

May 16, 2021

“Preaching Doom”
Lesson 11 of Unit

Jeremiah 38:14-23

Intro

Jeremiah is God's prophet to Judah from 627 until the mid-580's BC, roughly 100 years after Isaiah. Of the five kings during his ministry, only the first, Josiah, was righteous. The other four were wicked, including the one in today's passage, Zedekiah, the last of the five.

Like the northern kingdom of Israel earlier, Judah had been warned repeatedly to follow the covenant, but did not do so. Jeremiah spent a great deal of his ministry warning Judah of the coming destruction (which Isaiah had also warned of—2 Kings 20:16-18). However, he was usually not believed, and was seen as a “pro-Babylon sympathizer” by other more “loyal” prophets.

In the months preceding Judah's fall to Babylon, Jeremiah was twice punished and imprisoned for his messages predicting doom for Judah if they failed to change their ways. First, he was beaten and put in a dungeon cell for several days until Zedekiah had him released into the courtyard of the guard. When he didn't quit making his warnings about coming doom, Zedekiah's officials (with Zedekiah unwilling to oppose them), put him into a muddy cistern. He would have died there, but one high official, Ebed-Melek, took 30 men (with Zedekiah's permission) and got Jeremiah out of the cistern.

Today's passage is the conversation between Jeremiah and Zedekiah right after Jeremiah has been rescued from the cistern.

Read Jeremiah 38:14-23

1. vs. 14: King Zedekiah summons Jeremiah to talk

- “Third entrance to the temple” probably is a backdoor; the king wants a private setting
 - Maybe to avoid his officials overhearing
 - Maybe Jeremiah will change his mind in a private setting
- This is the third time Zedekiah summoned Jeremiah (also 34:6-7, 37:17)
 - Suggests the king respects Jeremiah's advice
- “Do not hide anything from me”
 - King doesn't understand that God's prophets never lie

2. vs. 15: Jeremiah's response: a question and a statement

- “If I give an answer, will you not kill me?”
 - His life has been threatened repeatedly; why is now any different?
 - His words suggest that his answer will be one Zedekiah will not like
- “Even if I did give you counsel, you would not listen to me”
 - Sounds like he suspects Zedekiah wants a favorable forecast
 - Jeremiah knows his words won't be favorable
 - Knows the king won't listen to what he say, so why talk?

3. vs. 16: Zedekiah's promise to Jeremiah

"I will neither kill you nor hand you over to those who want to kill you"

This sounds good, but...

Zedekiah is a wicked king

His character and words cannot be depended upon, based on past actions

He thinks Jeremiah is dependent on him for living

He says, "As the Lord lives, who has given us breath"

This is ironic: God controls whether Jeremiah lives, not Zedekiah

4. vs. 17: Jeremiah's response—about God and the essential action to be taken

He uses the phrases "Lord God Almighty" and "the God of Israel"

These emphasize God's sovereignty, the real king / lord over Israel

Also emphasizes that the people, led by the king, haven't been acting like people who belong to the God of Israel

Jeremiah answers, knowing God's message to Zedekiah would displease the king

A true prophet speaks God's words, no matter the consequences

He tells Zedekiah what to do in this situation

Surrender to the Babylonians

Your life spared, family spared, city won't be burned down

Judgment via Babylon will happen

God wants to show mercy to the people

If the king doesn't accept this option, the consequences are suggested

He will die, his family will either die or be captives, the city will burn

5. vs. 18: Jeremiah verifies the negative consequences suggested in vs. 17

This consequence calls on Zedekiah to go against the advice of officials

They don't want to surrender to Babylon

Jeremiah knows the past prophecies predicting Judah's destruction

2 Kings 21:10-15; Is. 39:6; Micah 3:12;

God could change His mind and not destroy Jerusalem (like He did with Ninevah)

This only happens if the people obey by repenting

6. vs. 19: Zedekiah's "concerns"

Some of the Jews have already surrendered to the Babylonians

He is afraid that they might scorn him, or even try to murder him

His predecessor, Jehoiakim, was murdered, likely by his own officials

7. vs. 20: Jeremiah's answer to Zedekiah's concerns

The concerns are the most important issue, if they are really a true issue at all
Jeremiah says, "Obey the Lord"

Doing the right thing spiritually will give him the best life possible

8. vs. 21: Who's in control?

Jeremiah says that God has told him what **will** happen if Zedekiah doesn't surrender
It's not Jeremiah who controls the situation—it's God

9. vs. 22: Jeremiah refers to the cost of a negative decision by Zedekiah on the lives of the women
The “women in the palace” likely refers to Zedekiah’s wives and concubines
They will be taken away by the Babylonian officials
Women are generally in a vulnerable situation in war
Their future here depends on Zedekiah looking out for them, protecting them
If Zedekiah surrenders, these women will be spared, left alone
If he doesn’t surrender and they are taken away—
They will mock him, reminding him of how he has failed

10. vs. 23: Additional costs
His children as well as his wives will be given to the Babylonians
Children are equally as vulnerable as the wives/women in war
Puts Zedekiah’s view of his family to the test

Also, the city will be burned down if he doesn’t surrender
By implication, the city will be spared if he does surrender

Zedekiah doesn’t obey God by listening to Jeremiah
He tries to sneak out and is captured
He had to watch his sons executed
Then he was blinded and led in shackles back to Babylon
The city was burned to the ground

Application: Jeremiah wasn’t believed, even after his predictions about Zedekiah and Jerusalem came true. But he was faithful to God, speaking the messages that God had given him. We can look to Jeremiah as we walk our own faith in daily life. Some may not listen to us as we speak God’s truth; live faithfully for God anyway. We may get verbally or physically attacked, lose status at work or in the community; live faithfully for God anyway. These types of situations are obviously nothing to treat lightly, and will likely be extremely challenging to our faith if/when they happen to us. God help us to have developed our spiritual lives to the depth needed to meet the challenge.

Prayer: Father God, we desire to be like Jeremiah, people who live by Your standards, seeking Your approval more than that of people. Help us to speak for You and live for You, all coming from a heart of love that seeks what is best, from Your view, for every person. In Jesus’ name, Amen.