## People, Places, and Times

**Jeremiah.** The son of a priest, Jeremiah was born in Anathoth, a village three miles northeast of Jerusalem. Jeremiah received his calling as a prophet in 626 BC during the thirteenth year of King Josiah's reign. The Book of Jeremiah reveals the inner turmoil and conflict out of which Jeremiah delivered his prophetic burden. Jeremiah resisted his call to prophetic ministry, citing his youth as an obstacle (Jeremiah 1:6-9). But God's will cannot be resisted. Jeremiah followed his calling faithfully, but the road was hard. He was rejected by his people (Jeremiah 15:10). He was frustrated by their hardheartedness (Jeremiah 5:3). In spite of all of the difficulties that Jeremiah experienced, he found that he could not resist God's call to prophesy. He had to declare the word of the LORD as the LORD had directed him. It was a compulsion. It was a dynamic, powerful inner motivation that made him prophesy. "Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay" (Jeremiah 20:9).

## 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 word 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). What does it mean to speak truth to power?

## At-A-Glance

1. A Final Interview (Jeremiah 38:14-18)
2. A Final Response (vv. 19-23)

## In Depth

**1. A Final Interview (Jeremiah 38:14-18)** King Zedekiah on more than one occasion privately sought out Jeremiah to hear what the Lord had revealed to him. The king had other prophets who told him what he wanted to hear regarding Judah's national security. But those prophets did not align with what the Lord spoke through Jeremiah, who proved to be His true prophet. The Lord delivered Jeremiah from his officials through King Zedekiah (Jeremiah 37:17-21). Jeremiah would find himself in trouble with the king's officials again for delivering the Lord's proclamation of calamity for disobedience and coming Chaldean siege. He was considered a trouble maker who caused unrest in the land and was thrown into a dry cistern by the king's men. The king would later rescue Jeremiah from death, but he would be once again locked up (Jeremiah 38:1-13). King Zedekiah sought to show honor for the word of the Lord and had Jeremiah brought to him at the Temple to inquire what the Lord might say through him. Jeremiah was hesitant to answer because he recognized that Zedekiah would probably not listen to his counsel. His officials had great power and influence and wanted Jeremiah dead. The king promised in their one-on-one conversation that neither he nor his men would kill Jeremiah because the king wanted to hear

what the Lord said. Jeremiah gave the Lord's word by advising the king and his officials to surrender to the Babylonians so that they may live. However, if they did not heed his counsel from the Lord, the city would burn, and they would not escape.

*How do you discern when to speak and when to be quiet?*

**2. A Final Response (vv. 19–23)** After hearing Jeremiah's prophetic word to surrender, King Zedekiah in confidence shares with Jeremiah that he fears what will happen if he follows the instructions given by the Lord. Jeremiah assures the king if he and his officials obey the Lord, the crisis will be suspended and they will be saved. However, if he refuses, the Lord revealed that the Chaldeans would burn the city and the people would be taken captive by Babylon. Further, Jeremiah tells the king that he and his officials would bring disgrace upon themselves as the people who trust them realize they had misled them. Their wives who are the life-givers and their sons who represent their bloodline would be captured. The king and all of his officials would be destroyed. King Zedekiah led Judah through habitual disobedience and bad advice, and Jeremiah foretold the consequences of those decisions. God still provided an opportunity to change their ways if they would only ask for and receive God's mercy.

*What are some reasons people dismiss godly advice?*

### **Search the Scriptures**

1. What was Jeremiah's response to King Zedekiah's request to hear from the Lord (Jeremiah 38:15)?
2. What was the Lord's advice to King Zedekiah through Jeremiah? What was His warning (vv. 17, 20–21)?

### **Discuss the Meaning**

1. Given Jeremiah's experience as a prophet, was he right to question King Zedekiah's request? What did the king expect to hear from Jeremiah?
2. Are there times when you have been the recipient of advice you did not want to receive but the Lord confirmed it was from Him? How did you respond?

### **Liberating Lesson**

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. spoke many times about the dangers of keeping silent. There are times when God will compel His people to speak truth to those who will not receive it favorably, but we must stand for righteousness even if it costs. Some believers live in parts of the world where they are faced with persecution daily for boldly living their faith. Those of us blessed with religious freedom must continue to pray and support those who do not have the same freedom. Think of ways your small group or church can help people living in countries where Christianity is actually illegal. Even on our side of the world, we must be intentional to equip ourselves and others in the spirit of God's love to share and defend our faith in the public square amid opposition.

### **Application for Activation**

In our world, we still hear the chant "no justice, no peace," because there is a need to keep speaking out against systemic injustice. The Church must champion against injustice because we are recipients of God's mercy and made equal at the Cross of Jesus. No matter the race, color, or creed injustice against any people does not reflect the God who created humanity in His image with the capacity to love without limit. There are plenty of causes in need of individual and

collective voices for social change. Commit to sharing your time, talent, and resources as an individual, a class, or a church to bring God's kingdom of righteousness in the earth.

### **Follow the Spirit**

What God wants me to do?

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### **Remember Your Thoughts**

Special insights I have learned?

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### **Say It Correctly**

Ebed-melek. eh-**BED**-meh-**LEK**.  
Zedekiah. zeh-deh-**KYE**-ah.  
Jehoiachin. jeh-**HOY**-ah-kin.  
Mattaniah. mah-tah-**NYE**-ah.

### **Daily Bible Readings**

#### **MONDAY**

Apostles Speak Truth to Council  
(Acts 4:13–22)

#### **TUESDAY**

Prophet Jeremiah Is  
Arrested and Imprisoned  
(Jeremiah 37:11–16)

#### **WEDNESDAY**

Ebed-Melech's Trust in  
Jeremiah Honored  
(Jeremiah 38:7–13; 39:15–18)

#### **THURSDAY**

Jeremiah Reaffirms  
Prophecy of Zedekiah  
(Jeremiah 37:17–21)

#### **FRIDAY**

Jeremiah's Last Days in Jerusalem  
(Jeremiah 38:24–28)

#### **SATURDAY**

Jerusalem Destroyed; People Exiled  
(2 Kings 25:1–12)

#### **SUNDAY**

Zedekiah Must Submit  
to Babylonian Conquest  
(Jeremiah 38:14–23)