

Later Experiences of Jeremiah

Lesson Scripture: Jeremiah 20:1-6; 37:1-38:28; 43:1-7

Focus Scripture: Jeremiah 38:7-13

Key Verse: The king commanded Ebed-melech the (Ethiopian), "Take three men with you from here, and pull the prophet Jeremiah up from the cistern before he dies." Jeremiah 38:10

JEREMIAH 38:7-13 (NRSV UE)

7 Ebed-melech the Cushite, a eunuch in the king's house, heard that they had put Jeremiah into the cistern. The king happened to be sitting at the Benjamin Gate,

8 So Ebed-melech left the king's house and spoke to the king,

9 "My lord king, these men have acted wickedly in all they did to the prophet Jeremiah by throwing him into the cistern to die there of hunger, for there is no bread left in the city."

10 Then the king commanded Ebed-melech the Cushite, "Take three men with you from here, and pull the prophet Jeremiah up from the cistern before he dies."

11 So Ebed-melech took the men with him and went to the house of the king, to a wardrobe of the storehouse, and took from there old rags and worn-out clothes, which he let down to Jeremiah in the cistern by ropes.

12 Then Ebed-melech the Cushite said to Jeremiah, "Just put the rags and clothes between your armpits and the ropes." Jeremiah did so.

13 Then they drew Jeremiah up by the ropes and pulled him out of the cistern. And Jeremiah remained in the court of the guard.

JEREMIAH 38:7-13 (KJV)

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;

8 Ebedmelech went forth out of the king's house, and spake 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 like to die for hunger in the place where he is: for there is no more bread in the city.

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.

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.

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.

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.

KEY TERMS

- **Ebed-melech** – Combines two Hebrew words, “servant” and “king”; this may have been a title instead of a name.
- **Zedekiah** – Hebrew meaning “Yah is righteousness”; derived from verb “sadeq” (“to be just”) and “yah”, the name of the Lord.
- **Cistern** – A large water storage tank usually dug into the ground or rock.
- **Malchiah** – Hebrew meaning “Yah (Jehovah) is king.”
- **Eunuch** – Usually a minister of state who was castrated; Jesus identified three types: born that way, made that way, or chose to live that way (Matthew 19:11-12).

INTRODUCTION

Jeremiah encountered insults, assaults, and slander. This mistreatment kept intensifying to the point where it could have resulted in his death. After Jeremiah

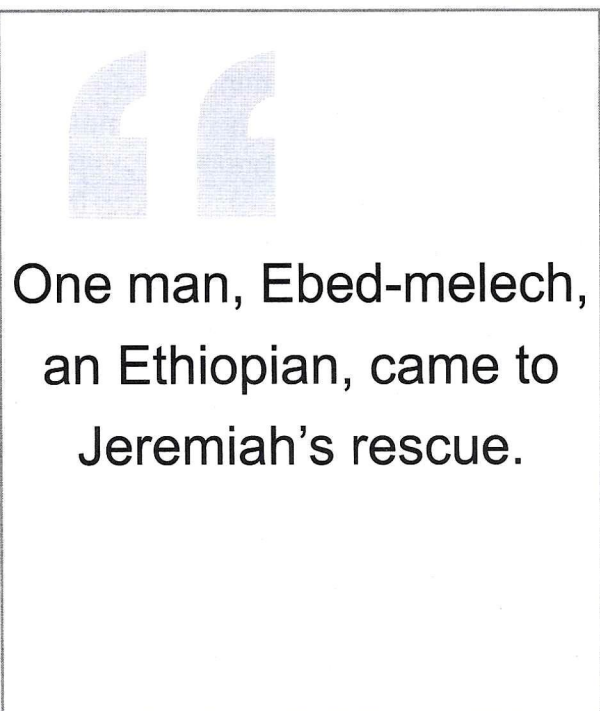
delivered a greatly disturbing message, the king agreed to have Jeremiah interred in a water cistern. Because he was sinking in the mud (similar to quicksand sinking), Jeremiah could be sucked under and die. One man, Ebed-melech, an Ethiopian, came to Jeremiah’s rescue. By making this request, Ebed-melech put his life in danger; also, he could have been killed for challenging the king’s decree.

TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

Jeremiah 38:7-13

Jeremiah had a message for Israel: surrender to the Babylonians. If they did, they would be exiled to Babylon, but they would live. But if they refused, they would die. This news did not sit well with

some of Zedekiah’s officers. They thought Jeremiah’s words were treasonous. They probably believed that Jeremiah’s words would scare the army and decrease their morale. So, they reported him to the king and wanted him punished severely. When Zedekiah heard about the officers’ complaint and their desire to kill Jeremiah,



he said, "Here he is; you can do whatever you want to him. The king can't stop you" (NRSV UE). Now, whether Zedekiah was really powerless is up for debate. Maybe he was just a puppet king controlled by Nebuchadnezzar and was afraid of what Babylon would do to him. Or maybe he was just weak-willed. Whatever the case, his feeble response led to Jeremiah being thrown into the mud of Malchiah's (Zedekiah's son) dry well. Instead of killing him right away, they lowered Jeremiah into the well, which would slowly kill him as he sank into the mud.

Ebed-melech, an Ethiopian eunuch and a member of King Zedekiah's court, found out what had happened to Jeremiah. According to the Mosaic law, since

Ebed-melech was castrated, he could not enter the Israelite assembly. But luckily, when Ebed-melech heard about Jeremiah's fate, King Zedekiah was sitting outside the Benjamin Gate. Jeremiah's daily bread ration, which had been his only source of food, had stopped. So, Ebed-melech told the king that Jeremiah was going to starve to death. Zedekiah

said that Jeremiah could be freed from the cistern, so several men accompanied Ebed-melech as they pulled Jeremiah out of the cistern. They wrapped rags around Jeremiah's arms to protect him from rope burns. They carefully pulled Jeremiah up, but he was not set free from imprisonment. He was still kept in the court of the guards.

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God promised Ebed-melech that he would be saved from the Babylonian invasion that would destroy Israel (Jeremiah 39:15-18).

would be saved from the Babylonian invasion that would destroy Israel (Jeremiah 39:15-18). This promise to Ebed-melech was in line with Isaiah 56:3-5: "To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose what pleases me and hold fast to my covenant – to them I will give within

my temple and its walls a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that will endure forever" (NIV).

SANKOFA

People usually do not voluntarily enter prison, especially for crimes they did not commit. United States history

records that between the 1870's and 1960's a number of black people were falsely imprisoned or lynched. All-white juries would exonerate white people accused of atrocities including murder when victims were black. One example: in 1906, Ed Johnson was arrested for allegedly assaulting a white woman in Chattanooga, Tennessee. According to the victim, someone knocked her out with a leather strap.

Supposedly, a witness stated that Johnson owned and was carrying a leather strap. Johnson says he did not own one. A number of people provided alibis for Johnson, but an all-white jury convicted him. He was granted a stay of execution, but a mob dragged him from the jail and murdered him by hanging. His

conviction was overturned in February 2000. Injustices were not limited to men; they also included women. Lena Baker was kidnapped and assaulted by a white man whom she shot in self-defense. An all-white male jury convicted her of murder. Baker became the only

women in Georgia history executed by electrocution. Granted a pardon in 2005, the Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles admitted that Baker's execution represented an egregious error. Unlike Jeremiah, neither Johnson nor Baker had anyone step forth to rescue them prior to being killed.

CASE STUDY

A movie, *Just Mercy*, featured Bryan Stevenson's commitment to righting injustices. He founded the Equal Justice Institute (EJI) in Montgomery, Alabama. Through this organization, Stevenson has challenged unfair sentencing imposed upon the innocent. His leadership confronted abusive practices

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aimed at prisoners and children unfairly tried as adults. His efforts have resulted in exonerating innocent inmates on death row. Stevenson's concern for the marginalized is visible in the creation of EJI's Legacy Sites, which preserve and tell stories of slavery, lynching, and racial segregation. Through the story shared

at these sites, Stevenson demonstrates how these historical issues still unfairly impact court hearings and sentencing as evidenced by the mass incarceration of black men. Though denial and obstructions have deterred EJI's justice thrust, the work continues. Unfair prison terms are not new as reflected in today's lesson.

LIFE APPLICATION

When people are imprisoned unjustly, an opportunity arises. The choice to act depends upon each of you. Will you stand idly by knowing that an innocent person was incarcerated? Or will you support efforts for that individual's release? Unfortunately, innocent people have

spent years in jail or have been executed. Speaking out to correct injustices takes courage. Silence cannot right wrongs. Vocal challenges accompanied by corrective action reflects God's justice. Ebed-melech shows how one person moved by compassion can save the life of another.



Jeremiah was imprisoned because of his prophetic message. God gave Zedekiah, another of Judah's kings, a warning of impending doom.

Questions

1. How can the church help people who are unfairly imprisoned?
2. How can the church become involved in sentencing decisions?
3. Where did you see Jesus in today's lesson?

4. How will you apply what you learned to your life?

SUMMARY

Jeremiah was imprisoned because of his prophetic message. God gave Zedekiah, another of Judah's kings, a warning of impending doom. Because of what he said, Jeremiah was put in a cistern where he could

have died. Ebed-melech, an Ethiopian, appealed to the king. Permission was granted for Ebed-melech to pull Jeremiah up from the cistern, which saved his life.

CLOSING DEVOTIONS

Think about Jeremiah and how this hymn, "Love Lifted Me" (AMECH #461)

could pertain to his time in the cistern:

I was sinking deep in sin,
Far from the peaceful shore,
Very deeply stained within,
Sinking to rise no more;
But the Master of the sea
Heard my despairing cry,
From the waters lifted me,
Now safe am I.

Love lifted me!

Love lifted me!

When nothing else could help,
Love lifted me.

Prayer: Lord, give us bold tongues so that we may speak against injustice. Let us know what we should do to help those who have been wronged. We pray that your justice be done and that you protect people who are working for you. In Jesus' name. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

November 3-9

Monday	Luke 12:42-48 (The Master Is Coming Soon)
Tuesday	Luke 12:49-53 (The Purifying Fire of Change)
Wednesday	Lamentations 2:17-22 (The Lord's Purifying Purpose)
Thursday	Lamentations 3:21-36 (Hope in the Lord)
Friday	1 Peter 1:1-12 (Faith Tested by Fire)
Saturday	1 Peter 1:13-25 (Prepare for Action)
Sunday	2 Kings 24:18–25:9 (God's Judgment is Sure)