

8730U

GLENLOCK BIBLE CAMP - 2002

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JEREMIAH

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Study #7: Ebed-melech, the value of true friendship
Exhortation

Reading: Jeremiah 37, 21, and 38:1-20

Brother chairman and my dear brethren and sisters in the patient waiting for Christ.

Jeremiah is a preeminent example of the words that James spoke when he said, 'Take my brethren the prophets who have spoken unto you in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction and of patience; lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds'. The life we've seen of Jeremiah and the remnant through this week, tremendous examples of suffering affliction and of patience. As Jeremiah had to labour for over 40 years to bring to people the words of God, as we saw the afflictions and the sufferings, the scourgings and the imprisonments that he was to go through, we get some idea of how much those prophets suffered.

Jeremiah was a remarkable type of the Lord Jesus Christ. I would suggest to you, second only to Joseph in his accuracy of alignment with the Lord Jesus Christ, was this great prophet, Jeremiah. Today, b&s, we're going to see how closely his sufferings were to mirror what the Lord Jesus Christ would go through. But we're also going to see this morning, a very great man, who comes out of obscurity, who rises to the occasion, a tremendously loyal and faithful friend, Ebed-melech.

Ebed-melech, b&s, is a prime example of loyalty in a time of danger and crisis, and that is a rare and precious thing in the eyes of God. Let's just set the setting for the times in which Ebed-melech comes to the fore: we're now down to the last 12 months of the throne of David. We're down to the end of the reign of Zedekiah, the third son of Josiah to sit upon the throne; he's been there for 11 years; Jerusalem is under siege, there's a tremendous famine in the city and after nearly 40 years from when Jeremiah began to speak the words of God, now his words are coming to pass with amazing accuracy. God's word is hasting to its conclusion like the almond rod that budded in chapter 1. Jeremiah is now faced with a king on the throne, I know he's a son of Josiah, but this one is different to the rest!

I'd like you to come to Ezekiel 12, you see, there's already been 2 captivities, carried off to Babylon; and Ezekiel was taken away in one of those captivities and now from the distance of Babylon, he looks back on the scene in Jerusalem. Through inspiration and

visions of God, he's given a demonstration of how God views the city of Jerusalem. Ezekiel was given this vision that he might speak to the rebellious Jews who were in Babylon already; that he might tell them it's useless thinking and putting their confidence in Zedekiah. You see, many of those Jews that went to Babylon, believed the false prophets who said, 'within 2 years you're going to come back'; so they were still trusting in the throne of David. So Ezekiel was told to speak to the rebellious house, verse 2, 'son of man, you live in the midst of a rebellious crowd, many of those in Babylon still haven't learnt, so you give them these words, Ezekiel, about **the king**. Now this prophecy in Ezekiel 12, in verse 10 we're told, 'This is the burden concerning the prince in Jerusalem. You see, many of those in captivity were thinking at least we've still got a king on the throne, he's still of the line of David; God will never wipe out the throne of David. They hadn't accepted that even though they were in Babylon, so you, Ezekiel, tell them what I think of the prince in Babylon. So this is the object of Ezekiel 12, now this prophecy was given for 2 reasons: one was to outline the terrible character of this covenant-breaking king, but also to tell them that no matter what Zedekiah thought he would get away with; he thought he would escape the Babylonians. You see, what Zedekiah had done was, he had made a tunnel under the wall, with the object that when the city finally fell, he would escape across to the land of Ammon and Moab. He had an escape plan ready, that when night fell, he would go under the wall with his personal companions and they would get away and go to the king of Ammon. That was the plan that Zedekiah had, and Ezekiel was given knowledge of that ahead of time, that in the evening in the **twilight**, this prince would try and escape under the wall.

Now, Ezekiel wants to portray this! Ezekiel was a man of sign! he had to live it out to those in Babylon, as to what their prince in Jerusalem was going to do. But I want you to just notice (if you've got your coloured pencil there), verse 4, 'Ezekiel was to take all his stuff (and that was the problem of Zedekiah when he finally did try this escape, he tried to take too much stuff with him), 'But Ezekiel, load up all your stuff and go forth at even in verse 4; Dig through the wall in their sight and carry out' (so you're going to portray what the prince in Jerusalem is going to do). Verse 6, again the word, 'carry it forth in the twilight'; Verse 7, 'In the even I digged through the wall and I brought it forth in the twilight' (so again, we're getting a theme going through here). God tells us what the meaning of this is in verse 10 and verse 11, it's concerning the prince in Jerusalem which is Zedekiah, and the house of Israel among them, 'Say I am your sign; like as I have done, so shall it be done unto them; they shall remove and go into captivity and the prince (here it is, here's the divine title that God puts upon Zedekiah) 'The prince that is among them shall bear upon his shoulder, in the twilight' (and you might say what God calls this man is **the twilight prince**, #1. because he would try and get away under the wall in the twilight, but more importantly, b&s, because that was what he was, he was a **twilight prince**). He was neither in the light nor in the dark, in a sense, he was better than Jehoiakim; Jehoiakim's attitude towards the bible was, 'give it here, and let me burn it!' Zedekiah was better than that, he always wanted to know what the word of God was; but he had no intention of doing it! He thought he was smarter than God. You know, God said through Jeremiah, time and time again, 'the city is going to fall, and you will be taken captive; but if you go out and surrender, Zedekiah, then you will be spared,

and your family will be spared. If only you'll surrender in obedience to the words of God! But he couldn't do that, he was so frightened that people laughed at him; that he declined to obey the words of Jeremiah and you know, the bible says that time and time again, you'll find it in Chronicles and Kings, you'll find it here in Ezekiel, because he would not obey the words of Jeremiah, a terrible fate came upon him; and the bible calls him 'the twilight prince', wanting to know what the light is but continuing to walk in darkness. That was the character of Zedekiah, a weak, vacillating character was this man!

Now you come back to Jeremiah 37 and see this in action. You know, there are three separate occasions that a delegation is sent from the king to Jeremiah to say, 'what is the word of Yahweh?' and not on one occasion does he respond to any of them; but he wants to know, he's a twilight prince and that's the bible's nomination of this man. Chapter 37 verse 1, 'King Zedekiah the son of Josiah reigned in stead of Jehoiachin the son of Jehoiakim, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon made king in the land of Judah'. Verse 2, 'But neither he, nor his servants, nor the people of the Land, did hearken unto the words of Yahweh, which he spake by Jeremiah the prophet'. You'll find that that is said again and again of Zedekiah, the profane wicked prince of Israel, he heard the words **but he would not do them!** Then in verse 3, we find that a delegation is sent to Jeremiah, he sent Jehucal the son of Shelemiah (now I want you to notice the name 'Shelemiah' comes up in verse 3, 13 and in chapter 38 verse 1), and you might say, 'well, so what? who was Shelemiah? Now Shelemiah is not the least bit important, what is important is as chapter 37 verse 13 tells us, Shelemiah was the son of Hananiah the false prophet, and we'll say a bit more about him later on. But you see, that was the connection, there is all the way through these chapters, the involvement of the enemies of Jeremiah, the sons and grandsons of Hananiah the false prophet and the sons of Pashur are all here persecuting Jeremiah. But a delegation comes, Jehucal the son of Shelemiah, (so he's the grandson of Hananiah the false prophet) and look who they send with him! Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah, that's Jeremiah's own **cousin**. So there's a high powered delegation sent from the king to Jeremiah.

Look what they ask in verse 3, 'Pray unto Yahweh our God for us!' You see, the Babylonians had this city besieged, food was running out, they were eating their own children we're told. 'Pray unto God for us'; Jeremiah couldn't do that, God had specifically told him, 'Jeremiah, don't even pray for this people'. Then between verse 4 and verse 5, the king decided that one of the reasons that they were in this terrible condition was that they had not obeyed the law of release of their slaves. Now we might just put chapter 34 alongside verse 4 and 5 because what they decided to do was that if they were to release their slaves that they had not released in the year of release, something had been neglected. They said, 'well, let's just do that and see if that makes any difference. And it did! They released their slaves and all of a sudden, the king of Egypt comes sallying forth from Egypt and the Babylonians who were not prepared for a battle against Egypt, retreated, and the siege was lifted and everybody thought that was great. You know, 'God's blessed us', 'He's removed the Babylonians', now where are those slaves? Let's go get them and put them under service again! So they broke their

covenant with the slaves, and **God's watching this!**

But for the time being, the siege is relief, verse 6, the army of Pharaoh came up and they departed; the Babylonians left Jerusalem alone. God says to Jeremiah, 'Jeremiah, you go and tell them, verse 7, the one that sent you to inquire of Me, behold, Pharaoh's army which is come forth to help you, shall return to Egypt their own land. The Chaldeans will come back and fight against the city and take it and burn it with fire'. Don't deceive yourselves in verse 9, then in verse 10, God says, 'I don't care if it's only the wounded of the Babylonian army here, they will destroy this city!' So everybody was warned; don't think that the Babylonians won't come back, **they will come back.**

Well, we get down to verse 11; Jeremiah's had enough, Jeremiah says, 'no one's listening, and because there's no siege, I'm getting out of here, I'm going off to my inheritance'. You see in the verse it says, 'It came to pass, when the army of the Chaldeans was broken up for fear of Pharaoh's army, Jeremiah went forth to go to the land of Benjamin, to get away from the people'. You imagine what it would be like in that siege, everybody sick of each other, tensions, fights over food; Jeremiah's had enough, he says, I'm out of here! I'm going to go and have a look at my block of land that I bought while I was in prison'. He's going to separate himself from the people. So he goes out through the gate of Benjamin, verse 13, but he doesn't get very far! 'When he was in the gate of Benjamin, a captain of the ward was there, whose name was Irijah, the son of Shelemiah, the son of Hananiah', and the bible leaves us in no doubt, telling us why Irijah decides to accost Jeremiah.

He was a grandson of Hananiah the prophet; now you can check the record of Hananiah in chapter 28. Let me just give you a summary of what had happened between Hananiah and Jeremiah. After the first captivity or the captivity of Jehoiachin had gone away, Jeremiah got up and said, 'they will be gone 70 years; don't mourn for them and he wrote a letter to Babylon saying, pray for the peace of Babylon, because you're going to be there 70 years'. Hananiah then, got up and said, 'don't listen to Jeremiah; I tell you by the word of God that they'll come back in 2 years; all of those that went in the first captivity and the second captivity, in 2 years they will be back here'. So the people thought, 'well, that sounds better, we'd much rather listen to Hananiah', and a public argument broke out between Jeremiah and Hananiah about whether or not the captives would come back; in the end Jeremiah had to say to the people, 'well, I'll give you some evidence; if that man's alive by the end of the year, then God hasn't spoken by me!' Guess what? in 3 months Hananiah was dead. Now you'd think that people would say to themselves, 'well, Jeremiah is certainly the prophet of God, we should listen to Jeremiah!' But no, b&s, all they did was to store up their resentment, that Jeremiah had put to death one of their family; they were waiting for him and here they were!

Grandson of Hananiah, 5 years later, is waiting in the gate of Benjamin, and he took Jeremiah and he said, 'I know where you're going, you're going to run off and join the Chaldeans; you're the one that's always preaching that we should surrender to the

Chaldeans, you're a spy!' Jeremiah's protests were ignored in verse 14. 'It's false, I don't go to the Chaldeans'. 'Not interested, Jeremiah, you come with me, and he took Jeremiah and brought him to the princes'. You can imagine the gentleness that would have been shown to Jeremiah as he was dragged off to the princes.

Now who were the princes? Well, this was the war cabinet, these were those important people left in the city, who had the responsibility for the defence and for the morale of the army. They had so much power that even the king feared them; you know, the king said in chapter 38 verse 5, 'Could anyone do anything against you princes, you're in control here, surely?' So Jeremiah is arraigned before the princes in verse 15. The princes were wroth with Jeremiah (and if you've got a pencil there, when it says they 'smote him', it wasn't a cuff behind the ears, this was his 2nd scourging; you know, he was scourged by Pashur in chapter 20; he now got another 39 stripes). This man, b&s, is 60 years old and he's just been through a terrible siege as well as other deprivations, he's got a back full of scars and they ripped him open again! They scourge him and then they throw him into the house of Jonathan the scribe, into the prison.

Let me say something about this prison. If you look down at verse 20, when Jeremiah eventually gets before the king again, he begs the king and says, 'please, please Zedekiah, whatever you do to me, don't send me back to the house of Jonathan'. Now for a courageous man like Jeremiah to beg so pleadingly not to go back there, it must have been a shocking place! Now we know something about it, verse 16, Jeremiah was going into the dungeon and into the cabins (you see, the margins has got 'cells', now the Hebrew word means 'vaults' (2588), and very likely in the house of Jonathan, they were underground cellars that they'd made into prison cells; solitary confinement, no light, rats, water leaking through the ceiling, utter misery for Jeremiah. Cold, underground cells, solitary confinement, look how long he was there. He remained there **many days** and we believe that probably he was there for from between 6 to 9 months in the house of Jonathan the scribe. That was no comfortable imprisonment, b&s!

Then we notice verse 17, then all of a sudden, it says 'Zedekiah the king sent and took him out'. Now why would Zedekiah suddenly remember Jeremiah? Do you know why? because the Babylonians had come back, that's why; because they raced back to the city because the Egyptians went home and the Babylonians returned now in force, determined to destroy Jerusalem; then all of a sudden Zedekiah is saying, 'oh dear, we need to go and get Jeremiah! where is he? still down in the dungeon, well, get him out for me, I want to talk to him secretly'; notice that in verse 17, '**secretly**' (5643) , you see, this is a cowardly king, he wouldn't face up Jeremiah in front of the princes, no, he says, 'bring Jeremiah into my inner chambers, I want to have a little chat with him'. When he gets him inside his house, he says, 'Is there any word from Yahweh? You know, we're not looking too bright here, Jeremiah, the Babylonians are back! Yes; there is, says Jeremiah, there's word from Yahweh! Oh good, tell me what it is. You, are going to be delivered into the hand of Babylon! I've been saying it for 40 years and I'm still saying it; you're going to go to the hand of the king of Babylon. Oh!'

Jeremiah goes on in verse 18, 'What have I offended against thee, or against thy servants, or against this people, that you've put me in prison? I've done nothing more than tell you the word of Yahweh'. Then in verse 19, he gets into Zedekiah about listening to the false prophets; 'where are your prophets now? you're asking me, Zedekiah, but where are all the prophets that you've been listening to for all these years, which got up and said the king of Babylon shall not come against you nor against this Land? where are they now? why don't you go and ask them?' Then he begs in verse 20 not to go back to the house of Jonathan; and Zedekiah was embarrassed, and he lets Jeremiah go back to the **court of the prison**, not down in the dungeons, he lived now in the court of the prison, where he appears to have had the prerogative to have visitors, because we read in the next chapter that people came to hear his words in the court of the prison, and there was given him a piece of bread that was from the very last supplies of the city. But the siege dragged on, famine set in, and disease followed and we're told they ate their own children.

Then the prophecy of chapter 21 fits between chapter 37 and 38. Let's just go to chapter 21 and see what prophecy was given that lead to the next imprisonment in chapter 38. Now another delegation is sent to Jeremiah in the court of the prison. Verse 1, 'The word which came to Jeremiah when king Zedekiah sent unto him, Pashur the son of Melchiah, and Zephaniah, the son of Maaseiah the priest'. Now Zephaniah is again, a cousin of Jeremiah. What will they do? another delegation! 'Inquire I pray thee of Yahweh for us, will Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon make war with us? if so be that Yahweh will do with us according to all His wondrous works, that He may go up from us?' So again, they plead with Jeremiah, 'please tell us, that Yahweh's changed His mind? ask God for us! Well, the message is no different; just have a look down at verse 7, 'Afterwards, saith Yahweh, I will deliver Zedekiah the king of Judah, and his servants and the people and such as are left in the city, from the pestilence, from the sword and from the famine, into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the Babylonian, into the hand of their enemies, into the hand of those that seek their life; and he shall smite them with the edge of the sword, he will not spare them, neither have pity nor have mercy'.

Then he gives them the choice in verse 8! 'I've set before you in verse 8, **the way of life and the way of death**. He that abideth in this city shall die by the sword and the famine and the pestilence, but if you go out and **fall** to the Chaldeans, you shall **live** (and look at this) and his life shall be unto him for a prey'. Now there's that beautiful little message of hope that God gives to His faithful servants, if you will only respond and surrender, **then your life will be given for a prey!** But in verse 10, God says I'm going to destroy this city and it will be burnt with fire. That was the message of chapter 21, that goes right between chapters 37 and 38, when we get back to Jeremiah 38 we find that it was that prophecy that lead to Jeremiah's death sentence!!

Chapter 38 verse 1, 'Then Shephatiah the son of Mattan, Gedaliah the son of Pashur (so you see, there's another one; Pashur's already gone off into captivity, he's going to die in Babylon, but here's his son now persecuting Jeremiah); 'and Jucal the son of

Shelemiah (another grandson of Hananiah the prophet) and Pashur the son of Malchiah (his father owned the dungeon) they were the princes, they were the war cabinet, and they heard the words that Jeremiah had spoken to all the people. Verses 2 and 3 is a summary of chapter 21, so when they heard chapter 21, their response is in verse 4; you see, probably there were some in the city who would discuss the possibility of surrender. Jeremiah said, 'it's a choice, if you want to live, then you surrender; if you want to die you stay in the city and hold out'. There's no doubt that many in the city would have started to say, that everything that Jeremiah had said had come to pass 'surely we should surrender?' and the princes who were responsible for the morale of the fighting men would say, 'we can't have this, we can't have Jeremiah undermining confidence', and so they lay a charge of sedition and treason against Jeremiah in verse 4. 'The princes said to the king, We beseech thee, let this man be put to death'. It never ceases to amaze me, b&s, the perversity of the human heart; you would think in the face of the absolute verification of all the words of Jeremiah that they wouldn't be wanting to put him to death. It's a bit like, isn't it? the Jews who tried to kill the resurrected Lazarus, what's the good of trying to kill a man who's just been raised from the dead? Utter perversity, isn't it? here was a man who they knew was dead, walking around the city of Jerusalem and they want to kill him, what good would it do? If the Lord could raise him once, He can raise him twice! but you see, that's the perversity of trying to get rid of any opposing voice to their interests.

So they say, 'Jeremiah has to go!' and make no mistake, b&s, they demanded and got a death sentence; it wasn't saying, let's put him back in prison,' **we want him put to death**'. The king said, 'yes, go ahead and put him to death', it was a death sentence given up on Jeremiah, 'because he weakens the hands of the people'. Now look at verse 5, this was Zedekiah's very last chance to show some conviction, he was a son of Josiah. When his father died, he was 10 years old; his father's best friend was Jeremiah. I've no doubt that Jeremiah coached him through his teenage years; was he going to rescue Jeremiah? He had the power, b&s, because the princes wouldn't have asked him, they would have just gone ahead and done it, but they had to get the king's approval for what they wanted to do. **He had the power to save Jeremiah!** later on, he could order Jeremiah released from the terrible dungeon, so he had the power to do it. But he wilted in the face of the strong minded princes! Now I want you to notice his pathetic answer in verse 5, this is the **twilight prince to a tea!** Zedekiah looking at Jeremiah his father's friend, then he looks at the princes and says, 'well, I'm only the king, you know, and what can I do? I mean, you princes are all powerful, aren't you? I'm only the king!' B&S, there's the Pontius Pilate of the Old Testament; just as Jesus had to have someone in power who had the authority, and that let Him down, who took away His justice and His right, so Jeremiah had to have a Pontius Pilate. Zedekiah washed his hands and said, 'see ye to it, it's none of my business'.

The princes went away with glee; they took Jeremiah. Imagine how comfortable he was treated: they cast him into the dungeon. It didn't say that they gently lead him into the dungeon, they **threw him into the dungeon** of Hammelech in the court of the prison, and then they got ready for their wonderful gruesome death they were going to give to him. Now b&s, there's no question that they devised the most gruesome and terrifying

death that they could possibly imagine for Jeremiah. You see, they could just have taken him outside the king's palace and chopped his head off. That would have been too kind for these enemies of Jeremiah. They had scores to settle, they were really going to make Jeremiah pay, and they took this ill-fed starving 60 year old man who was worn out, and tired from 40 years of hard work, and they said, 'we've got something for you, Jeremiah'. Then they put ropes around his arms and they lowered him down into a storm water and sewer pit, that he might die there. It was a ghastly way to die! did you notice that they actually let him down with cords. You know, some of these pits have been excavated and we're told that many of these pits were 60 feet or 20 metres deep, they've actually found them under the ruins of Jerusalem. What they were is they were caverns that caught the water that came from all parts of the palace, and any water that was released in the castle, including sewage, it would rush down into these pits and would dissipate into underground channels. This was the collection pit and over the years, there had accumulated in the bottom of this deep pit about 5 feet of shocking, slimy mud and it was like quicksand and they had measured it very carefully. They had found one of the pits that was just the right depth so that a man would die slowly, and they let him down by cords (if it had only been 10 feet deep they would have just dropped him in and waited for the splash; but they let him down by cords all the way down this narrow hole down to the bottom. He wonders when he'll get to the bottom; he starts to slip and he gets to his armpits and his feet touch the ground, and he's left standing there in this horrible mire. Also ever so often, somewhere in the palace, water would be released in the palace, and it would come crashing in upon him and he'd be putting his face up to try and breathe, and gradually the water level would drop and he's choking and spluttering in this horrible muck that came down. It began to eat away at his flesh, and in that position you can't sit down, you can't even move. You know what it's like when you go to the beach, and you get up to your knees in the sand in the surf, it's almost impossible to get your legs out. Well, you think of being in this sort of stuff up to your shoulders; you can't move, you can't sit down, you can't fall asleep, there's nothing to eat.

Then we're told in Lamentations 3 verse 62, 'they hurled down abuse upon him', can you imagine what the sons of Pashur and the grandsons of Hananiah the prophet would have said before they closed the stone upon that pit. They hurled down every kind of mocking and abuse that they could think of upon Jeremiah. 'How's the water, Jeremiah? where's the word of Yahweh now?' Then they put the stone upon the top (Lamentations 3 verse 53) and it was total and utter blackness, claustrophobic, foul smelling, and the water kept coming in and flooding over his face and he's floundering in the mud to try and get some breath. You know, this was the most terrifying experience Jeremiah ever went through! it left a **huge scar** upon his mentality. I want you to come to Lamentations 3, you know, Lamentations is Jeremiah's nervous breakdown; when the city's finally fallen, he's just had enough and it all comes out, his anger against God, his sadness for the Jews and all the recollection of his terrible experiences come back and there's about 6 verses dedicated to his time in the terrible dungeon. The trauma he went through is described: verse 52, 'Mine enemies chased me sore like a bird, without cause (just notice that phrase 'without cause', that's a phrase used of Jesus Christ, isn't it?)

'They have cut off my life (there's the death sentence) in the dungeon, and cast a stone upon me'. Can you imagine what it was like when the light went out and you're down in that pit, 60 feet down. 'Waters flowed over mine head; then I said, I am cut off' (I'm going to drown in this water and eventually the water would come down and he could get some breath) 'I called upon thy name, O Yahweh, out of the low dungeon'. You know, God had said to him, 'Jeremiah, I will give thee thy life for a prey', but down there he must have felt totally and utterly forgotten; it's so hard to hang on when you're in the black hole of despair; sometimes we just can't see where God is working in our lives. 'I called on your Name from the low dungeon; Thou drawest near, verse 57, in the day I called upon Thee and Thou saidst, 'fear not'. Look what he says about his enemies, verse 62, 'the lips of those that rose up against me; and their device against me all the day. Behold, their sitting down and their rising up, I am their music (I am their mocking and their song) they make fun of me!' It was a terrible experience, b&s, and years after, even a couple of years later, he was still reliving that terrible experience in the pit.

He was there a long time! Come back to Jeremiah 38, you see Ebed-melech was more concerned that Jeremiah was going to die of hunger than drowning. When he went before the king, he said Jeremiah's going to die of hunger (verse 9); you know, the real danger to

Jeremiah was something they really didn't appreciate and that was the **mire**. You see, the mire was rotting his flesh away; what if he fell asleep? he would surely drown, and I suggest to you that probably Jeremiah was down in that dungeon for from 24 to 36 hours, and that's an awful long time to stay awake. It must have seemed like an eternity to try and hang on. But God was at work, b&s, verse 7 of chapter 38, 'Now when Ebed-melech the Ethiopian one of the eunuchs in the king's house **heard** that they had put Jeremiah in the dungeon'.

Let me say something about Ebed-melech: we don't know what his name was, you see, Ebed-melech is a title and it means 'a servant of a king' (5663); Ebed-melech was a slave, he had lost his identity. We're not given his actual name, he was very likely brought into the house of Zedekiah as the keeper of the harem, look at verses 22 and 23, it talks about the harem of king Zedekiah, 'all the women left in the king's house', verse 23, 'shall bring out all thy wives', so he had an extensive harem and it was the custom of these times, to get an Ethiopian and to make him a eunuch forcibly and to put him in charge of the house of the women. That's probably what his job was in the king's palace, and here was a man without seed, no family, no inheritance, no one to declare his generation, a man cut off from the land of the living, having no life of his own, all he is, is a servant of the king for the rest of his life. Yet God knew that he was the servant of the highest King of all! Ebed-melech saw that Jeremiah had been put into this terrible pit!! Isn't it amazing, b&s, that he identified with Jeremiah? He knew Jeremiah had no seed, no family, no wife and was about to be cut off from the land of the living. He saw Jeremiah as a lamb lead to the slaughter, as a lamb before his shearers is dumb; he saw a man whose justice had been taken away, a man humiliated, a man with no one to declare his generation. Isn't it amazing that God provided these eunuchs, these Ethiopian eunuchs to identify with Jeremiah and with Christ.

You know, it's just like the man of Acts 8, reading Isaiah 53, about a man with no generation; well, here's another one, an Ethiopian eunuch and his moment had come. He'd heard the words of Jeremiah because many of them had been spoken in the prison or in the palace. He heard the machinations of the princes and their interview with the king and he believed the words of Jeremiah. He then was faced with a problem! you see, none of Jeremiah's friends knew about the death sentence, it had been transacted in the palace and carried out in the palace and there was no one outside that knew that Jeremiah needed to be rescued. Ebed-melech because he was in the palace, knew what was going on, and it was up to him now, to do something about it! His moment of truth had come.

You think about what he did! We can just read this so easily; he is a humble servant of the king, his job is to stay in the palace and to make sure the women behave. He leaves his post, he leaves the harem unguarded, he goes right out from the palace to the gate of Benjamin, and he confronts the king in public. Now that takes **courage and conviction!** The king's sitting in judgment at the gate of Benjamin, and he confronts him in verse 9, 'My lord, these men (pointing or referring to the princes) have done evil in all that they have done to Jeremiah, they've put him in the dungeon; and if we don't get him out of there, he's going to die of hunger'. The weak king gives into a stronger personality again. Look at verse 10, 'Then the king commanded Ebed-melech the Ethiopian saying, Take from hence 30 men and get Jeremiah out of the prison before he dies!' He's always giving in to strong characters, is Zedekiah. Still scared of the princes - 'take 30 men just in case they find out', and when they opened the pit, you can imagine the relief of Jeremiah -standing there dirty and dishevelled, his flesh beginning to crinkle and rot away, and all of a sudden he looks up at this little circle of light that he now has, and all he can see is white teeth! You think about it! a black face staring down the hole, all you can see is white teeth in a smile, and a voice which says, 'Jeremiah, are you alright? are you
still
alive?'

Then they realize the condition he was in and they went away and got these old rags and said, 'Jeremiah put these under your arms'. If you've ever been trapped in deep mud, you would understand the suction that would be upon the body of Jeremiah, as they tried to pull him out. I once jumped out of a boat onto what I thought was hard sand and sunk up to my thighs, and we laughed and thought this was hilarious, but it got to be quite serious; the tide was coming in and every time I tried to pull on the boat, we nearly tipped the boat over because of the suction. It took a major effort for the two of us to get me out of the mud and back in the boat! But here's a man up to his armpits, and he's an old man and all his flesh is beginning to rot away; you know what it's like when you stay for a couple of hours in the bath, you go all white and crinkly! He's been there probably for 36 hours, and this isn't clean water he's standing in, this is filthy, polluted mud; so they said, 'well, look put all these rags under your arms because there's going to be enormous pressure when the 30 men start hauling on the rope to get you out of the mud. You imagine the pain that Jeremiah went through as they haul him out of that mud, as the mud tried to suck him down again; and they dragged him out. Imagine what a sight he must have been! the emaciated rotten flesh right up to his armpits. Vile

smelling, hair matted, his face-a mask of terror, utterly tired and drained, starving to death, and imagine the care that was provided for Jeremiah. The careful bathing, the feeding, b&s, that's why God loved Ebed-melech, he looked after Jeremiah.

You know, God noticed his loyalty. God says in Matthew 25, that when the Lord Jesus sits to judge His servants, He will say to some, 'I was in prison and you came to me', and today, b&s, we don't have many of our number in jail, but there are many in prisons of depression, prisons of sin, prisons of grief, and God highly values loyalty in times of shame and danger.

God values loyalty in times of false accusation, the Proverbs say, 18 verse 24, There are friends who pretend to be friends, there are lots of surface friends, even in the truth; 'but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother'; true friends are better even than relatives, because the friendship is based upon the love of the things of the truth. Proverbs 17 verse 17, 'A friend loveth at all times, but a brother is born for adversity'. Think of the difference of how people treated their friends; just take the case of Paul in Rome on trial before Nero. You know, Paul says two things about his friends, he said, 'Onesiphorus, he sought me out very diligently and was not ashamed of my chains', and it probably cost Onesiphorus his own life. To go and visit Paul in prison when Paul was on trial for his life, and Onesiphorus sought him out and lost his own life in doing so. Also Luke stayed with Paul right to the end, 'only Luke is with me', right to the bitter end, Luke was there helping Paul. But what about the Roman ecclesia, what about those that Paul had desired so anxiously to give spiritual gifts unto, that he'd gone there that he might preach the truth in Rome. What did they do for Paul? All they had to do, b&s, was to come to the court when Paul went on trial, and just sit in the court anonymously and they didn't do it! You know, Paul got up in the court before Nero, having been in jail for a long time, and he thought, 'well, at last I can see my brethren and sisters', and he got into the courtroom and he says, '**no man stood with me**', and he was so upset that he had to quote the words of Stephen, 'I pray God it may not be laid to their charge'. They let him down when he desperately needed their support and their friendship and their loyalty, and they were looking after their own necks. Nobody was there, and **God loves loyalty against injustice!**

Look at David! Jonathan standing up to his own father, 'what has David done? why should he be slain? and Jonathan fiercely angry for David, against his own father and against his own interests; loyalty at all costs is what God loves, b&s, and God will reward that loyalty.

God loves those that stand by their friends in times of false accusation, in times of grief, in times of sadness, in times of injustice, in times of shame. Nothing like 'twilight' princes who just evaporate off the scene, and say, 'not my problem, I don't want to get involved'. Sometimes the appalling silence is worse than the burden itself; 'he's no friend of mine', no wonder Jesus said to him, 'do you really love Me, Peter?' What is our response, b&s, when faithful brethren, who've spoken the word of God, who've tried to live godly lives, who've sacrificed themselves for the work of the truth, what do we do when they are being accused of being heretics? Do we stand back and say, 'not my problem! I can't do anything about it', or are we prepared like Ebed-melech to even confront the king in

public and say, 'it's not right what you're doing to Jeremiah!' You see, that's the sort of friends that God loves! we just can't say it's not my problem, I can't do anything about it!

Come to chapter 39 and verse 15, and you see what God thought of Ebed-melech's loyalty to Jeremiah. Verse 15, Jeremiah was told when he was released, 'Go back and speak to Ebed-melech the Ethiopian saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel (did you notice as with the Rechabites, whenever God speaks to a non Jew He says, 'I am the God of Israel and you're now included) 'behold, I will bring My words upon this city for evil, and not for good; and they shall be accomplished. Verse 17, 'Ebed-melech, I will deliver thee in that day, saith Yahweh: and thou shalt not be given into the hand of the men of whom thou art afraid.' You know, Ebed-melech, was justly (as all they were in the city) frightened of what the Babylonians would do. But more than that, he was also frightened of the princes; you see, when the princes found that Jeremiah's death sentence had been commuted and that he was rescued from the terrible dungeon, they were now looking for another traitor. Who had talked the king out of killing Jeremiah? and Ebed-melech had to leave his place and he had to stay in the palace, they knew exactly where to find him, and they were waiting the chance to get him away from the side of the king and put him to death. So he was afraid not only of the Babylonians, he was afraid of the princes and God says in verse 18, 'I will surely deliver thee, and thou shalt not fall by the sword in the palace, and thy life will be given thee for a prey: **because you put your trust in Me**, saith God'. Now I want you to notice in verse 16 and 17, particularly verse 17, that God acknowledges his courage despite his fears! He was scared, b&s, and rightly scared, and we've got to make a difference between godly courage and fleshly courage; there are men like Alexander the Great and Joab who were fantastic with fleshly courage (Joab's policy was well, I'll fight this side and you fight that side and if you get into trouble I'll help you, and if I get in trouble you come and help me!) He never thought about if they both got into trouble, it didn't come into his head! That's fleshly courage, Alexander the Great was exactly the same, reckless, arrogant, utterly courageous but no thought for the dangers. Godly men understand the problem, Ebed-melech was justly afraid but he trusted in God, and that's godly courage, b&s. Godly courage conquers fear by a faith in God, and he escaped the edge of the sword, 'thou shalt not fall by the sword' that's one of the people in Hebrews 11, 'by faith they escaped the edge of the sword', and he was brought under the umbrella of Jeremiah's remnant, his life given to him for a prey! God is also in Isaiah 56 verses 4 and 5, 'thus saith God to the eunuchs that keep My covenant that honour My Sabbaths, to them I will give a place, a welcome in My house of prayer for all nations'; so now he joins those faithful eunuchs that have attached themselves to the hope of Israel'.

What about Jeremiah? Well, come back to chapter 38, what happened to the twilight prince? You know, after Jeremiah came out of the terrible pit, the king asked him again, 'is there any hope?' Jeremiah said, no! surrender; I keep telling you, surrender. Verse 19, 'The king said, I am afraid of the Jews that are fallen to the Chaldeans, lest they deliver me into their hand, and they mock me'. Jeremiah, I hear what you're saying but I don't want to be laughed at; I just can't bear to be laughed at! and Jeremiah said to him,

again the same words, 'You surrender, you live, if you refuse to go forth, this is the word; and look at verse 21, 'Behold, the women that are left in the king of Judah's house shall be brought forth to the king of Babylon's princes (can you imagine the fate of those women?) 'I say to you, Zedekiah, 'your friends have set you on, those princes have led you and prevailed against you and do you know what, Zedekiah? **It's your feet that are stuck in the mire, not Jeremiah's!**'; that's what they're going to say to you, ' they're going to say you're like Jeremiah, and you're stuck in the mire and won't get out; they'll bring out your wives and your children to the Chaldeans and they shall not escape. Do you know what happened to Zedekiah? He was dragged up to Riblah, his wives were distributed to the princes and the honourable men of Babylon, and they took Zedekiah and got his children in front of him and they killed his sons in front of his eyes, and then poked out his eyes and dragged him off to die in Babylon, **because he would not do what the word of God wants!** A terrible fate for the twilight prince!

But I want to conclude, b&s, in Psalm 69; let's just go to this psalm, and I want to show you something very beautiful about divine inspiration. You know, Psalm 69 is a direct Messianic psalm, it is very clearly talking about the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, how He would endure grief and sorrow and loneliness; how He'd be a stranger to His mother's brethren; how He'd be deserted by His friends. But do you know, that the Spirit with the power of foreknowledge, describe the sufferings of Christ through the terrible experience of Jeremiah which was yet to happen? All the language of Psalm 69 is based upon Jeremiah in that dungeon, a future event. The Spirit is looking down the corridor of time and it sees Jeremiah in the dungeon and then it parallels the two!

Have you ever read this psalm this way? I believe this was written like this to give comfort to Jeremiah. If you were Jeremiah and you knew your bible, where else would your mind be, if you're down in the mire? It would be here, b&s, Psalm 69 verse 1, 'Save me, O God; I cried unto Thee out of the deep dungeon, he says, for waters had come into my soul, I sink into deep mire where there is no standing; I've come into deep waters where the floods overflow me; I'm weary of my crying, my throat is dried: mine eyes fail while I wait for my God. They that hate me without a cause (remember he said that in Lamentations)? they that hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of my head: they that would destroy me are mighty'. Come down to verse 7, 'Because for thy sake I have borne reproach: shame has covered my face, I am become a stranger unto my brethren, (his own home town and his own brothers have been persecuting him) 'and an alien unto my mother's children'. Why? verse 9, 'The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up', come to verse 11, 'I made sackcloth my garment; and I've become a proverb to them' Remember they mocked him as they put the stone upon the pit? 'They that sit in the gate speak against me: I was the son of the drunkards', and that's exactly what is said in Lamentations 3.

Verse 14, 'Deliver me out of the mire and let me not sink: let me be delivered from them that hate me, and out of the deep waters. Let not the water flood overflow me, neither let the deep swallow me up, and let not the pit shut her mouth upon me'. The horror of the darkness, but you know, worse than that experience, b&s, was the loneliness! Verse

20, 'Reproach hath broken my heart; and I am full of heaviness: and I looked for some (and as the margin says) to lament with me, I looked for comforters but there was nobody'. But more than the pain of the cross, the Lord was to go through the loneliness, through the desertion of friends and there was no one to lament with Me. It was said of the Lord Jesus Christ, 'thy rebuke hath broken His heart', b&s, Jeremiah and Christ were to share a tremendous sense of being alone in their sufferings.

We now come to remember our Lord Jesus Christ, who so willingly gave His life to save His friends, and to remember His words where He said, 'as He hath laid down His life for us, so ought we as loyal and true friends, be prepared to lay down our lives for the brethren. Let us, b&s, in times of shame, in times of accusation, in times of grief, in times of sadness, let us remember to be like Ebed-melech, because God loves the spirit of loyalty in friends, because in people like Ebed-melech, we see the servants of the greatest King of all!