



# CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS

JULY 25 2020

## 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. 458). 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

- Friendship
- Results of sin
- Consequences of evil doing
- The judgment

### 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 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.



## Tips for Top-Notch Teaching

### 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.

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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 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.

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

## 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.*

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 the Pacific Press Publishing Association. Get more info about it at [www.cornerstoneconnections.net](http://www.cornerstoneconnections.net).