

THE RESCUE OF JEREMIAH FROM THE ATTEMPT ON HIS LIFE: A PICTURE OF COMPASSION JEREMIAH 38:01–13

Introduction

Critical situations — crises — arise throughout life. As we walk through life, all of us have to deal with crises such as war, assault, rape, robbery, bankruptcy, loss of job, failure in school, divorce, serious injury, earthquakes, hurricanes, tornadoes, devastating floods, mental and emotional illnesses, death and countless other critical situations. When serious trouble comes, we need a strong heart and mind, peace and comfort, decisiveness and courage, and the assurance and confidence that we can conquer the crisis. In such distressing times, there is one source to which we can turn and be assured of receiving help. This source is the Word of God. When we turn to it, the LORD quickens it to our hearts and gives us assurance that He will deliver us through the crisis.

The present Scripture tells the story of a king and people who rejected God's Word. It is the story of King Zedekiah and the people of Judah, who were facing the crisis of their lives, the utter destruction of their nation by the Babylonian war machine. But despite the impending disaster, both the king and the people refused to turn to the LORD. They rejected both Him and His holy commandments. Instead, they placed their trust in their own ability to handle the crisis. This is, *The Final Rejection of God's Word and the imprisonment of Jeremiah*, Jeremiah 37:1-38:28.

- I. The rejection of God's Word by the king and the people (vv. 37:1-10).
- II. The arrest and imprisonment of Jeremiah: a picture of persecution (vv. 37:11-21).
- III. The rescue of Jeremiah from the attempt on his life: a picture of compassion (vv. 38:1-13).
- IV. The king's secret and final meeting with Jeremiah: a picture of cowardice (vv. 38:14-28).

Jeremiah 38:01–13 The Rescue of Jeremiah from the Attempt on His Life: A Picture of Compassion

Jeremiah was rescued from an attempt to kill him. When he was transferred to the guardroom of the palace, he was given some freedom to meet with people. This is clear from an earlier passage (32:1-2, 6). As with any faithful servant of the LORD, Jeremiah used this opportunity to continue bearing strong witness for the LORD. But his pointing out the people's sins and God's coming judgment aroused strong opposition against him. The story of what happened to him reaches the height of suspense and drama.

1. Four high-ranking officials became extremely upset with Jeremiah for continuing to preach while he was a prisoner, and they demanded that he be put to death.
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Obviously, they hated him because he continued to point out their sins and to demand that they live righteously or else face God's judgment. Most likely these four officials represented a much larger group who were fed up with Jeremiah condemning them. However, Jeremiah was also encouraging the people to surrender to Babylon (v. 2c).

In the minds of the officials and those who supported them, Jeremiah's message was treason, a betrayal of his country. Moreover, Jeremiah was destroying the morale of the soldiers and people (v. 4). Instead of seeking to encourage them to defend themselves against the murderous Babylonians, it seemed as though Jeremiah was opposing the war effort. Consequently, Jeremiah should be put to death. Jeremiah's message may well have been treasonable if it were not for two facts.

First, Zedekiah and the people stood no chance whatsoever against the mighty army of Babylon. Utter defeat was inevitable and could happen at any moment. Second, the LORD himself had instructed Jeremiah to encourage the people to surrender to the Babylonians. Only by surrendering could they save Jerusalem and their own lives, for judgment was inevitable. The LORD Himself had sealed the fate of Jerusalem because of the people's sins (32:29-35).

If Jerusalem surrendered, Nebuchadnezzar would exile the leadership, but he would not destroy the city or slaughter the majority of the citizens. Of course, the officials who took the lead in opposing Jeremiah were among the leaders who would most likely be executed because of their own rebellion against Babylon. In light of these facts, the only sure way for the Jews to save their capital and their own lives was for them to surrender. Although Jeremiah was innocent of the charge of treason, King Zedekiah accepted the vicious charges against God's prophet. He was too spineless and fickle to stand against his officials. He issued the verdict of guilty and turned Jeremiah over to the four high-ranking officials who had brought the charges.

2. Wishing to silence Jeremiah forever, these four officials attempted to kill him. They lowered him by ropes into an empty cistern owned by the king's son Malkijah. Note that it was in the courtyard of the guard, the palace prison. Fortunately there was no water in the bottom of the cistern. But Jeremiah did begin to sink in the mud. From the description given, he sank deeply. He was being left to die a slow, agonizing death.
3. But God was far from being through with His dear servant, for He was working behind the scenes to have Jeremiah rescued (vv. 7-12). Another royal official, Ebed-Melech, an Ethiopian, heard about Jeremiah's plight. Courageously, he approached the king while he was sitting at the Benjamin Gate. Remember that the rulers and judges of that day heard the complaints and legal disputes of people at the major gates of the city. Ebed-Melech approached the king and fearlessly charged the four officials with a serious injustice. Informing the king that Jeremiah would soon starve to death in the cistern, he pleaded for the prophet's life (vv. 7-9).

The courage of his own royal official, Ebed-Melech, strengthened the king's backbone, and he ordered Jeremiah's immediate rescue (v. 10). He assigned thirty of the royal guard to help Ebed-Melech save Jeremiah. Taking the guards with him, Ebed-Melech hurried to a storage room and secured some worn-out clothes. He then rushed to the cistern and lowered the clothes to Jeremiah on a rope. After instructing the prophet to put the clothes under his arms as a pad to protect them from the ropes, he had the men pull Jeremiah out of the cistern. Jeremiah was rescued, but he remained a prisoner in the courtyard of the palace (vv. 11-13).

Thought 1. The lesson for us here is about compassion. As Ebed-Melech showed compassion for Jeremiah, so we must show compassion for those who are helpless and suffering. Society is full of people who need our help. There are...

- the orphans
- the widows
- the widowers
- the prisoners
- the broken-hearted
- the handicapped
- the suffering
- the hungry
- the thirsty the poor
- the empty souls
- the homeless
- the dying
- the bedridden
- the depressed
- the lonely
- the divorced
- the single parents
- the diseased

There is no end to the needs within every nation. We must be compassionate. We must reach out to embrace and meet the needs of the helpless and those suffering in our communities. Listen to what God's Holy Word says about compassion:

Mat 25:35-40 *For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'LORD, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'*

Luke 10:33-34 *But a Samaritan, as he travelled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him.*

Acts 20:35 *In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'*

Acts 28:2 *The islanders showed us unusual kindness. They built a fire and welcomed us all because it was raining and cold.*

Rom 12:20 *On the contrary: “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.”*

Rom 15:1 *We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.*

Gal 6:2 *Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ.*

Col 3:12 *Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.*

Heb 13:3 *Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.*

James 1:27 *Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.*

1 John 3:17-18 *If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.*

Isa 58:6-7 *“Is not this the kind of fasting [religion] I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter — when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?” ■*