

Aim of lesson

To compare Zedekiah's concern for immediate comfort and status with Jeremiah's determination to do God's will.

Bible background

Jeremiah 38; 39; 40:1-6.

Outline of lesson

The plot against Jeremiah

Use the pictures in the workbook to clarify Jeremiah 38 as you read it together. The class can decide on the words for the characters in each picture. There is only room for a short sentence for each, but discussion can bring out the fuller picture. The six pictures are as follows:

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| (1) | Verses 1-3 | The officials do not like Jeremiah's preaching. |
| (2) | Verses 4-5 | They tell the king he should be put to death. |
| (3) | Verse 6 | Jeremiah is put in a cistern. |
| (4) | Verses 7-10 | Ebedmelech protests to the king. |
| (5) | Verses 11-13 | He rescues Jeremiah. |
| (6) | Verses 14-26 | Jeremiah again warns the king. |

The last section is quite long and could perhaps be summarised on the sheet by Zedekiah saying: 'I don't know what to do' and Jeremiah saying 'Your feet are stuck in the mud!' (see v22).

Stuck In the mud

The class will appreciate the irony of the situation and the courage of Jeremiah in telling the king that he is the one with his feet stuck in the mud, after his own uncomfortable suffering, with the possibility of losing his life. The contrast should be made between the two men. One who was prepared to suffer for doing God's will and did not compromise to make life more comfortable, and the other who was so afraid of what others might say and do (v19) that in spite of God's assurance of safety (v20) and the evidence of God fulfilling his word in the Babylonian armies surrounding the city, he chose to stay in Jerusalem and disobey God's command.

The fall of Jerusalem

Jeremiah remains in prison from this time until Jerusalem is captured (Jeremiah 38:28). The workbook has a supposed newspaper of the day Jerusalem was taken by the Babylonians in 587 B.C. Perhaps your class, as newspaper reporters, could each choose a different aspect to write about. Suggestions are given in the workbook and the following references would be useful for the 'reporters':

Wall Broken Through	Jeremiah 39:1-3; 2 Kings 25:1-4, 10.
Zedekiah Captured	Jeremiah 39:4-8; 2 Kings 25:4-7.
Temple Destroyed	2 Kings 25:9, 13-17.
Jeremiah Freed	Jeremiah 39:9-14; 40:1-6; see also 2 Chronicles 36:15-21.

Ebedmelech

The class may like to read of the sequel to Ebedmelech's bravery in rescuing Jeremiah. He had not made himself popular with the officials, and there were people he feared (see Jeremiah 39:17). God sends a special message to him to promise protection in the destruction that was coming, Jeremiah 39:15-18.

Digging deeper

Poor Jeremiah

In this section the students can find out what happened to Jeremiah after the fall of Jerusalem.

Relevance to our lives

The contrast between the weak King Zedekiah, easily persuaded to do wrong and too afraid of others to do God's will, and the courage and perseverance of Jeremiah, even in the face of suffering, is a lesson for us all. The class could discuss how both characters would act in today's world, a world also facing God's judgment.

Prayer

The class could consider what Jeremiah might have prayed when Jerusalem was taken. They should compare their ideas with the book of Lamentations. Jeremiah shows no sense of 'I told you so'. He laments bitterly the destruction of Jerusalem and identifies himself very much with her suffering. In fact, Jeremiah shows that God himself feels for the suffering of his people and suffers with them, even though he brought the punishment they deserved. The class could read Lamentations 1:1-3; 2:11 or Jeremiah 8:21; 9:1,10. They should also note his awareness of God's mercy even in such awful judgment, Lamentations 3:22-23.

Other suggestions for activities

- An older class may like to record a dramatic reading of a section of Lamentations.
- Half the class could write a letter from Jeremiah telling a friend about Zedekiah and the other half could write a letter from Zedekiah telling a friend about Jeremiah.
- The class could continue their newspaper of the time of Jeremiah.