

# Bible Stories

## JEREMIAH and the FINAL DAYS of JUDAH

Jeremiah 21:8-10

May 06, 2023

Jeremiah was born during the reign of Manasseh – Judah’s worst king.

When Manasseh’s grandson, Josiah, came to the throne he attempted to undo everything Manasseh had done. He removed the idols from the land, but he couldn’t remove idol worship from the hearts of the people.

The people didn’t abandon the Temple they simply brought idol worship into the Temple and relegated Yahweh to just another of the many gods they worshipped.

They had convinced themselves that their actions wouldn’t have any serious consequences because they believed that God would never allow anything terrible to happen to the city or Temple that bore His name.

It was in the 13<sup>th</sup> year of Josiah’s reign {627 BC}, that Jeremiah got **THE CALL**.

Jeremiah resisted. He actually protested:

- **Jeremiah 1:6** - "Ah, Sovereign LORD," I said, "I do not know how to speak; I am only a child."

But Yahweh had somethings to say and He wanted Jeremiah to deliver the message:

- **Jeremiah 2:1-9** - The word of the LORD came to me: <sup>2</sup> "Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem: "'I remember the devotion of your youth, how as a bride you loved me and followed me through the desert, through a land not sown. <sup>3</sup> Israel was holy to the LORD, the firstfruits of his harvest; all who devoured her were held guilty, and disaster overtook them,'" declares the LORD.... <sup>7</sup> I brought you into a fertile land to eat its fruit and rich produce. But you came and defiled my land and made my inheritance detestable. <sup>8</sup> The priests did not ask, 'Where is the LORD?' Those who deal with the law did not know me; the leaders rebelled against me. The prophets prophesied by Baal, following worthless idols. <sup>9</sup> "Therefore I bring charges against you again," declares the LORD. "And I will bring charges against your children's children."
- **Jeremiah 4:14-18** - O Jerusalem, wash the evil from your heart and be saved. How long will you harbor wicked thoughts? <sup>15</sup> A voice is announcing from Dan, proclaiming disaster from the hills of Ephraim. <sup>16</sup> "Tell this to the nations, proclaim it to Jerusalem: 'A besieging army is coming from a distant land, raising a war cry against the cities of Judah. <sup>17</sup> They surround her like men guarding a field, because she has rebelled against me,'" declares the LORD. <sup>18</sup> "Your own conduct and actions have brought this upon you. This is your punishment. How bitter it is! How it pierces to the heart!"

Jeremiah did what God asked him to do – at great personal cost.

- He was not allowed to marry or have a family (16:2).
- God gave him all sorts of crazy object lessons to perform before the people (19:1-2 and 27:2).
- His life was threatened by those who opposed his message, including his own family (26:8-15).
- Court **“prophets”** challenged him at every turn (28).
- He was imprisoned (37:12-16).
- He was thrown down a well (38:3-6).

### Jeremiah imprisoned – 37:1-21

Zedekiah, the last king of Judah, was on the throne. Nebuchadnezzar had placed him on the throne after King Jehoiachin had been removed and taken to Babylon.

Neither he nor his attendants nor the people of the land paid any attention to the words Yahweh had spoken through Jeremiah, however, he still asked Jeremiah to **“pray to Yahweh for us.”**

Pharaoh marched out against Nebuchadnezzar’s army when he got word that the Babylonians were besieging Jerusalem (because Egypt and Judah had formed an alliance against Babylon) the Babylonian army broke off the siege and set off to engage the Egyptian army.

Jeremiah went to Zedekiah with a word from Yahweh: *“Pharaoh's army, which has marched out to support you, will go back to its own land. Then the Babylonians will return and attack this city; they will capture it and burn it down. Do not deceive yourselves, thinking, 'The Babylonians will surely leave us.' They will not! Even if you were to defeat the entire Babylonian army that is attacking you and only wounded men were left in their tents, they would come out and burn this city down.”*

While the Babylonians were away, the people were once again free to move about the countryside. Jeremiah decided it was time to go check on his property. When he reached the Benjamin gate, however, he was stopped by the captain of the guard and accused of trying to desert to the Babylonians.

Why do you suppose Jeremiah was singled out? Because he had been counselling the people to surrender:

- **Jeremiah 21:8-10** - .... tell the people, 'This is what Yahweh says: See, I am setting before you the way of life and the way of death. <sup>9</sup> Whoever stays in this city will die by the sword, famine or plague. But whoever goes out and surrenders to the Babylonians who are besieging you will live; he will escape with his life. <sup>10</sup> I have determined to do this city harm and not good, declares Yahweh. It will be given into the hands of the king of Babylon, and he will destroy it with fire.'

Even though Jeremiah insisted that the accusation was a lie, he was arrested. He was beaten and imprisoned in the dungeon, **“where he remained a long time.”**

Zedekiah secretly sent for Jeremiah:

**Zedekiah:** *Do you have a word from Yahweh?*

**Jeremiah:** *Yes. You will be handed over to the Babylonians. By the way... What crime have I committed that I have been thrown into prison? Where are the prophets who told you that the king of Babylon would not attack you or this land? Please don't send me back to the dungeon or I will die there.*

Zedekiah gave the order for Jeremiah to be moved to the courtyard of the guard and given bread each day until all the bread in the city was gone.

There had been 2 sieges already – 605 and 597. Now in the 9th year of Zedekiah's reign, on the 10th day of the month (589/588 BC), Nebuchadnezzar began the final siege of Jerusalem and the people suffered in the extreme.

### **Jeremiah thrown down a well 38:1-28**

Even though Jeremiah remained in the courtyard of the guard, he was still encouraging the people to surrender: ***“This is what Yahweh says: 'Whoever stays in this city will die by the sword, famine or plague, but whoever goes over to the Babylonians will live. He will escape with his life; he will live. This city will certainly be handed over to the army of the king of Babylon, who will capture it.'”***

Shephatiah, Gedaliah, Jehucal and Pashhur went to the king, ***“This man should be put to death. He is discouraging the remaining soldiers, as well as the people, by the things he is saying. He is not seeking the good of the people but their ruin.”***

**Zedekiah:** *Do what you want to him. I cannot stop you.*

These men took Jeremiah and threw him into the empty cistern located in the courtyard of the guard – he sank down into the mud.

Ebed-Melech discovered what had happened and went to Zedekiah to intercede on Jeremiah's behalf and the king ordered him to take 30 men and rescue Jeremiah. Jeremiah was pulled out of the cistern, but remained in the courtyard of the guard.

Zedekiah once again had Jeremiah brought to a secret meeting:

**Zedekiah:** *I have a question and don't hold anything back.*

**Jeremiah:** *If I give you an answer won't you have me killed? Even if I give you counsel you will not listen to me.*

**Zedekiah:** *I swear by Yahweh that I will not kill you or hand you over to those seeking to kill you.*

**Jeremiah:** *This is what Almighty God says, If you surrender your life will be spared, this city will not be burned down and you and your family will live. If you refuse to surrender, this city will be handed over to the Babylonians and they will burn it to the ground and you will not escape from their hands.*

**Zedekiah:** *I am afraid the Babylonians will hand me over to the Jews who have already surrendered and they will mistreat me.*

**Jeremiah:** *You will not be handed over. Obey Yahweh and things will go well for you. But if you refuse to surrender, all your wives and children will be brought out to the Babylonians. You will not escape, but will be captured and this city will be burned down.*

**Zedekiah:** *Don't tell anyone we've talked.*

Jeremiah remained in the courtyard of the guard until the day Jerusalem was captured.

Did the people listen to Jeremiah? No.

Did the king listen to Jeremiah? No.

On the 9<sup>th</sup> day of the 4<sup>th</sup> month in 586 BC, Jerusalem's wall was breached.

- **Jeremiah 39:4-9** - When Zedekiah king of Judah and all the soldiers saw them, they fled; they left the city at night by way of the king's garden, through the gate between the two walls, and headed toward the Arabah. <sup>5</sup> But the Babylonian army pursued them and overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho. They captured him and took him to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon at Riblah in the land of Hamath, where he pronounced sentence on him. <sup>6</sup> There at Riblah the king of Babylon slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes and also killed all the nobles of Judah. <sup>7</sup> Then he put out Zedekiah's eyes and bound him with bronze shackles to take him to Babylon.

Zedekiah would die in a Babylonian prison.

One month later:

- **Jeremiah 52:12-27** - On the tenth day of the fifth month, in the nineteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, Nebuzaradan commander of the imperial guard, who served the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. <sup>13</sup> He set fire to the temple of the LORD, the royal palace and all the houses of Jerusalem. Every important building he burned down. <sup>14</sup> The whole Babylonian army under the commander of the imperial guard broke down all the walls around Jerusalem..... So, Judah went into captivity, away from her land.

### **What do we do with this story?**

Jeremiah struggled with the mission God gave him, yet he faithfully carried out God's instructions in the face of unrelenting opposition.

He wanted to see hearts changed, but he was never able to prevent Judah's downward spiral.

Even as he tried to prevent the destruction and misery their rebellion had brought, the people only hardened their hearts and stubbornly refused to listen.

No wonder Jeremiah was called the weeping prophet.

- **Charles Swindoll:** At one time or another, all of us have enjoyed the fleeting pleasures of sin... Because, we are sinners by nature, we are prone to shove aside, the anguishing reality of the effects of compromise, so that, we can more thoroughly embrace the thrills of evil. Realizing this, the Lord has graciously inspired and preserved the Lamentations of Jeremiah, which records, the devastating consequences that flowed from Judah in rebellion against God. As we read the pages of this book we will find ourselves asking if the bitter fruit of disobedience is worth the tremendous price it exacts.