

Jeremiah 37:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Therefore hear now, I pray thee, O my lord the king: let my supplication, I pray thee, be accepted before thee; that thou cause me not to return to the house of Jonathan the scribe, lest I die there.

Analysis

Let my supplication, I pray thee, be accepted before thee (תְּפִלָּתָךְ תִּחְנַתִּי לְפָנֶיךְ) —Jeremiah's plea employs techinnah (תִּחְנָה), meaning a supplication for grace or favor, and naphal (תַּפְלָל), literally 'to fall,' creating the image of a petition falling before the king. Despite unjust imprisonment, Jeremiah appeals humbly to Zedekiah's mercy rather than demanding vindication.

That thou cause me not to return to the house of Jonathan the scribe, lest I die there—Jeremiah doesn't request full release, only transfer from the dungeon to better conditions. The 'house of Jonathan' had been converted into a makeshift prison with underground cells ('the dungeon, and into the cabins,' 37:16), where conditions were so brutal that Jeremiah faced death. The phrase 'lest I die there' (pen amut sham, פֶּן-אֲמֹת שָׁם) reveals the prophet's real fear of perishing before God's purposes were complete.

This humble petition models proper Christian response to unjust suffering: Jeremiah neither demanded rights nor accepted preventable death passively. He appealed to legitimate authority for mercy. Paul similarly appealed to Caesar when facing death threats (Acts 25:11), showing that submission to God's sovereignty doesn't require fatalism or refusing to seek relief from unjust conditions.

Historical Context

Zedekiah granted Jeremiah's request, transferring him to the court of the guard where he received daily bread rations until the city fell (37:21). This milder imprisonment lasted until Judah's princes convinced Zedekiah to let them execute Jeremiah by throwing him into a muddy cistern (38:4-6). The vacillating king later allowed Ebed-melech to rescue Jeremiah from the cistern (38:7-13). These episodes reveal Zedekiah's weak character—he recognized Jeremiah as God's prophet and even sought his counsel, but lacked courage to fully vindicate him against opposition. This political cowardice ultimately led to catastrophe: Jerusalem fell, Zedekiah's sons were killed before his eyes, he was blinded and taken to Babylon in chains (39:4-7).

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How does Jeremiah's humble appeal for mercy balance submission to God's will with legitimate self-preservation?
2. What does this passage teach about appealing to authority for justice while trusting God's sovereign purposes?
3. How should Christians respond when facing unjust treatment—passive acceptance, aggressive resistance, or Jeremiah's model of humble appeal?

Interlinear Text

לֶךְ לְךָ אָדָן וְאַתָּה שְׁמַע בְּאַתָּה וְעַתָּה הִנֵּה
the king O my lord now I pray thee hear Therefore H6258 H4994 H8085 H113 H4428

תִּפְלֶל	בְּאָ	תִּחְבְּתִי	לִפְנֵי יְהָ	וְאֵל
I pray thee be accepted	H4994	let my supplication	before	H408

וְלֹא	הַסְפֵּר	יְהוֹנָתָן	בֵּית	תְּשַׁבֵּב	נִ
thee that thou cause me not to return	to the house	of Jonathan	to the house	the scribe	H3808
H7725	H1004	H3083	H5608		

אֵם וְתַּשְׁמַח: lest I die H4191

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 36:7 (References Lord): It may be they will present their supplication before the LORD, and will return every one from his evil way: for great is the anger and the fury that the LORD hath pronounced against this people.

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