LESSON 4

CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS
JULY 27 2024

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

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).

key text

"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)

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?

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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?

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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?

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

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How would you summarize the key message in this story?

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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?

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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.