

**Jer. 38:1 ¶ Then Shephatiah the son of Mattan, and Gedaliah the son of Pashur, and Jucal the son of Shelemiah, and Pashur the son of Malchiah, heard the words that Jeremiah had spoken unto all the people, saying,**

**Jer. 38:2 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.**

**Jer. 38:3 Thus saith the LORD, This city shall surely be given into the hand of the king of Babylon's army, which shall take it.**

The wording indicates that this chapter is a continuation of events from the last chapter. It begins with the identification of four of the king's advisors who heard Jeremiah's message that those who stayed in the city would die, but those who surrendered to the Babylonians would live even though they would be captives. God had determined that the time for judgment had come, and He was going to give Jerusalem to the forces of Babylon. Emphasis is again to the fact that God is in charge.

**Jer. 38:4 Therefore the princes said unto the king, We beseech thee, 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.**

**Jer. 38:5 Then Zedekiah the king said, Behold, he *is* in your hand: for the king *is not he that can do any* thing against you.**

**Jer. 38:6 Then took they Jeremiah, and cast him into the dungeon of Malchiah the son of Hammelech, that *was* in the court of the prison: and they let down Jeremiah with cords. And in the dungeon *there was no water, but mire: so Jeremiah sunk in the mire.***

These four men were furious with Jeremiah and decided to advise the king in their anger. They were basically accusing Jeremiah of treason and seeking to bring harm to Jerusalem by undermining the courage of its soldiers with his message. Zedekiah, weakling that he was, basically gave them permission to do with Jeremiah as they pleased. So they put Jeremiah in the dungeon, a part of the prison system. Though they let him down with ropes, the bottom was totally muddy; and Jeremiah sunk into the mud. This must have been another cistern that had been emptied fairly recently to have so much mud at the bottom.

This made me think of what an appropriate picture this is of how the enemy wants to affect the testimony of the believer. He wants to essentially put us in a position that we are sinking under the circumstances and rendered ineffective in ministry.

I found the following quote from Broadman's Bible Commentary used by Burton Coffman that I appreciated regarding Jeremiah's actions from a political point of view.

"Jeremiah was no glib supporter of those in political power, supporting 'his country right or wrong!' 'He so loved his country that he was not content until it became the embodiment of the highest social, moral, and spiritual ideals; and he

was a splendid example of the enlightened type of patriotism so badly needed today.”

Oh that we had men and women of such character in the halls of congress today!

**Jer. 38:7** Now when Ebedmelech the Ethiopian, one of the eunuchs which was in the king's house, heard that they had put Jeremiah in the dungeon; the king then sitting in the gate of Benjamin;

**Jer. 38:8** Ebedmelech went forth out of the king's house, and spake to the king, saying,

**Jer. 38:9** 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 like to die for hunger in the place where he is: for *there is no more bread in the city.*

**Jer. 38:10** Then the king commanded Ebedmelech the Ethiopian, saying, Take from hence thirty men with thee, and take up Jeremiah the prophet out of the dungeon, before he die.

One of the eunuchs that served the king heard what the four advisors had done to Jeremiah and proceeded to go tell the king who was sitting in judgment at the Benjamin Gate at the time. He warned the king that Jeremiah, God's true prophet, might die of hunger if he is left in the dungeon. Food was very scarce in the city at that time. Ebedmelech the Ethiopian, the eunuch, was then commanded to take 30 men with him and get the prophet out of the dungeon before he could die. Though weak in the presence of his advisors, he took action to ensure the success of Jeremiah's rescue.

I think his actions show Ebedmelech the Ethiopian to be a Gentile who feared God. He was concerned for God's prophet and described Jeremiah's enemies as doing evil. He recognized with the psalmist that the enemies of God's people are the enemies of God.

*Psalms 5:7–12 “But as for me, I will come into thy house in the multitude of thy mercy: and in thy fear will I worship toward thy holy temple. Lead me, O LORD, in thy righteousness because of mine enemies; make thy way straight before my face. For there is no faithfulness in their mouth; their inward part is very wickedness; their throat is an open sepulchre; they flatter with their tongue. Destroy thou them, O God; let them fall by their own counsels; cast them out in the multitude of their transgressions; for they have rebelled against thee. But let all those that put their trust in thee rejoice: let them ever shout for joy, because thou defendest them: let them also that love thy name be joyful in thee. For thou, LORD, wilt bless the righteous; with favour wilt thou compass him as with”*

**Jer. 38:11** So Ebedmelech took the men with him, and went into the house of the king under the treasury, and took thence old cast clouts and old rotten rags, and let them down by cords into the dungeon to Jeremiah.

**Jer. 38:12** And Ebedmelech the Ethiopian said unto Jeremiah, Put now *these* old cast clouts and rotten rags under thine armholes under the cords. And Jeremiah did so.

**Jer. 38:13** So they drew up Jeremiah with cords, and took him up out of the dungeon: and Jeremiah remained in the court of the prison.

Ebedmelech and his group of soldiers proceeded to gather the materials they needed to rescue Jeremiah. They got him out of the dungeon as carefully as possible and left him in a better, safer part of the prison.

Note: The “treasury” is simply a word that means storehouse or depository and evidently had reference to the royal wardrobe since he was looking for old rags to try to soften the pain that would be caused by the ropes used to rescue Jeremiah.

**Jer. 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.

**Jer. 38:15** 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?

**Jer. 38:16** 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.

It didn't take long for Zedekiah to arrange a meeting with Jeremiah at the “third entry” of the temple. Some commentators suggest that this entrance faced the palace; others indicated it was a private entrance to the temple for the king. The king prefaces his request for information from Jeremiah with the admonition to tell him the whole truth in giving his answer and not to hide anything from him. Jeremiah boldly asks his own questions of the king before agreeing to give him an answer. He wanted to know if his answer will be the basis for killing him or if the king is going to heed his advice. Zedekiah only answers the first; he promises that he will not have him killed nor will he allow his advisors to harm him.

Isn't it interesting that though he treats the LORD with contempt, he expects Jeremiah to accept the fact that he can be trusted by swearing in acknowledgement of the living God as our Creator. It is interesting to me that even today in America we take an oath in court to tell the truth “so help me God.” Those words can only have meaning when coming from the mouth of a person who fears and respects God.

**Jer. 38:17** 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:

**Jer. 38:18** 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.

Jeremiah once again repeats the message God had given him to deliver. He tells Zedekiah that if he will surrender to the forces of Babylon, he will live and the city will not be burned. If, however, he does not surrender, the city will be burned and he will be captured.

**Jer. 38:19** 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.

**Jer. 38:20** 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.

**Jer. 38:21** But if thou refuse to go forth, this *is* the word that the LORD hath shewed me:

**Jer. 38:22** 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.

**Jer. 38:23** 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.

Zedekiah explains to Jeremiah that he fears surrendering because he is afraid he will be mocked and abused by the Jews who had already surrendered. Jeremiah promises him that will not happen if he will obey the words of the LORD that had been declared to him. If he refuses to obey God, however, he will not only face mocking from his wives and children, but he will be captured and the city burned down. The message was unchanged—Surrender and live or resist and be captured and humiliated.

I liked the NLT translation for v22: *"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!'"*

It's always amazing to me that we tend to fear what men may do to us more than we fear God.

**Jer. 38:24** Then said Zedekiah unto Jeremiah, Let no man know of these words, and thou shalt not die.

**Jer. 38:25** But if the princes hear that I have talked with thee, and they come unto thee, and say unto thee, Declare unto us now what thou hast said unto the king, hide it not from us, and we will not put thee to death; also what the king said unto thee:

**Jer. 38:26** Then thou shalt say unto them, I presented my supplication before the king, that he would not cause me to return to Jonathan's house, to die there.

**Jer. 38:27** Then came all the princes unto Jeremiah, and asked him: and he told them according to all these words that the king had commanded. So they left off speaking with him; for the matter was not perceived.

**Jer. 38:28** So Jeremiah abode in the court of the prison until the day that Jerusalem was taken: and he was *there* when Jerusalem was taken.

At this point Zedekiah tells Jeremiah that if he keeps their conversation secret, he will not die. If the princes, however, hear about this meeting and come to ask Jeremiah what he told the king, he is to declare that he begged the king not to send him back to the dungeon to die. The princes did find out and confronted Jeremiah, and he answered them according to the king's instructions. Evidently, they left satisfied with his answer since no one emerged to tell them otherwise. I am not sure that would be possible in today's day and age. With today's technology even the walls have eyes and ears.

So was Jeremiah right not to tell the whole truth? I liked Burton Coffman's comments: "We have no patience whatever with 'scholars' who criticize the 'ethics of Jeremiah,' suggesting that perhaps he told a lie on this occasion. Nonsense! Jeremiah obeyed his king, which he was honor bound to do; what he said was absolutely true. Of course, it was not 'the whole truth,' but Jeremiah was under no oath nor any responsibility whatever to tell those crooked murderers the "whole truth."

We are then told that Jeremiah remained in the court of the prison until the day that Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians. Jeremiah was proven a true prophet of God.