

# Jeremiah 38:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And Ebed-melech the Ethiopian said unto Jeremiah, Put now these old cast clouts and rotten rags under thine armholes under the cords. And Jeremiah did so.

## Analysis

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**Ebed-melech the Ethiopian said unto Jeremiah, Put now these old cast clouts and rotten rags under thine armholes under the cords**—The specific instruction reveals Ebed-melech's practical wisdom and empathy. He anticipated that pulling an emaciated man from a muddy pit with ropes would cause excruciating pain and injury without padding. The 'armholes' (אַצִּילֵי יָדַי, *atsile yadekha*, literally 'joints of your hands/arms') would bear the full weight during extraction.

**And Jeremiah did so**—The prophet's simple obedience to his Ethiopian rescuer's instructions demonstrates humility. God's chosen prophet, who spoke the Almighty's word to kings, accepted direction from a foreign eunuch. There's no record of Jeremiah instructing Ebed-melech on proper rescue technique or insisting on his own method. He trusted the man God sent to deliver him.

This exchange beautifully illustrates the body of Christ's mutual interdependence. The most spiritually gifted sometimes need practical help from unexpected sources. Paul's teaching that 'the eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee' (1 Corinthians 12:21) applies here—the prophet needed the servant, the Jew needed the Gentile, the spiritual leader needed the practical helper. Pride would have refused the rags or insisted on directing the rescue; wisdom and humility accepted help gratefully.

## Historical Context

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The image of Jeremiah being pulled from the miry cistern with rags protecting his armpits is visceral and unforgettable. This occurred in approximately July 587 BC, about a year into the final siege. Jeremiah had been imprisoned multiple times throughout his ministry but this was the closest to death—the muddy cistern would have meant slow suffocation or starvation. His rescue allowed him to witness Jerusalem's fall (39:11-14), minister to the remnant (chapters 40-43), and likely write Lamentations. Without Ebed-melech's courage and practical wisdom, Jeremiah would have died in the pit and much of his prophetic ministry would have been lost.

## Related Passages

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**Matthew 25:31** — Final judgment

**Romans 2:1** — Judging others

## Study Questions

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1. What does Jeremiah's simple obedience to Ebed-melech's instructions teach about humility in receiving help?
2. How does this rescue demonstrate the importance of both courage and practical wisdom in ministry?
3. In what ways does God often send unexpected people to deliver us, and how should we respond?

## Interlinear Text

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שׁ יִם	יְרֵמִי הוּ	אֶל	הַכּוֹשׁ י	מִ לֶךְ	עֶבֶד יְיָ אָמַר
Put	And Jeremiah	H413	the Ethiopian	And Ebedmelech	said
H7760	H3414		H3569	H5663	H559
אֶצֶל וְ	תַּ חַת	וְהַמְלָחִים	הַסֹּחֵב וְ	בָּלוֹא י	נָ א
under thine armholes	H8478	and rotten rags	cast clouts	now these old	H4994
H679		H4418	H5499	H1094	
כֵּן:	יְרֵמִי הוּ	וַיַּעַשׂ	לַחֲבֹל יִם	מִתַּ חַת	יָד יָרְ
H3651	And Jeremiah	did	under the cords	H8478	H3027
	H3414	H6213	H2256		

## Additional Cross-References

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**Ephesians 4:32** (Parallel theme): And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

**Romans 12:10** (Parallel theme): Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another;