

JEREMIAH, GOD'S MESSENGER

God's Word Rejected

Jeremiah 38:1—40:6

Jeremiah the prophet is thrown into a pit then rescued by a friend.

Teaching Aim

Living for God is difficult but he cares for his people.



Response Aim

The children will accept Christians have trouble but God is with them.

Preparing Yourself

There are times when we wonder how much more we can take. Drained emotionally and fearful, we wonder whether we will survive. As Christians we have the promise that with the Spirit's help we will be able to stand (1Cor 10:13).

God's protection

Despite the certainty of Jeremiah's calling and equipping, the opposition and lack of response to his message were such that he was tempted to give up and say 'no more' (e.g. 20:7f), but God's word burned so fiercely within him that he had to speak and he knew God would protect him.

The book of Jeremiah spans 40 recorded years of his prophetic ministry and we know that it continued even beyond that after the fall of Jerusalem. The incident when he was thrown into a pit happened 38 years after the start of his ministry and about 17 years after the burning of the scroll.

God's message

Babylon was stronger than ever. Zedekiah, another puppet king, was in the ninth of his 11 years as king. He was a weak man and easily swayed. He refused to listen to God's clear message through Jeremiah that the city would fall but that he and his family and all the people could be rescued, if they would surrender (38:2-3, 17-18).

Jerusalem was under siege by Babylon for 18 months before it finally fell, apart from a brief respite

when the Egyptians came to help.

Jeremiah was disliked for his 'unpatriotic' message and seen as a threat to national morale. He was confined in a number of different places until the end. His rescue from the pit only meant a return to imprisonment in the guardhouse.

God's people

One of the most exciting aspects of Jeremiah's personal story is the way in which, in times of crisis, God had people in place to help and rescue him. In this instance, although his own people were against him, God found an African who was kind-hearted towards Jeremiah and was prepared to stand up for him.

It should not be difficult to help the children imagine the fear, darkness and despair that Jeremiah felt. The story is a dramatic one.

God's care

The truth we want to leave with the children is that however tight a corner we are in, God knows and cares. That doesn't mean comfort and ease for evermore. Jeremiah was still in prison, but not in such a perilous state.

Encourage the children to share any 'tight corner' experiences, or their fears of what might come. Help them to see how they can call out to God who knows and cares. Point out that God often uses other people to protect and help us.

Catherine Vos¹ gives an excellent retelling of the story of Jeremiah and the history around it. 

NOTES

Jeremiah 38

1. Cf. 37:21 – Jeremiah was in the courtyard of the guard, free to speak, but not to go outside.

5. Zedekiah was afraid of his officials and refused to intervene.

6. Many houses in Jerusalem had pear-shaped cisterns about 13m deep, lined with a form of cement, for water storage (picture, *IBD* p289).

7. *Cushite* – possibly from Ethiopia or Sudan. *Ebed-Melech* – means 'King's Servant' and may be a title rather than a name. *Benjamin Gate* – the king was probably settling legal matters in an area where people could approach and talk with him.

Resources

- *To start* (1): picture of a fortified city.
- Visual Aid - Get the children to help to fill in the details as you tell the lesson.
- Cut-away, relief model of cistern made from thick card.

Verse to Learn

Psalm 33:18

The eyes of the LORD are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love.



Teaching the Children

To start

Using a picture of a fortified city, invite the children to talk about being under siege: restrictions, shortages, fear, etc. Explain that Jerusalem was being besieged by the Babylonians.

Alternative: Who has been in a cave, or underground passage? What was it like – dark, damp, scary? How did you get in and out?

Arrested and imprisoned

Jerusalem was being attacked. Jeremiah's own people hated him. They thought he was a traitor for saying they should surrender Jerusalem to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. Jeremiah had been put into a dark pit with deep mud in the bottom. *Demonstrate with the model.*

He had been lowered by ropes into a deep hole and left there in the mud, in the dark. How do you think he felt? Helpless in such a horrible place, Jeremiah knew God was still with him.

Teaching: Living for God is never easy – sometimes it means being treated very badly. Jesus warned his followers to expect rough treatment. God never leaves his people even if they go through horrible things.

Application: Are you ready for some rough treatment if you follow Jesus? God will always be with you, whatever happens.

Imprisoned and rescued

Read verses 7-13. How was God protecting Jeremiah?

- Ebed-Melech cared.
- The king agreed to release Jeremiah.
- More men ordered to help.
- Rags used to protect his arms.
- King promises to keep Jeremiah safe.
- Treated well by Babylonians.

Teaching: God never forgets his people, even when they go through rough times. He never lets them suffer more than they can bear.

Application: As a Christian, you must expect difficulties – but God will always be with you.

Rescued but still in prison

Where did Jeremiah end up? (v13, *still in prison but in a better part*) That was part of God's protection. How? *Look at 37:21.* Food was running out, but Jeremiah was being fed.

Teaching: God cares for his people, but he doesn't stop every nasty thing from happening. Why do you think that is?

- So they love and trust him more.
- So they remember his help in past times.
- So their faith grows stronger.

Application: If you have difficulties following Jesus, God can use them to make you strong.

Rescued but still protected

What sort of king was Zedekiah? (*A weak king.*) He never had the courage of his convictions and was afraid of people near to him perhaps more than of the army outside his walls.

God used the king to protect Jeremiah (vv14-16,24-26). Because he was in the court of the guard, under the king's overall command, Jeremiah was protected. After two years of siege the walls of Jerusalem fell and the Babylonians came in but God kept Jeremiah safe.

Teaching: Living for God can be tough, but he always stays with and cares for his people.

Application: Are you going to live for God, knowing he'll always be with you? Or would you rather live for yourself, without God?

To finish

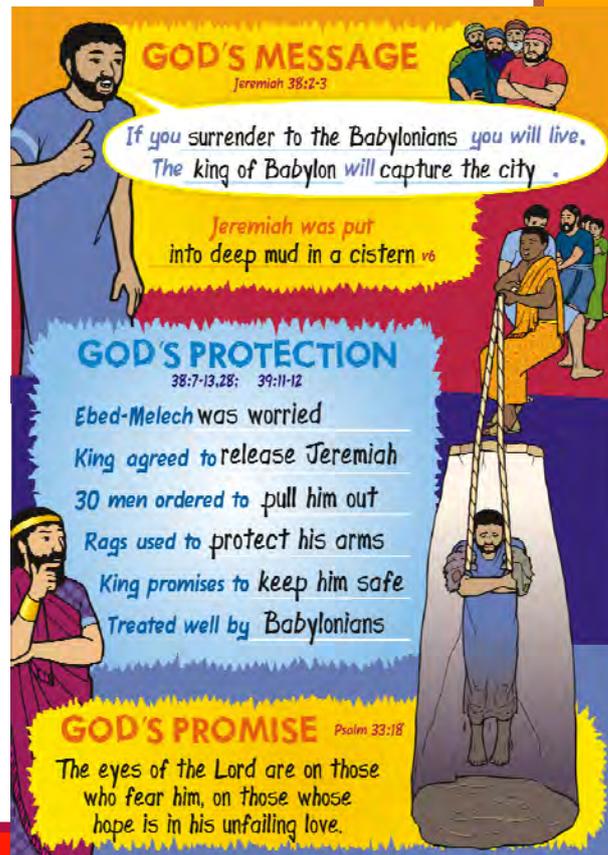
Find out what God told Jeremiah when he first called him. (1:5) It is the same for all who follow Jesus. *Read Matthew 28:20.* The VTL reminds us that God is always watching over his people. It's the best way to live, knowing that whatever difficulties come, he is with you, making you stronger all the time.

Response Activity: Ask the children to think carefully about where they stand and tell you privately next week. Are they Christians, do they oppose Christians or are they uncommitted but help Christians. ⑥

Lesson Summary

Under siege OR underground.

- **Arrested and imprisoned** (Jer 38:1-6) After delivering God's message, Jeremiah is put in a deep pit. Living for God can be very hard at times. Where do we go for help?
- **Imprisoned and rescued** (vv7-13a) Jeremiah is rescued from the pit. God never lets his people suffer more than they can bear. Who is always with us, no matter the circumstances?
- **Rescued but still in prison** (vv13b,28) Jeremiah is kept under guard. Obedience doesn't mean that God stops nasty things happening to us. We need to keep on trusting and obeying during these experiences.
- **Rescued but still protected** (vv14-27) Zedekiah is a weak king but God uses him to protect Jeremiah. Living for God can be tough but God watches over those who love him. VTL.



GOD'S MESSAGE

Jeremiah 38:2-3



If you _____

you will live.

The _____

will _____

Jeremiah was put

v6



GOD'S PROTECTION

38:7-13,28; 39:11-12

Ebed-Melech

King agreed to _____

30 men ordered to _____

Rags used to _____

King promises to _____

Treated well by _____

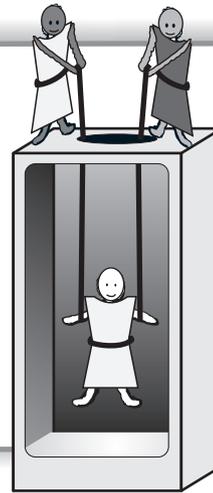


GOD'S PROMISE

Psalms 33:18

God's Word Rejected

- **Make** eye masks with the words of the *VTL* written around the eye holes.
- **Make** a personal list of tight corner situations with the repeated phrase When ... (x happens) ... trust God.
- **Act** the incident of Jeremiah being put into a pit, using a circle of chairs. Provide a rope and some old clothes to demonstrate how he was pulled out, but make sure the children help him out, rather than pull the ropes.



- **Dungeons** or pits made from bottles or boxes (ideally cube-shaped tissue boxes). Provide pipe cleaners for figures and wool and rags so the children can describe the incidents. Stick the *VTL* around the bottom of the bottle/box.