Rescue From A Dark Pit
Jeremiah 38:1-28

Introduction

In the last few chapters of Jeremiah we have discussed the broad themes of the inspiration and proclamation and preservation of God’s Word; we have seen God’s Word dishonored; God’s Word protected (chapter 36) and God’s Word rejected (chapter 37-38).

Jeremiah has been charged with desertion (chapter 37) and now Jeremiah will be charged with dissension (chapter 38). The chapter contains foes and friends and a final meeting with a wishy-washy king.

Warren Wiersbe writes; “There’s no problem so big or complicated that it can’t be run away from.” So read a piece of graffito found on a London wall in 1979, probably adapted from the Peanuts comic strip drawn by Charles Schultz. Whatever the source, the statement certainly represents King Zedekiah’s approach to the terrible problems in Judah when the enemy was at the gates” (see BE Decisive p.146-147).

We cannot run away from our problems for ever. Make no mistake about it. At some point we will all face a crisis; a problem; which can’t be solved by running away--unless of course we run straight into the arms of our loving Savior.

In this chapter we are given a glimpse of a mysterious character who in many ways reminds of our Lord Jesus.

Jeremiah’s Foes (vv.1-6)

Jeremiah 38:1–28 (NKJV)

1Now Shephatiah the son of Mattan, Gedaliah the son of Pashhur, Jucal the son of Shelemiah, and Pashhur the son of Malchiah heard the words that Jeremiah had spoken to all the people, saying,

These are four princes who are enraged that Jeremiah was released from prison and given the opportunity to speak God’s Word.

2“Thus says the Lord: ‘He who remains in this city shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence; but he who goes over to the Chaldeans shall live; his life shall be as a prize to him, and he shall live.’

3Thus says the Lord: ‘This city shall surely be given into the hand of the king of Babylon’s army, which shall take it.’”
Therefore the princes said to the king, “Please, let this man be put to death, for thus he weakens the hands of the men of war who remain in this city, and the hands of all the people, by speaking such words to them. For this man does not seek the welfare of this people, but their harm.”

The princes demand Jeremiah’s death. They claim that Jeremiah was weakening the men’s morale and resolve on the part of the men who were tasked to defend the city.

An archeological discovery called the Lachish Letters describes the influence of the princes on King Zedekiah.

The letters were probably written shortly before Lachish fell to the Babylonian army in 588/6 BC during the reign Zedekiah, king of Judah (ref. Jeremiah 34:7).

“To my Lord Yaosh. . .Who is thy servant but a dog that my lord hath sent the letter of the king and the letters of the princes, saying, “Pray, read them!” And behold the words of the princes are not good but weaken our hands and slacken the hands of the men. . .As the Lord thy God liveth, truly since they servant read the letters there hath been no peace for thy servant”.

Then Zedekiah the king said, “Look, he is in your hand. For the king can do nothing against you.”

We see the King as weak-willed and compromised. He listens to the princes but has secret sympathies with Jeremiah.

The King seems to go in the direction of whoever happens to be speaking to him at the moment. Later in the text Ebed-Melech will use that character flaw to help rescue Jeremiah from the miry pit.

So they took Jeremiah and cast him into the dungeon of Malchiah the king’s son, which was in the court of the prison, and they let Jeremiah down with ropes. And in the dungeon there was no water, but mire. So Jeremiah sank in the mire.

The cell is a tunnel dug deep into the limestone. It is a water cistern--but there is no water--just a filthy concoction of refuse and mud. Think sludge. Think sludge that is reeks of the odor of raw sewage.

The evil princes have Jeremiah cast into a deep pit. Jeremiah is left to die a slow--agonizing death.

Sometimes sin places us into a deep pit. In David’s Psalm (40:2) “He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, Out of the miry clay, And set my feet upon a rock, And established my steps.”
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The language describes David’s hopeless and helpless situation; God by His grace had taken David from a place of insecurity to security.

Sin will sometimes place us in a pit of iniquity, or despair, or depression or unbelief.

Jeremiah’s Friend (vv.7-13)

7Now Ebed-Melech the Ethiopian, one of the eunuchs, who was in the king’s house, heard that they had put Jeremiah in the dungeon. When the king was sitting at the Gate of Benjamin, 

The name “ebed-melech” means servant of the king (God). Here the word translated eunuch can also mean palace official. Kush is translated Ethiopian--but included the area both north and south in the Nile. The Ethiopian people were dark--black--and traded with the people of the Levant. Many Ethiopian people became rich.

Whoever this man was--he exercised a great deal of influence with the king.

8Ebed-Melech went out of the king’s house and spoke 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 likely to die from hunger in the place where he is. For there is no more bread in the city.”

The city under siege is on reduced rations. Ebed-Melech is moved with compassion.

10Then the king commanded Ebed-Melech the Ethiopian, saying, “Take from here thirty men with you, and lift Jeremiah the prophet out of the dungeon before he dies.”

Ebed-Melech seeks and succeeds in rescuing Jeremiah from the pit and to save him from death by isolation and starvation. Like Jesus who seeks and saves the lost; Jesus dies on our behalf and delivers us from the wrath to come (1 Thess. 1:10) “And to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come”.


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_Ebed-Melech_ acts--according to the words of the King; and Jesus acts--according to the King of Heaven--according to the Word of God (John 17:4) “I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the word which You have given Me to do.”

11So Ebed-Melech took the men with him and went into the house of the king under the treasury, and took from there old clothes and old rags, and let them down by ropes into the dungeon to Jeremiah.

Ebed-Melech--provides the means to rescue Jeremiah--so the Lord Jesus has provided for us a means to be rescued--the Lord has decreed that those who are saved shall bear His message of salvation to others (John 20:21); “So Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace to You! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you’.”

12Then Ebed-Melech the Ethiopian said to Jeremiah, “Please put these old clothes and rags under your armpits, under the ropes.” And Jeremiah did so.

Jeremiah was saved from the miry pit by acting according to the instructions that were given to him (here v.12); and so we are saved by doing as the Lord directs (John 5:24)

“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life.”

13So they pulled Jeremiah up with ropes and lifted him out of the dungeon. And Jeremiah remained in the court of the prison.

Jeremiah’s Final Meeting With King Zedekiah (vv.14-28)

14Then Zedekiah the king sent and had Jeremiah the prophet brought to him at the third entrance of the house of the Lord. And the king said to Jeremiah, “I will ask you something. Hide nothing from me.”

Once again the King seeks counsel from Jeremiah. This is not the first time the King has sought counsel from the Prophet. It will be the last time.
Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, “If I declare it to you, will you not surely put me to death? And if I give you advice, you will not listen to me.”

So Zedekiah the king swore secretly to Jeremiah, saying, “As the Lord lives, who made our very souls, I will not put you to death, nor will I give you into the hand of these men who seek your life.”

Zedekiah swears a solemn oath that he will not put Jeremiah to death to allow his enemies to kill him. It would appear that Jeremiah believed that even a weak willed king like Zedekiah was able to keep his word.

Zedekiah was weak. Jesus is strong. The wicked King Zedekiah assures Jeremiah that he will not be put to death--and the stronger King Jesus-- assures us that we will never perish (John 10:28-29).

“And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand.”

Then Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, “Thus says the Lord, the God of hosts, the God of Israel: ‘If you surely surrender to the king of Babylon’s princes, then your soul shall live; this city shall not be burned with fire, and you and your house shall live.

But if you do not surrender to the king of Babylon’s princes, then this city shall be given into the hand of the Chaldeans; they shall burn it with fire, and you shall not escape from their hand.’ ”

And Zedekiah the king said to Jeremiah, “I am afraid of the Jews who have defected to the Chaldeans, lest they deliver me into their hand, and they abuse me.”

We are not told whether these Jews were influenced by Jeremiah’s message or they exercised common sense.

But Jeremiah said, “They shall not deliver you. Please, obey the voice of the Lord which I speak to you. So it shall be well with you, and your soul shall live.”
21But if you refuse to surrender, this is the word that the Lord has shown me:

22‘Now behold, all the women who are left in the king of Judah’s house shall be surrendered to the king of Babylon’s princes, and those women shall say: “Your close friends have set upon you And prevailed against you; Your feet have sunk in the mire, And they have turned away again.”

The Prophet employs poetry. “Your close friends” or “your trusted friends” translates the Hebrew expression “the men of your peace”.

“Your feet have sunk in the mire”. The irony is not lost on the king.

Euripides in *The Trojan Women* sang a similar song;

> And forth, lo, the women go,  
> The crown of War, the crown of Woe,  
> To bear the children of the foe  
> And weep, weep, for Illion!

23‘So they shall surrender all your wives and children to the Chaldeans. You shall not escape from their hand, but shall be taken by the hand of the king of Babylon. And you shall cause this city to be burned with fire.’ ”

24Then Zedekiah said to Jeremiah, “Let no one know of these words, and you shall not die.  
25But if the princes hear that I have talked with you, and they come to you and say to you, ‘Declare to us now what you have said to the king, and also what the king said to you; do not hide it from us, and we will not put you to death,’  
26then you shall say to them, ‘I presented my request before the king, that he would not make me return to Jonathan’s house to die there.’ ”

The king provides a “cover story” for the prophet.

27Then all the princes came to Jeremiah and asked him. And he told them according to all these words that the king had commanded. So they stopped speaking with him, for the conversation had not been heard.
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Apparently the princes buy Jeremiah’s cover.

28Now Jeremiah remained in the court of the prison until the day that Jerusalem was taken. And he was there when Jerusalem was taken.

Conclusion

In the end Ebed-Melech sought to rescue and save Jeremiah from the pit, from starvation, he acted according to the word of the king; Ebed-Melech provided a way to lift him from the pit; and Ebed-Melech will be rewarded because of his trust in the Lord (see chapter 39:16-18).

All those who trust in Jesus will be rewarded with all spiritual blessings in Him (see Eph. 1:3).