

## LESSON 11

May 16, 2021

### Unit III: Courageous Prophets of Change

#### The Consequences of Giving Challenging Advice

**DEVOTIONAL READING:** Jeremiah 38:7-13; 39:15-18

**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES:** Jeremiah 37–38

**PRINT PASSAGE:** Jeremiah 38:14-23

**Key Verse**—Jeremiah said unto Zedekiah, If I declare it unto thee, wilt thou not surely put me to death? and if I give thee counsel, wilt thou not hearken unto me? (Jeremiah 38:15, KJV)

.....

Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, “If I give you an answer, will you not kill me? Even if I did give you counsel, you would not listen to me.” (Jeremiah 38:15, NIV)

#### Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do these things:

- Identify Jeremiah’s hesitation to give controversial advice to Zedekiah.
- Sense Jeremiah’s apprehension when talking to Zedekiah.
- Commit to giving challenging godly advice.

#### KEY TERMS

**Babylonians (verse 19)**—Hebrew: *Kasdim* (kas-dah’-ee): inhabitants of a region of South Babylon (or Chaldea) who led the conquest and capture of Judah; “Chaldeans” (KJV).

**Counsel (verse 15)**—Hebrew: *yaats* (yaw-ats’): to advise.

#### PREPARING THE LESSON

- Refer to the *Townsend Press SS Commentary Teacher’s Edition* for an additional lesson plan—with word studies, insights on teaching adults, learner matrices, etc.
- Review last week’s student assignments (“Your Life” and Your World!”).
- Thoroughly review your student book for your adult or young adult class.
- Please note that you have the option of using your subscription bundle supplements, i.e., Lesson Scenario, Student Activity Sheet, SSL-AAG.

#### WHY THIS LESSON MATTERS

No one necessarily wants to be the bearer of bad news. How can we find courage to speak when what we have to say is likely to cause controversy or hard feelings? Jeremiah discussed his concerns with King Zedekiah and confidently delivered a message from God.

#### THE LESSON IN FOCUS

The Scriptures bear witness that God’s people rejected the prophets He sent to warn them of judgment and call them to repentance. Without exception, God’s prophets spoke boldly despite difficult and dangerous consequences. Even when the people rejected them and turned a deaf ear to their message, God’s prophets remained obedient to God’s instructions and true to their assignments. When Ezekiel lost his wife, God required that he not mourn her death to demonstrate God’s lack of pity for His rebellious people (see Ezekiel 24:15-27). Hosea was commanded to marry a prostitute to demonstrate God’s love for His wayward, idolatrous people (see Hosea 1:2). Because of his faithful commitment to prayer, Daniel was thrown into a den of lions and delivered by God (see Daniel 6:12). Jeremiah endured imprisonment and physical abuse at the hands of those

who rejected his message from the Lord. The prophets endured many personal sacrifices and moments of emotional stress as they boldly spoke God's Word to a rebellious people who no longer feared God. Yet, God's prophets refused to compromise or alter their message to please people or to save their own lives, often choosing personal punishment over spiritual compromise. Those with the courage to stand boldly on God's Word may be ridiculed, ostracized, or threatened with harm. Those with courage to stand for God without compromise share the brave company of the prophets, the apostles, and Jesus Christ, the one who willingly gave His life to fulfill the Word of God.

### **THE LESSON IN CONTEXT**

Jeremiah was called and commissioned to minister primarily to the Southern Kingdom of Judah during the reigns of Judah's last five kings, beginning with godly Josiah and ending with amoral and indecisive Zedekiah. Jeremiah was a priest and prophet who repeatedly appealed to his countrymen to repent and escape God's coming judgment. When Judah had firmly rejected Jeremiah's message and invasion was upon them, Jeremiah pleaded with Zedekiah to surrender to the Babylonians instead of resisting. God had told Jeremiah that surrender was the only way to prevent the total destruction of Jerusalem and to spare the king's family. The civil and religious leaders rejected the prophet's appeals for surrender and accused him of being a traitor. Jeremiah was imprisoned (see Jeremiah 37:1-16) and later put into a dry cistern (see Jeremiah 38:16) during the final days of the Babylonian siege. This week's lesson highlights the third time that Zedekiah called for Jeremiah, supposedly to receive God-directed counsel concerning Judah's plight.

### **OPENING INQUIRY (Choose from the items below.)**

1. How many times would you repeat the same message to someone who continues to ignore you, while still asking for your advice?
2. How do you explain Jeremiah's hesitation to counsel Zedekiah?
3. Did Zedekiah have an ulterior motive for summoning Jeremiah a third time?
4. How is God's grace illustrated in Jeremiah's final meeting with Zedekiah?

### **INSIGHTS**

Jeremiah's ministry as a prophet vividly illustrates that there are often serious consequences for boldly speaking God's Word. Conduct a personal reality check to determine your willingness to speak the truth at the risk of suffering negative consequences. Would you risk being imprisoned for speaking God's Word? Are you willing to offend friends or upset family relationships? Are our congregations willing to lose members? Are you committed enough to continue to serve or minister even when you have been misunderstood or mistreated for refusing to compromise God's Word? Jeremiah had a close relationship with God that strengthened him to complete his prophetic assignment. As you grow in your relationship with God, pray that God will give you deeper convictions and greater courage to speak and stand for truth despite the consequences.

### **EXPLORATION**

Unpack the content of this lesson by making it relevant to the lives of your students. We live at a time in which believers and unbelievers alike are more likely to do what feels good than to obey God. In this climate, believers who take an unpopular biblical stand often experience ridicule or negative consequences even within the church. Have the class to name some common practices in our culture that need to be challenged by the Word of God. Let the students suggest ways that believers can stand for God in the midst of a culture that often resists godly truth.

## ADDITIONAL EXPOSITORY INSIGHTS FOR THE TEACHER

### Commentary on Jeremiah 38:14-16

#### KJV

**14** Then Zedekiah the king sent, and took Jeremiah the prophet unto him into the third entry that is in the house of the LORD: and the king said unto Jeremiah, I will ask thee a thing; hide nothing from me.

**15** Then Jeremiah said unto Zedekiah, If I declare it unto thee, wilt thou not surely put me to death? and if I give thee *counsel*, wilt thou not hearken unto me?

**16** So Zedekiah the king sware secretly unto Jeremiah, saying, As the LORD liveth, that made us this soul, I will not put thee to death, neither will I give thee into the hand of these men that seek thy life.

#### NIV

**14** Then King Zedekiah sent for Jeremiah the prophet and had him brought to the third entrance to the temple of the LORD. "I am going to ask you something," the king said to Jeremiah. "Do not hide anything from me."

**15** Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, "If I give you an answer, will you not kill me? Even if I did give you *counsel*, you would not listen to me."

**16** But King Zedekiah swore this oath secretly to Jeremiah: "As surely as the LORD lives, who has given us breath, I will neither kill you nor hand you over to those who want to kill you."

The text appears to record Zedekiah's last meeting with Jeremiah before Jerusalem completely fell to the Babylonians. The king sent for the prophet and met with him in secret. Zedekiah told Jeremiah that he was going to ask him something and did not want him to hold anything back (verse 14). Based on his previous experiences with the king, Jeremiah raised two objections to Zedekiah's request (verse 15). First, if he gave the king a message he did not want to hear, there was no guarantee that Zedekiah would not order his death. Second, Jeremiah said any counsel he gave would be wasted because the king was not going to listen to him anyway. Zedekiah answered the first objection but not the second. He promised that he would not personally kill Jeremiah nor hand him over to those who were seeking his life (verse 16). Zedekiah made no promise to heed the message he requested. Jeremiah's response was reasonable and practical, based on his past experiences with King Zedekiah. Sometimes, fear is a reasonable response to reality rather than a lack of faith. Zedekiah had repeatedly ignored the word of the Lord that Jeremiah had delivered to him. Despite his history with the king, Jeremiah agreed to tell Zedekiah what the Lord had said in exchange for the king's promise to spare his life.

## DISCUSSION STARTERS

(Please review the appropriate student book's related biblical exposition section.)

- **Adult Question:**

What is the right and wrong way to handle rejection for speaking God's truth?

- **Young Adult Question:**

How do you handle situations in which people are making light of God's Word?

## Commentary on Jeremiah 38:17-18

### KJV

**17** Then said Jeremiah unto Zedekiah, Thus saith the LORD, the God of hosts, the God of Israel; If thou wilt assuredly go forth unto the king of Babylon's princes, then thy soul shall live, and this city shall not be burned with fire; and thou shalt live, and thine house:

**18** But if thou wilt not go forth to the king of Babylon's princes, then shall this city be given into the hand of the Chaldeans, and they shall burn it with fire, and thou shalt not escape out of their hand.

### NIV

**17** Then Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, "This is what the LORD God Almighty, the God of Israel, says: 'If you surrender to the officers of the king of Babylon, your life will be spared and this city will not be burned down; you and your family will live.

**18** "'But if you will not surrender to the officers of the king of Babylon, this city will be given into the hands of the Babylonians and they will burn it down; you yourself will not escape from them.'"

In desperation, Zedekiah asked Jeremiah for a word from God, likely hoping that a new question would bring a different answer. God's word for Zedekiah had not changed. God had given Zedekiah two choices. If he surrendered to the Babylonians, then his life would be spared, the city would not be burned, and his family would survive (verse 17). If Zedekiah refused to surrender, then the city would be burned down and he would be captured by the Babylonians (verse 18). Jeremiah did not compromise the word of the Lord and delivered it just as he had been instructed. Even at Zedekiah's word to spare his life, there was still the possibility of betrayal or of his inability to protect him. Despite these possibilities, Jeremiah stood on the word of God.

## DISCUSSION STARTERS

(Please review the appropriate student book's related biblical exposition section.)

- **Adult Question:**

In what ways do some Christians, preachers, teachers, and even some gospel songwriters water down or compromise God's Word?

- **Young Adult Question:**

How would you help a fellow Christian who seems determined to disregard God's Word concerning a serious matter when obedience could mean the difference between life and death?

## Commentary on Jeremiah 38:19-23

### KJV

**19** And Zedekiah the king said unto Jeremiah, I am afraid of the Jews that are fallen to the *Chaldeans*, lest they deliver me into their hand, and they mock me.

**20** But Jeremiah said, They shall not deliver thee. Obey, I beseech thee, the voice of the LORD, which I speak unto thee: so it shall be well unto thee, and thy soul shall live.

**21** But if thou refuse to go forth, this is the word that the LORD hath shewed me:

**22** And, behold, all the women that are left in the king of Judah's house shall be brought forth to the king of Babylon's princes, and those women shall say, Thy friends have set thee on, and have prevailed against thee: thy feet are sunk in the mire, and they are turned away back.

**23** So they shall bring out all thy wives and thy children to the Chaldeans: and thou shalt not escape out of their hand, but shalt be taken by the hand of the king of Babylon: and thou shalt cause this city to be burned with fire.

#### NIV

**19** King Zedekiah said to Jeremiah, “I am afraid of the Jews who have gone over to the *Babylonians*, for the Babylonians may hand me over to them and they will mistreat me.”

**20** “They will not hand you over,” Jeremiah replied. “Obey the LORD by doing what I tell you. Then it will go well with you, and your life will be spared.

**21** “But if you refuse to surrender, this is what the LORD has revealed to me:

**22** “All the women left in the palace of the king of Judah will be brought out to the officials of the king of Babylon. Those women will say to you: ‘They misled you and overcame you—those trusted friends of yours. Your feet are sunk in the mud; your friends have deserted you.’

**23** “All your wives and children will be brought out to the Babylonians. You yourself will not escape from their hands but will be captured by the king of Babylon; and this city will be burned down.”

In his folly, Zedekiah feared man more than God. He told Jeremiah that he feared the Jews who had defected to the Babylonians and that they would hand him over to those that opposed him (verse 19). Zedekiah did not have a relationship with God; therefore, he had no spiritual guidance. Leaders like him are a danger to themselves and to those they lead. Jeremiah tried to assure Zedekiah that his fear was unfounded. All he had to do was obey the Lord and things would go well for him (verse 20). God was giving Zedekiah one last chance to repent and literally save his physical life, but he refused it. Jeremiah warned that if he refused to surrender because of fear, then he would surely suffer the very ridicule and humiliation he was so desperately trying to avoid. The women of his palace (his royal harem) would ridicule him before the Babylonians for trusting the counsel of his advisers who had misled him while pretending to be his close friends (verses 21-22). He would also see his wives and children being led away, he would be captured, and the city would be burned down (verse 23). Zedekiah trusted his own instincts more than he trusted God and refused to submit to the word of God. In every decision, trusting God’s Word is the best option even if it involves an uncertain outcome. Obedience to God is always the best path through a difficult situation. Zedekiah received a clear, personal word from the Lord, but refused to obey it because he doubted God. Jeremiah obeyed the word of the Lord despite the consequences and reaped the benefits of being in God’s will.

#### DISCUSSION STARTERS

(Please review the appropriate student book’s related biblical exposition section.)

- **Adult Question:**

Why do you think Zedekiah refused to take Jeremiah’s counsel?

- **Young Adult Question:**

Zedekiah was curious enough to seek God’s counsel, but foolish enough to ignore it. Identify a time in your life when you ignored God’s counsel. What were the consequences?

#### LIFE APPLICATION

- **Refer to Adult Book**

(See student lesson’s “Your Life” section.)

—Every believer has the responsibility to speak God’s truth with love to those who seek advice and even to those who do not. A courageous commitment to truth involves accepting the possibility

of difficult consequences that result from personal convictions. Are you prepared and willing to suffer for boldly speaking the Word of God?

**(See student lesson's "Your World!" section.)**

—Many Christians imagine that the only people who need the Word are lost sinners. Within the church, there is still an urgent need for “Jeremiahs” who will challenge doctrinal error and take a stand against immorality and other sins. Does your church have courageous leaders who are willing to confront compromise and sin, even when others silently go along with it?

- **Refer to Young Adult Book**

**(See student lesson's "Your Life" section.)**

—You cannot change God's Word to make it unoffensive to people. Like Jeremiah, you must speak when God tells you to speak— boldly, clearly, and lovingly, even if the advice is unsolicited. Then be sure you practice what you preach!

**(See student lesson's "Your World!" section.)**

—Zedekiah lacked the humility and courage to take God at His word and act on Jeremiah's advice. When you feel conflicted about how to face a challenging situation, stand on whatever truth you know from God's Word, obey God, and leave the consequences to Him.

## **NEXT WEEK'S LESSON**

The lesson topic for Sunday, May 23, 2021, is “Take Responsibility!” The Devotional Reading is Psalm 147, the Background Scripture is Ezekiel 18, and the Printed Text is Ezekiel 18:1-9, 30-32.

## **CLOSING PRAYER**

Gracious God, thank You for those who boldly declare Your Word to us. Give us receptive, obedient hearts so that our lives will be blessed. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

## **HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**

**(May 17-23, 2021)**

### **Ezekiel: Street Preacher to the Exiles**

MONDAY, May 17	“Treat Each Other Fairly”	(Deuteronomy 24:14-18)
TUESDAY, May 18	“Taking Personal Responsibility”	(Jeremiah 31:27-30)
WEDNESDAY, May 19	“The Child Who Sins Suffers Punishment”	(Ezekiel 18:10-13)
THURSDAY, May 20	“The Righteous Child Is Rewarded”	(Ezekiel 18:14-18)
FRIDAY, May 21	“All Are Accountable for Their Sins”	(Ezekiel 18:19-24)
SATURDAY, May 22	“God Is Compassionate and Fair”	(Ezekiel 18:25-29)
SUNDAY, May 23	“Repent and Live Righteous Lives”	(Ezekiel 18:1-9, 30-32)