

Message #42

Jeremiah 38:1-28

John F. Kennedy said, “We, the people, are the boss, and we get the kind of political leadership, be it good or bad, that we demand and deserve.”

One of the ways God begins to judge a nation is by weak, pathetic leadership. When a nation is led by weak, fickle, pathetic, wishy-washy leadership, it is a judgment of God and that nation is being led to great destructive calamity directly from the hand of God. Frankly, I fear for the United States of America because it appears that God is bringing this nation under judgment.

God does not want His people to just sit quietly and not defend what is true and right. In fact, He expects His people to defend Him and His word. That is what Jeremiah did and that is what got him into trouble.

But you may be certain of this; those who defend God and His word have the protection of God, no matter who or what is in power. We certainly see that point here.

GOD SOVEREIGNLY PROTECTS JEREMIAH, EVEN WHEN THE MOST POWERFUL POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS LEADERS WANT HIM KILLED.

Standing up for the word of God has never been popular, especially when you proclaim that judgment is coming. People don't like that message and they don't like the one presenting that message. In fact, they wanted to kill Jeremiah.

There are eight historical facts we want to see here:

HISTORICAL FACT #1 – Because Jeremiah proclaimed the truth of God, four of Zedekiah's officials want him killed. **38:1-4**

Among the many who heard the message of Jeremiah were:

- 1) Shephatiah son of Mattan - not mentioned anywhere else in O.T.
- 2) Gedaliah son of Pashhur - Pashhur was the priest who beat Jeremiah and put him in stocks (20:1-2).
- 3) Jucal the son of Shelemiah - Jucal went and got Jeremiah to pray (37:3).
- 4) Pashhur the son of Malchijah - he too was sent to get Jeremiah to pray earlier (21:1).

They had known Jeremiah for years and they did not like him. They did not like what he had to say. They wanted him dead.

According to **verses 2-3**, Jeremiah was proclaiming that if you surrender to the Babylonians you will live, but if you don't, you will die by sword, famine and pestilence.

The false accusation that they make about Jeremiah is that he does not seek the welfare of the people. What a lie that is. Jeremiah was the one man who always sought the welfare of the people by trying to point them to God.

Jeremiah was telling the truth of God. God was going to allow the Babylonians to take over the city of Jerusalem and if the people stayed in the city, they would die by direct judgment of God. Either by sword, famine, and pestilence they would die. But if they went out to the Babylonians and willingly surrendered, they would live.

Now the key political leaders of Jerusalem did not like that message so their solution is we must kill Jeremiah to shut him up. He is presenting a discouraging and threatening message and he is preaching a message that is harming the people.

The truth of God was being told by Jeremiah and because of that he was a hated man. People do not realize how blessed they are if they have a man of God who will tell them the truth about their sin and about God's judgment.

HISTORICAL FACT #2 – Zedekiah turns Jeremiah over to the four officials. **38:5**

Zedekiah is a weak, pathetic leader and he gave into the demands of this godless group of political and religious leaders.

Zedekiah knows Jeremiah is right and he knows Jeremiah tells the truth. He is the one who wanted Jeremiah to pray (37:3) and he is the one who secretly met with Jeremiah to get some message from God (37:17). Zedekiah knew the truth about Jeremiah in that he was a true man of God.

He is like Pilate, who knew the truth about Jesus Christ. He knew Jesus was innocent, but he turned Him over to ruthless leaders anyway because he is a political leader who won't stand up against the whims of the people. That is exactly what happens here to Jeremiah. Zedekiah turns him over to godless leaders.

HISTORICAL FACT #3 – Jeremiah is taken and thrown into a cistern filled with mud. **38:6**

A cistern was a big hole that was typically dug in limestone rock to collect and store water. Cisterns varied in sizes and depths. Often they were shaped like a pear. There was a narrow opening at the top, so you could put a cover over it and as it went into the ground it expanded to various widths.

Now the text says these four took Jeremiah and "cast" him into the cistern. That verb "cast" (salak) literally means they threw him in it. So I understand that to mean they slung him into the opening at the top. They had some ropes on him so they threw him into the top of the cistern and lowered him and put him down in the cistern and he actually sunk into the mud.

The four took Jeremiah, this powerful prophet and man of God, and threw him into a cistern that was nothing but a filthy, muddy pit. There was no water left in it and all that is left was mud. It was so muddy that Jeremiah sank into the mud.

It seems that their goal is to just leave him there to die. He has no food and no water and is just stuck in the mud like quicksand and left to die.

Now one must wonder why didn't they just kill him? I am sure from their perspective they were thinking that he will die a slow, miserable death. No food, no water, sunk in mud.

But the truth is the sovereignty of God was there with Jeremiah. Jeremiah is not going to die yet and therefore even though this was a very awful moment in his life, it was still a moment in which God was keeping His prophet alive.

HISTORICAL FACT #4 – An Ethiopian named Ebed-melech went to Zedekiah and told him what was done to Jeremiah was evil. **38:7-9**

God was not going to let His man die like that. God will raise up a most unlikely man to get him out of this. There was a man, who was an Ethiopian, who went to the king. His name, Ebed-melech, means “servant of king.” He realized that Jeremiah was a man of God who told the truth of God. This dark-skinned servant went to Zedekiah, who was publicly sitting in the Gate of Benjamin (v. 7). This black man is the smartest man in the kingdom (Jer. 13:23).

Supposedly the king was sitting at the gate as an administrator of justice in cases that demanded some judgment (II Sam. 15:2-4; 19:8; Ps. 69:2; Prov. 22:22; Amos 5:10, 15). Well the worst case of injustice had just occurred in what happened to Jeremiah.

So according to **verses 8-9**, Ebed-melech, went to the king and told him that what those four men did to Jeremiah was wicked. He is risking his own life by doing this. By actually publicly confronting the king and challenging something the king authorized was very risky business.

The irony of this is we don't even know if Jeremiah knew this man, but God raised him up. He was very concerned that Jeremiah would starve to death, which is what those four wanted.

This is a good man. Neither God nor Jeremiah would forget the kindness displayed by Ebed-melech (Jer. 39:15-18). God would give him His special protection and blessing.

God always blesses and honors those people who do nice things for a true man of God.

HISTORICAL FACT #5 – Zedekiah authorizes the Ethiopian to go rescue Jeremiah. **38:10-13**

Obviously what the Ethiopian did convicted Zedekiah. He decided to reverse his decision.

Again we see how fickle Zedekiah actually is. Zedekiah ordered him to take 30 men and bring Jeremiah up out of that cistern before he dies.

The Ethiopian is thoughtful and careful in the way he actually does this. According to **verse 11**, he took some men and went to the storeroom of old worn out clothes and rags and he let them down into the cistern and he told Jeremiah to put them under his armpits so that when he would be pulled up, it would not hurt or mark his arms (v. 12).

According to **verse 13**, they gently pulled Jeremiah up out of that muddy cistern pit and he was able to live in the court of the guardhouse.

Psalm 40:2–David writes: “He brought me up out of the pit of destruction, out of the miry clay, and He sat my feet upon a rock making my footsteps firm.”

HISTORICAL FACT #6 – Zedekiah asks Jeremiah to tell him the truth of God. **38:14-23**

Zedekiah is all over the map. One minute he turns Jeremiah over to a bunch of political hacks and goons to kill and the next, he wants Jeremiah to come and tell him the word of God. A doubled-minded man is unstable in all his ways and that certainly describes Zedekiah.

Again he is secret about this meeting because he does not want to upset his political allies. He has Jeremiah come to him through some third entrance in the Temple (**v. 14**). This must have been some secret, private entrance the king used to go to the Temple. **This will be Jeremiah’s last meeting with Zedekiah before Babylon demolishes the city.**

According to **verse 14**, Zedekiah said I am going to ask you a question and tell me the truth.

According to **verse 15**, Jeremiah said if I tell you the truth two things will happen:

- 1) You will kill me
- 2) You will not listen to me.

According to **verse 16**, Zedekiah promised an oath before God to Jeremiah:

- 1) I will not put you to death.
- 2) I will not turn you over to those who want you dead.

So once again in **verses 17-18**, Jeremiah said if you will surrender to the Babylonians, which is the will of God, God will protect you. But if you don’t you will be destroyed.

Jeremiah tells the king that if he will obey the word of God, God will protect him. But if he refused to obey the word of God, he and his city and family would be destroyed.

Now the king’s response in **verse 19** is that he is afraid if he turns himself over to the Babylonians, then the Jews who are already there will abuse him when he gets there.

Jeremiah has just informed him that if he would obey God, God would protect him and already he is making excuses.

So in **verse 20** Jeremiah assures him that if he will obey the word of God, things will go well with him.

No matter how fickle a person has been or wrong decisions one has made, if a person will purpose to obey the word of God, things will go well with them.

If you don't obey, the women will mock you, your family will be publicly captured, and the city will be burned (v. 22-23).

HISTORICAL FACT #7 – Zedekiah asks Jeremiah not to tell anyone else what he said.
38:24-26

Zedekiah told Jeremiah that if the four officials questioned him, he was to tell them that he appeared before the king to be released from prison. Tell them you appeared before me to ask me to get out of the dungeon.

HISTORICAL FACT #8 – Zedekiah's officials question Jeremiah. **38:27-28**

The officials did question Jeremiah and that is what the king told him to do. Now this raises a real concern for legalists because Zedekiah seems to shade the truth a bit. But the fact is, he is obeying what the king told him to do and say.

Actually Jeremiah is truthful in that the king did speak those words to Jeremiah and Jeremiah reported it.

Verse 28 says Jeremiah stayed in the court of the guardhouse until the day Jerusalem was captured.