

CORNERSTONECONNECTIONS
JULY27 2024

be swayed and besieged

Scripture Story: Jeremiah 37–39; 2 Chronicles 36.
Commentary: *Prophets and Kings* (or *Royalty and Ruin*), chapter 37.

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

This week's lesson exposes a major flaw in Zedekiah's leadership—inaction. His moral courage registered too low on the scale for leaders, and the result was horrendous damage to his family and his people. The options were simple: (1) submit to Babylon's rule and live in peace for 70 years, or (2) resist and evoke the force of Nebuchadnezzar's might. Zedekiah heard the word of the Lord through Jeremiah, but unconverted leaders and false prophets threatened him, and Zedekiah would listen to God only in private. Because Zedekiah could not act on his convictions, the great walls of Jerusalem fell, the glorious Temple of Jehovah was sacked and pillaged, and many were killed in the wake of senseless butchery.

As believers in God, there are times when our choices will have consequences, and those consequences are uncertain—even frightening. But far more dangerous is not making the right choice, thinking a better option will emerge. Ellen White states that while he had "no fixed purpose to do evil" he did not have the backbone "to stand boldly for the right" (*Prophets and Kings*, p. 457). If Zedekiah's life teaches us anything today it is that God's Word is to be trusted, even if it doesn't make us feel safe. Perhaps we will obey God only in the pivotal moments when we practice faithfulness in the ordinary, not-so-pivotal moments.

II. TARGET

The students will:

- Know that loyalty to God will at times be risky, but always right. *(Know)*
- Sense the peace that comes from exercising your faith in God. *(Feel)*
- Determine to live publicly our personal convictions about God. *(Respond)*

III. EXPLORE

Christ's Ministry in the Heavenly Sanctuary, Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs, No. 24

"There is a sanctuary in heaven, the true tabernacle that the Lord set up and not humans. In it Christ ministers on our behalf, making available to believers the benefits of His atoning sacrifice offered once for all on the cross. . . . It declares that those who have remained loyal to God shall receive the kingdom. The completion of this ministry of Christ will mark the close of human probation before the Second Advent. (Lev. 16; Num. 14:34; Ezek. 4:6; Dan. 7:9-27; 8:13, 14; 9:24-27; Heb. 1:3; 2:16, 17; 4:14-16; 8:1-5; 9:11-28; 10:19-22; Rev. 8:3-5; 11:19; 14:6, 7, 12; 20:12; 22:11, 12.)"

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Refer the students to the What Do You Think? *section of their lesson. After they have completed it,*

discuss their responses.

Invite the students to share their responses to the activity on who has influence on your life. You might comment, "Everyone is influenced to a certain degree by all these options (parents, friends, public opinion), but their level of influence is different."

Illustration

Share this illustration in your own words:

In class at a public university Jamie writhed in his seat as the philosophy professor mocked Christian faith with snide remarks such as "C'mon, people! Any thinking person can see that faith in God is a crutch created by humans who must believe that someone is in control." He would stare at the class waiting for a response. Some would nod in agreement. Others stared in disbelief. Still others never made eye contact and simply took notes hoping not to be called on to respond. The professor would throw down controversial statements like gauntlets, daring anyone to take him on. The sassy teacher's diatribes went almost uncontested until Jamie took the challenge, choked down his fear, and spoke up. "Professor, I disagree. In fact, I believe in God, not because I have to but because everything I have experienced gives evidence that God is real." The teacher had not expected anyone to respond so confidently. Many in the class noticed as well and eagerly waited for the conversation to escalate into an all-out argument. The teacher tried to discredit Jamie intellectually and even intimidate him with questions about proof. Nevertheless, the more cynical the professor became the more the class began to show curious support for Jamie. The teacher moved quickly to change the subject, getting in the last word.

But Jamie's words struck a chord in a few classmates. As they left the building they expressed their appreciation for the way he stood up to the teacher. They were believers as well, and were equally uncomfortable with their own inability to respond.

During the next few weeks many students gained the moral courage to share their convictions in class. This surprised the professor so much that he noticeably toned down his bitter rhetoric.

When in your life have you witnessed someone boldly take a stand for God, not knowing how others would respond? When have you ever had to make your loyalty to God clear to others?

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

In every age the opportunity comes to believers to take a stand and boldly remind the world that God's Word is real, right, and true. Whether it's speaking up for God in a class or bravely obeying God's Word when others are sure to laugh and ridicule you, there is a time to stand. Most of the time it's risky and even frightening. Read the story about how Zedekiah heard the word of God from Jeremiah to submit to Babylon's rule and not trust the Egyptians to save them. But popular opinions froze him in fear, and the people paid the price.

Out of the Story for Teachers

After you read the Into the Story *section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.*

- This week's passage from 2 Chronicles 36 is a summary of the events of Jeremiah 37, 38, and 39. Read through these chapters to get specific insights into the story.
- In what way was Zedekiah stiff-necked and hard-hearted?
- In what way does Zedekiah's age factor into his struggle as a king? What are the advantages and disadvantages of being a young leader?

This story is a classic example of how the stubbornness of leaders can cause horrific pain and tragedy for many.

Some might think the destruction of Jerusalem was harsh. Read Jeremiah 38:14-24 and compare the exchange between Jeremiah and Zedekiah to the summary in 2 Chronicles. How does a person become so careful of public opinion, even when the threat of death and shame is near?

- What do you think it means when the Bible says, "The land enjoyed its sabbath rests" (2 Chronicles 36:21, NIV)?
- How would you summarize the key message in this story?
- What lessons does this story reveal about leadership? What are some keys to successful Christian leadership? How does the story of Zedekiah illustrate that God can use us to

Tips for Top-Notch Teaching

RABBI 101

Building Bridges

People think and learn through stories because so much information can be transferred through human experiences. If a picture is worth a thousand words, then stories can convey a bounty of truths. One teaching method that can help engage students in learning is to have them connect a story in the Bible to other stories in Scripture. This week's lesson was on Zedekiah's inability to stand, and the results were disastrous. "What other stories in Scripture does this event remind you of, and why?" is a good question to try. Furthermore, try to get the students to connect the biblical stories to their own experiences in life by inquiring, "When have you faced the challenge of keeping quiet or speaking up for God?" The more we get students to bridge their world to the lives of people in the Bible, the more God's Word becomes real and relevant to them.

fulfill His purposes only if we are willing to cooperate with Him?

Use the following as more teachable passages that relate to today's story: Daniel 3; Luke 5:1-6; Acts 4; Matthew 25:14-30.

Sharing Context and Background

Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.

This week's lesson is focused on the actions and inaction of the last king of Judah, Zedekiah, and his interaction with the prophet Jeremiah. Jeremiah embraced the call of prophet as a young man (Jeremiah 1:6, 7) and served from about 627 B.C. to 560 B.C. Zedekiah reigned from about 597 to 586 B.C. where he witnessed the final collapse of God's people as they were taken into captivity. The overall context of this story has to do with God preparing His people for His judgment. God's purpose was to use Babylon as a tool to bring discipline to Judah, but God did not chastise His people without offering them grace to be restored. In fact, God clearly mapped the season of renewal, if they should respond with humility and surrender (Jeremiah 3:14-17; 23:5; 31:31; 33:16). By 586 B.C., the tragic refusal to hear God's counsel came to fruition as Zedekiah succumbed to the urging of false prophets and was violently defeated and broken.

The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary describes the nature of Zedekiah's role in this time of discipline:

"Zedekiah was a puppet king of the Babylonians, yet at the same time a legitimate heir to the throne. He was no doubt required to take an oath of allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar, but within a few years violated that oath by entering into an alliance with

Teaching From . . .

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

- **Key Text**
  Invite the students to share the key text with the class if they have committed it to memory.
- **Flashlight**
  Read the Flashlight *statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week's story found in the book* Prophets and Kings. *Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from* Out of the Story.
- **Punch Lines**
  Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week's story. Have them share the verse that speaks most directly to them and allow them to explain why they chose it.
- **Further Insight**
  Ask them how the quote in Further Insight *conveys the point of the story in this lesson.*

various neighbor nations against Babylon" (vol. 4, p. 484). Zedekiah seemingly responded to Jeremiah as though he were a true prophet from God as seen in his repeated attempts to seek the man of God out and be advised (37:3, 4; 38:14-16).

The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary comments further about Zedekiah: "It would appear that Zedekiah's decisions reflect vacillation more than they do outright doubt or unbelief." Perhaps this quality represents the deeper, more pervasive problem of trying to find our own way to salvation and security instead of trust in God's. Stubbornness always leads to suffering and humility to wholeness. King Zedekiah had the opportunity to obey God and do the right thing, but buckled under the pressure.

Here is what happened to Zedekiah as described in Jeremiah 39:

- 39:1 Nebuchadnezzar besieges the city.
- 39:2 The walls of Jerusalem are pulled down.
- 39:5 Zedekiah tries to run but is caught and sentenced.
- 39:6 Zedekiah's sons and the nobles are killed in front of him.
- 39:7 Zedekiah's eyes are removed.
- 39:15-18 The word of the Lord comes to Jeremiah announcing that God has brought disaster instead of prosperity, as the king and the people have chosen. However, Jeremiah and those who were faithful were spared and given help, "because you trust in me, declares the LORD" (39:18, NIV).

III. CLOSING

Activity

Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

Invite students to make a list of scenarios in which they wish someone would be brave enough to stand up for what is right. Prompt their lists with this question: I WISH SOMEONE WOULD STAND UP AND DO SOMETHING WHEN . . .

Have them make these lists in pairs or groups of three and read their lists out loud to the class. You may notice some powerful convictions the students have about what is right and what is needed. Invite them to be the kind of people who will stand and remind them that, like Jeremiah, they can trust in the Lord.

Summary

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

Zedekiah was not bent on evil; in fact, he kept reaching out to Jeremiah for insight. He knew what was right and believed he should do it, but not enough to do it. Our world is looking for leadership—people who have a clear sense of right and wrong, of what is true and what is false. And even though some are cynical, the hearts of people are watching and searching for guidance from God. There are many who live their lives with regrets, not about what they did, but about what they did not do. How do you want to live your life as a believer in God? There is the Zedekiah way: Play it safe. Hope for an easy way. Don't take the risks of being hated or misunderstood. Perhaps you can see the determined look on the faces of Bible heroes who stood in the face of adversity and declared their loyalty to God. Noah. Moses. Elijah. Daniel. Esther. John the Baptist. Paul. The list goes on of people who were faithful. Where is the list of those who remained silent? How about you? Will you be swayed and besieged by inaction, or will you stand and be counted faithful to God?



Remind the students about the reading plan that will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages Series. The reading that goes with this lesson is *Prophets and Kings* (or *Royalty and Ruin*), chapter 37.

*A special adaptation of *Prophets and Kings* has been created by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press® Publishing Association. Get more info about it at www.cornerstoneconnections.net.

CORNERSTONECONNECTIONS
JULY27 2024

STUDENT LESSON

Scripture Story: Jeremiah 37–39; 2 Chronicles 36.
Commentary: *Prophets and Kings* (or *Royalty and Ruin*), chapter 37.

be swayed and besieged



Photo by Colleen Cahill

keytext

"The LORD, the God of their ancestors, sent word to them through his messengers again and again, because he had pity on his people and on his dwelling place. But they mocked God's messengers, despised his words and scoffed at his prophets until the wrath of the LORD was aroused against his people and there was no remedy."

(2 Chronicles 36:15, 16, NIV)

flashlight

"With tears Jeremiah entreated Zedekiah to save himself and his people. With anguish of spirit he assured him that unless he should heed the counsel of God, he could not escape with his life, and all his possessions would fall to the Babylonians. . . . He sacrificed the noble freedom of his manhood and became a cringing slave to public opinion. With no fixed purpose to do evil, he was also without resolution to stand boldly for the right. Convicted though he was of the value of the counsel given by Jeremiah, he had not the moral stamina to obey; and as a consequence he advanced steadily in the wrong direction" (*Prophets and Kings*, p. 457).

what do you think?

To what degree are you swayed by the following influences:

Friends

Almost never Almost always

1 2 3 4 5

Parents and family

Almost never Almost always

1 2 3 4 5

The popular masses

Almost never Almost always

1 2 3 4 5

Which of the above have the most influence in your life? Why?

did you know?

The Hebrew word for "falter" means to limp around. Someone who limps or falters is *almost* walking correctly. One leg works; the other doesn't. One step is sure; the other stumbles. What does it mean to stumble in a spiritual sense? When you allow distractions and ungodly influences to deter you from faithfulness to God, it is easy to falter and stumble in your walk with Him.

To walk with God means much more than merely knowing about Him. Walking with God requires commitment to a relationship with Him that will result in knowing Him personally. A walk with God will help you live in obedience to His teachings and apply in practice the principles of His kingdom. The Word of God calls each of us to walk with the Lord: "That you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory" (1 Thessalonians 2:12, NKJV).

"As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving" (Colossians 2:6, 7, NKJV).

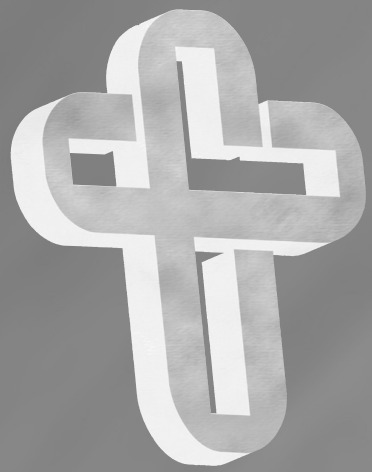
INTO THE STORY

"Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem eleven years. He did evil in the eyes of the LORD his God and did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet, who spoke the word of the LORD. He also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him take an oath in God's name. He became stiff-necked and hardened his heart and would not turn to the LORD, the God of Israel. Furthermore, all the leaders of the priests and the people became more and more unfaithful, following all the detestable practices of the nations and defiling the temple of the LORD, which he had consecrated in Jerusalem.

The LORD, the God of their ancestors, sent word to them through his messengers again and again, because he had pity on his people and on his dwelling place. But they mocked God's messengers, despised his words and scoffed at his prophets until the wrath of the LORD was aroused against his people and there was no remedy. He brought up against them the king of the Babylonians, who killed their young men with the sword in the sanctuary, and did not spare young men or young women, the elderly or the infirm. God gave them all into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar. He carried to Babylon all the articles from the temple of God, both large and small, and the treasures of the LORD's temple and the treasures of the king and his officials. They set fire to God's temple and broke down the wall of Jerusalem; they burned all the palaces and destroyed everything of value there.

"He carried into exile to Babylon the remnant, who escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and his successors until the kingdom of Persia came to power. The land enjoyed its sabbath rests; all the time of its desolation it rested, until the seventy years were completed in fulfillment of the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah."

(2 Chronicles 36:11-21, NIV)



OUT OF THE STORY

This week's passage from 2 Chronicles 36 is a summary of the events of Jeremiah 37, 38, and 39. Read through these chapters to get specific insights into the story.

In what way was Zedekiah stiff-necked and hard-hearted?

_____

_____

In what way does Zedekiah's age factor into his struggle as a king? What are the advantages and disadvantages of being a young leader?

_____

_____

This story is a classic example of how the stubbornness of leaders can cause horrific pain and tragedy for many. Some might think the destruction of Jerusalem was harsh. Read Jeremiah 38:14-24 and compare the exchange between Jeremiah and Zedekiah to this summary in 2 Chronicles. How does a person become so careful of public opinion, even when the threat of death and shame is near?

_____

_____

_____

What do you think it means when the Bible says: "The land enjoyed its sabbath rests" (2 Chronicles 36:21, NIV)?

_____

_____

How would you summarize the key message in this story?

_____

_____

What lessons does this story reveal about leadership? What are some keys to successful Christian leadership? How does the story of Zedekiah illustrate that God can use us to fulfill His purposes only if we are willing to cooperate with Him?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

punch lines

"Let the one who is wise heed these things and ponder the loving deeds of the LORD" **(Psalm 107:43, NIV).**

"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will" **(Romans 12:2, NIV).**

"It is better to heed the rebuke of a wise person than to listen to the song of fools" **(Ecclesiastes 7:5, NIV).**

"But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. 'Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened' " **(1 Peter 3:14, NIV).**

"They would not be like their ancestors—a stubborn and rebellious generation, whose hearts were not loyal to God, whose spirits were not faithful to him" **(Psalm 78:8, NIV).**

"Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed" **(John 3:20, NIV).**

further insight

"If we would develop a character which God can accept, we must form correct habits in our religious life. Daily prayer is as essential to growth in grace, and even to spiritual life itself, as is temporal food to physical well-being. We should accustom ourselves to lift the thoughts often to God in prayer. . . . We cannot for one moment separate ourselves from Christ with safety."—Ellen G. White, *The Sanctified Life*, p. 93

Sabbath

Read Romans 12:2.

As you respond to the exercise in the *What Do You Think?* section of this week's lesson, who (parents, friends, masses) do you think has an unhealthy level of influence in your life? Rewrite today's Bible verse in your own words. Try not to use any of the major words contained in the verse.

Sunday

Read Jeremiah 37–39.

Read this week's story from Scripture and answer the questions given in the *Out of the Story* section. But first, take a few moments to read today's reading from the Bible for a more detailed sample of the drama between the prophet, false prophets, and King Zedekiah. Why do you think this story is in the Bible? What does it tell us about people? What does it say about God?

Monday

Read 2 Chronicles 36:15, 16.

Read the *Key Text* found for this week's lesson. What does this story tell you about God's long-suffering patience? Perhaps you know of people whose hearts have hardened so much that they resist any prompting from God, friends, or strangers. Take time to pray for such people today.

Tuesday

Read Colossians 2:6, 7.

This week's *Flashlight* quote truly captures the problem for Zedekiah, and for believers in every age. Notice the sentence "With no fixed purpose to do evil, he was also without resolution to stand boldly for the right." Consider the brief word study in the *Did You Know?* section, and reflect on the times in your life when you took a stand for God that was risky? How did you feel? Compare that experience with times you chose not to do anything.

Wednesday

Read the *Punch Lines* for this week and rank them 1-5 as if you were using them for a Bible study with someone who was struggling to take a stand for God. Maybe you know someone who is wavering between making a decision or *not* making a decision. How would you organize these verses to help them respond? What other verses might you include?

Thursday

Read Jeremiah 29:11.

Write down what it means to you that God has good plans for your life. How much do you believe these words? What evidence could you give from your own experience that demonstrates your convictions?

Friday

Read Psalm 103:8.

Reflect today on the patience of God throughout history—not only with biblical characters, but with you. As you ruminate on the great moments of grace, say a prayer of thanksgiving to God for pursuing you relentlessly.

Dear God,
Thank you for _____

Amen.

this week's reading*

Prophets and Kings (or *Royalty and Ruin*), chapter 37.

**Royalty and Ruin* is a special adaptation of *Prophets and Kings*, created for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press®. Get more information about it at http://www.cornerstoneconnections.net/article/191/about-us/conflict-of-the-ages-companion-books#.URlhF1rBO9s. By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.