

Jeremiah 38:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Then said Jeremiah unto Zedekiah, Thus saith the LORD, the God of hosts, the God of Israel; If thou wilt assuredly go forth unto the king of Babylon's princes, then thy soul shall live, and this city shall not be burned with fire; and thou shalt live, and thine house:

Analysis

If thou wilt assuredly go forth (אִם־תֵּצֵא אֲשֶׁר)—The emphatic Hebrew construction (infinitive absolute + verb) stresses the certainty and necessity of surrender. God demanded complete submission to Nebuchadnezzar's princes as the instrument of His judgment. This was not political advice but prophetic command—refusing meant defying God Himself.

Then thy soul shall live (nephesh, נֶפֶשׁ)—God promised Zedekiah personal survival if he obeyed, echoing the Deuteronomic principle: obedience brings life, rebellion brings death (Deuteronomy 30:15-20). The stakes included not just Zedekiah's survival but Jerusalem's preservation from burning. Yet this weak king chose the approval of his officials over the explicit promise of God, a decision that would cost him everything (39:4-7).

Historical Context

By 587 BC, Babylon had crushed Judah's Egyptian allies and tightened the siege. Surrender was militarily inevitable, but Zedekiah's pro-Egyptian court faction (the princes who opposed Jeremiah) insisted on resistance. Jeremiah's message aligned

with political reality and divine decree: Babylon was God's chosen instrument of judgment.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. What does Jeremiah's message reveal about God's sovereignty over pagan empires like Babylon?
2. Why might Zedekiah find it harder to obey God's "shameful" command than to face certain destruction?
3. How does this choice between God's way (surrender) and human pride (resistance) mirror spiritual decisions we face?

Interlinear Text

אָמַר	יֵרֵמְיָהוּ	אֶל	צִדְקִיָּהוּ	כֹה	אָמַר	יְהוָה	אֱלֹהֵי י
Then said	Jeremiah	H413	unto Zedekiah	H3541	Then said	the LORD	the God
H559	H3414		H6667		H559	H3068	H430
וְהָיוּ	אֱלֹהֵי י	יִשְׂרָאֵל	אִם	תֵּצֵא	תֵּצֵא	אִם	תֵּצֵא
of hosts	the God	of Israel	H518	If thou wilt assuredly	If thou wilt assuredly		
H6635	H430	H3478		H3318	H3318		
אֶל	שָׂרֵי י	מֶלֶךְ	בָּבֶל	וְהָיָה	וְהָיָה	נַפְשְׁךָ	נַפְשְׁךָ
H413	princes	unto the king	of Babylon's	and thou shalt live	and thou shalt live	then thy soul	then thy soul
	H8269	H4428	H894	H2421	H2421	H5315	H5315
וְהָיָה	הַזֶּה	אֵת	לֹא	תִשְׂרֹף	בָּאֵשׁ	וְהָיָה	וְהָיָה
and this city	H2063	H3808	shall not be burned	with fire	and thou shalt live	and thou shalt live	and thou shalt live
H5892			H8313	H784	H2421	H2421	H2421
וְהָיָה	וּבֵיתְךָ:	אֵת ה					
H859	and thine house						
	H1004						

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 27:12 (Kingdom): I spake also to Zedekiah king of Judah according to all these words, saying, Bring your necks under the yoke of the king of Babylon, and serve him and his people, and live.

Jeremiah 38:2 (References Lord): Thus saith the LORD, He that remaineth in this city shall die by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence: but he that goeth forth to the Chaldeans shall live; for he shall have his life for a prey, and shall live.

Jeremiah 27:17 (Kingdom): Hearken not unto them; serve the king of Babylon, and live: wherefore should this city be laid waste?

Jeremiah 39:3 (Kingdom): And all the princes of the king of Babylon came in, and sat in the middle gate, even Nergal-sharezer, Samgar-nebo, Sarsechim, Rab-saris,

Nergal-sharezer, Rab-mag, with all the residue of the princes of the king of Babylon.

2 Kings 24:12 (Kingdom): And Jehoiachin the king of Judah went out to the king of Babylon, he, and his mother, and his servants, and his princes, and his officers: and the king of Babylon took him in the eighth year of his reign.

Psalms 80:14 (References God): Return, we beseech thee, O God of hosts: look down from heaven, and behold, and visit this vine;

Psalms 80:7 (References God): Turn us again, O God of hosts, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved.

1 Chronicles 17:24 (References God): Let it even be established, that thy name may be magnified for ever, saying, The LORD of hosts is the God of Israel, even a God to Israel: and let the house of David thy servant be established before thee.

Amos 5:27 (References God): Therefore will I cause you to go into captivity beyond Damascus, saith the LORD, whose name is The God of hosts.