

Lesson 16

A Brave Friend

Jeremiah 37:1–39:18

Memory Verse

“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you”
(John 15:12)

Teacher’s Objective

At the end of the session, the students should be able to:

Define the words *dungeon, city gates, and mire*

Locate Jerusalem on a map

Describe how Ebed-Melech trusted God to help him rescue Jeremiah

Express in their own words how they plan to please God by showing kindness to others

Materials Needed

See “Teaching Activities” for specific details

Read Psalm 69

Teacher’s Bible Study

The book of Jeremiah is the longest prophetic book in the Old Testament. Even though the book of Isaiah has more chapters, they are shorter than the chapters in the book of Jeremiah. It is important to note that the order of events and prophecies are not written in the order they occurred. Note the sequence:

1. Jeremiah’s prophecies and sermons about Judah (chapters 1–25).
2. Events in the life of Jeremiah (chapters 26–45).
3. Jeremiah’s prophecies about other countries (chapters 46–51).
4. The fall of Jerusalem and events that followed (chapter 52).

Besides writing about the consequences that would befall Jerusalem, Jeremiah did write about a New Covenant that God would make with His people (Jeremiah 31:31–34; Hebrews 8:7–13; 10:15–18).

The book was written by the prophet Jeremiah about the events in his life and in the history of Judah (the Southern Kingdom) between 625 and 580 B.C. Jeremiah was one of the greatest prophets and one of the most unpopular. He made people angry because he told them God was judging them for their idolatry and evil acts, and that a great power from the north would soon come and conquer them. He spent most of his time hiding from angry kings or spending time in prison.

Zedekiah was the last king of Judah. He was a weakling. The reoccupation of the Temple by the abominations which his good father had expelled were permitted. He was not only helpless in the hands of the group who defiled the Temple, he was also unable to stand up against the princes of the court.

The burden of Zedekiah’s sin, in the eyes of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, was not his inability to recognize truth amid babble and bad advice, nor the failure to heed to the true voice of prophecy, but rather the breaking of a solemn oath to the king of Babylon (Ezekiel 17:15; Jeremiah 27; II Kings 24:3–7).

This may have been a prayer given by Jeremiah when he was put into the dungeon. This same fate was seen by Joseph (Genesis 37:20–29). However, in Jeremiah’s case, it was a “broken cistern” (Jeremiah 2:13). What a horrible experience this must have been.

Presenting the Bible Story

Jeremiah 37:1–2

Jeremiah gives God's message to Zedekiah. Zedekiah was the last king of Judah. After King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon captured Jehoiachin, the previous king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar appointed Zedekiah to be king.

Jeremiah 37:3–10

Zedekiah was not a godly king. He did, however, ask Jeremiah to pray to the Lord for Jerusalem. Maybe Zedekiah thought he would be granted victory and the Babylonians would be forced out of Palestine. As we read, Zedekiah did not receive the answer he sought. The Egyptians who came to support Judah would be crushed by Babylon and forced to go home. Babylon would then return, capturing Jerusalem and burning it down.

Jeremiah 37:11–16

*City gates were openings
in the walls of the city
that were closed and
barred at night*

When the Babylonian army left the city to fight the Egyptians there was probably a period of calm. Jeremiah left the city and traveled to the "Gate of Benjamin." This was the north wall of the city. Jeremiah was accused of being a traitor and defecting to the Chaldeans. He was then thrown in a dungeon for a long time.

Jeremiah 37:17–21

It is interesting that Zedekiah took Jeremiah out of the dungeon in secret. Could this be a sign that the king was not in full control? Could it be because Jeremiah was not popular with the people of the city? Jeremiah used this opportunity to protest his innocence and asked that he not be sent back to the dungeon. Zedekiah granted his request.

Jeremiah 38:1–6

*The dungeon had
several feet of mire
(Mire is soggy mud)*

Now that Jeremiah was confined to the courtyard of the guard (37:21), he had some freedom and the opportunity to deliver God's message to any who would listen. Jeremiah's message is summarized in (chapter 38 and verses 2,3). Four high ranking officials heard Jeremiah's words and demanded that the king put him to death. Here is where we see the weakness of Zedekiah. First he told Jeremiah he would protect him (37:18–21) and now he gave him to those who wanted him to die. What was Zedekiah's lame excuse for such actions? "For the king can do nothing..."

Jeremiah 38:7–9

Jeremiah 38:10–13

Ebed-Melech was the only one of the king's officials that cared about Jeremiah. Ebed-Melech was an Ethiopian from upper-Egypt. He was an official in the royal palace.

Jeremiah 38:14–16

Thirty men went with Ebed-Melech probably because it would take that many to pull Jeremiah out of the dungeon, and for protection against any opposition.

Jeremiah 38:17–23

Jeremiah meets for the second time with Zedekiah. Zedekiah wanted to ask Jeremiah something. Jeremiah remembered how Zedekiah did not keep his word before; therefore, Jeremiah knew there were no guarantees that Zedekiah would do what he said. Zedekiah promised he would not kill Jeremiah or hand him over to those who would like to kill him. He did not promise to follow the advice of Jeremiah's message.

Jeremiah 38:24–28

Jeremiah gives the same message he gave before to Zedekiah. He then says, "Please obey the voice of the Lord...." King Zedekiah had a

Jeremiah 38:1–7

choice: obedience or disobedience. Just as we have a choice today. Will we obey God's voice or will we disobey and suffer the consequences?

Jeremiah 38:8–10

Zedekiah chose not to take Jeremiah's advice. He warned Jeremiah not to tell anyone what they spoke about. Instead, if he is questioned, he was to tell them that he was pleading with Zedekiah not to send him back to the dungeon. This was not a lie, as Jeremiah had made a request during his first meeting with Zedekiah (Jeremiah 37:20). Officials did hear about the meeting Jeremiah had with Zedekiah, and Jeremiah told them what Zedekiah told him to say. It was believed, as no one had heard the conversation.

Jeremiah 38:11–14

The doom of Jerusalem's destruction was ignored by the people of Jerusalem and by King Zedekiah. Jeremiah's vindication came when God brought to pass Jerusalem's destruction. Zedekiah and his ragtag group of soldiers were overtaken in the plains of Jericho. Zedekiah was forced to watch his sons and his nobles be put to death. Zedekiah then had his eyes put out and was bound and dragged back to Babylon to be humiliated. The shame that Zedekiah feared, he now would suffer because he did not heed the warning of God.

Jeremiah 38:15–18

The city of Jerusalem suffered as well. Just as Jeremiah warned. The Babylonians set fire to the city, broke down the walls and those still alive were taken as captives. The poor were left behind to tend the vineyards and pay taxes to the Babylonians.

Art and Activities

Jeremiah had been gathered with the other refugees. When he was identified, he was released. Nebuchadnezzar may have heard about Jeremiah through those who had defected to the Babylonians early on.

While Jeremiah waited for Jerusalem to fall, God gave him a message for Ebed-Melech. Because Ebed-Melech trusted God by helping Jeremiah, he would escape being executed. Ebed-Melech was brave and kind to Jeremiah, therefore God watched over him and kept him safe from his enemies.

Teaching Activities

Explore with your students the following questions:

Young children

Provide your students with the appropriate Activity Page.

Older children

Provide your students with the appropriate Activity Page.

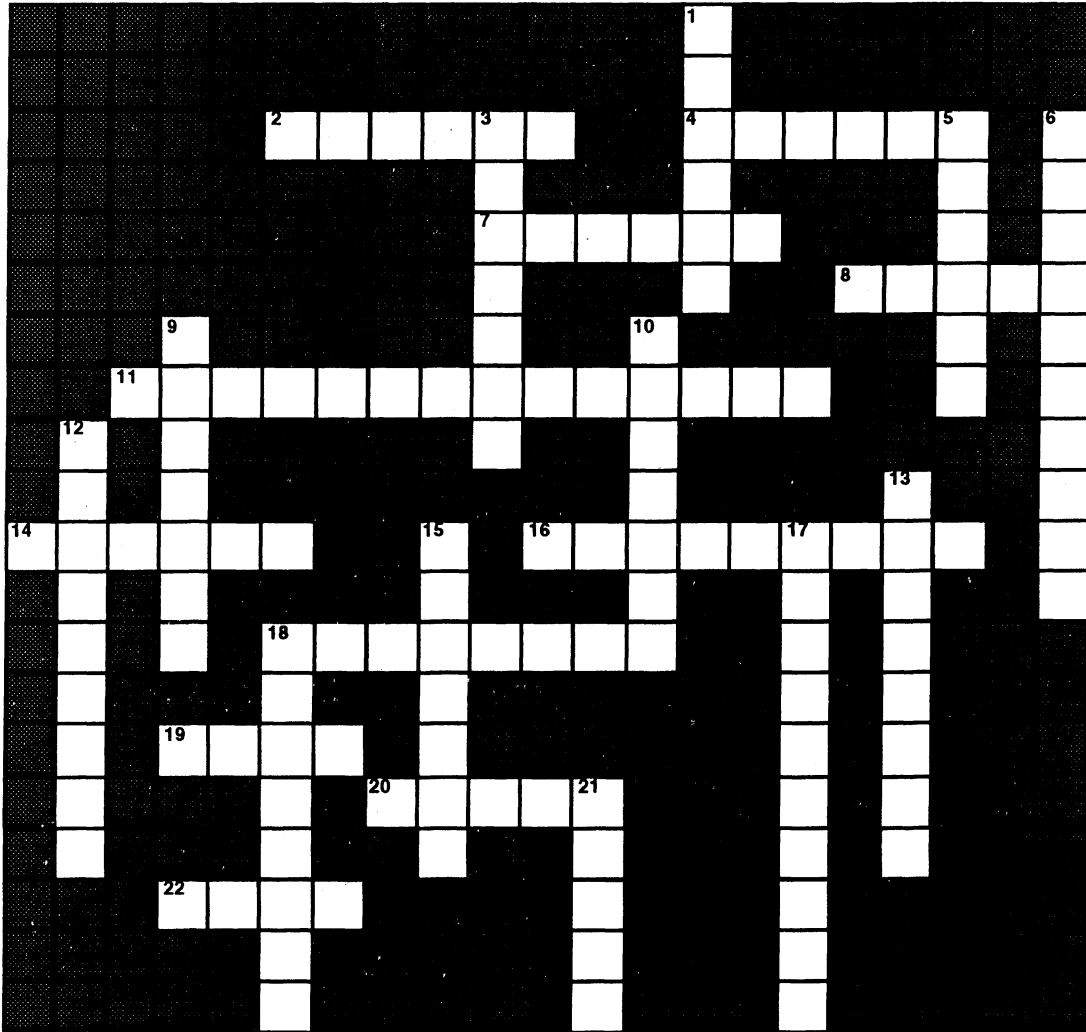
Explore the Subject

Always close your class with prayer

1. Do you think it was easy for Ebed-melech to go to King Zedekiah? Why or why not?
2. Why did Ebed-melech as that Jeremiah be released from the dungeon?
- 3..What have we learned by Ebed-melech's example of kindness?

Activity Page

A Brave Friend Jeremiah 37:1–39:18



Across:

2. To avoid punishment.
4. A professional copyist.
7. The captain of the ward, and son of Shelemiah (Jeremiah 37:13).
8. The residence of the sovereign.
11. "Then Jeremiah went forth out of Jerusalem to go into the ___ _ ___ (three words; Jeremiah 37:12).
14. Extreme scarcity of food and water.
16. To set free or liberate.
18. Jeremiah was cast into the prison in the house of _____ (See Jeremiah 37:15)
19. Mud.
20. A string of thin ropes woven together.
22. Tending to do great harm.

Down:

1. Father of King Zedekiah (See Jeremiah 37:1).
3. Preeminent class of people.
5. A castrated man.
6. Something regarded as harmful or destructive.
9. Material used to protect something from abrasion.
10. The chief city of ancient Mesopotamia.
12. Semitic people who seized Babylon from the Assyrians in the 7th century B.C.
13. King of Judah during the reign of Nebuchadrezzar.
15. A person who betrays another.
17. The Ethiopian eunuch who went to the king in order to rescue Jeremiah from the dungeon.
18. Major prophet of the 6th and 7th centuries B.C.
21. A cutting or thrusting weapon with a long blade.

Activity Page

A Brave Friend Jeremiah 37:1–39:18



- | | | | | | |
|-------------|------------|----------|----------------|-----------|--------|
| BABYLON | DISOBEY | EVIL | JERUSALEM | OFFICIALS | ROPES |
| BENJAMIN | DUNGEON | FIRE | JOSI | PRINCES | SECRET |
| BRAVE | EBEDMELECH | FRIEND | LOVE | PRISON | SIN |
| CHALDEANS | EGYPT | GATES | MESSAGE | PROPHET | TRUST |
| CISTERN | ETHIOPIAN | GUARD | MIRE | RAGS | |
| COMMANDMENT | EUNUCH | JEREMIAH | NEBUCHADNEZZAR | RELEASED | |

Activity Page

A Brave Friend Jeremiah 37:1–39:18

Jeremiah's friend, Ebed-Melech, rescues him from the dungeon. Color the picture.



Activity Page

Color page

May the Lord keep watch between
you and me when we are away
from each other.

Genesis 31:49

