

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

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' (אַצְלֵי יָדֶיךָ, atsle 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

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

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

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

שׁ יְם	יְרָמִי הָוּ	אָל	פְּכָשׁ	מַלְגָּעַ	עָבֵד	וְ אָמֵר
said H559	And Ebedmelech H5663	the Ethiopian H3569	And Jeremiah H3414	Put H7760		
אַצְלָוֹת	תְּחִתָּה	וְהַמְלָחִים	הַסְּעִבָּוֹת	בְּלוֹאִים	וְאַתָּה	נֵא
H4994 now these old H1094	cast cloths H5499	and rotten rags H4418			under thine armholes H679	
קָרְבָּן	יְרָמִי הָוּ	וְעָשָׂה	לְפָנָלִים	מִתְּחִתָּה	מִתְּבָנָה	בְּ
H3027 under the cords H8478	did H2256	And Jeremiah H6213			H3414 H3651	

Additional Cross-References

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;

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