

Jeremiah 38:19

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And Zedekiah the king said unto Jeremiah, I am afraid of the Jews that are fallen to the Chaldeans, lest they deliver me into their hand, and they mock me.

Analysis

I am afraid of the Jews that are fallen to the Chaldeans—Zedekiah's confession reveals his character: he feared defectors' mockery more than God's judgment. The verb yare (יָרָא, "to fear") shows misplaced reverence. He should have feared (yare) Yahweh (Proverbs 9:10), but instead he feared (yare) public humiliation.

Lest they deliver me into their hand, and they mock me—The verb alal (אָלָל, "to mock/abuse") suggests more than verbal taunting—possibly physical mistreatment. Zedekiah's pride couldn't bear the thought of Judean defectors saying "I told you so." This fear of shame proved fatal: his actual fate (eyes gouged out after watching his sons executed, 39:6-7) was infinitely worse than any mockery he imagined. By fearing man rather than God, he guaranteed the very disaster he sought to avoid.

Historical Context

Some Jews had already surrendered to Babylon, following Jeremiah's advice (38:2). These defectors represented a humiliating rebuke to Zedekiah's resistance policy. In honor-shame cultures like ancient Judah, a king's loss of face before subjects—especially "traitors"—was considered unbearable.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. How does the fear of man prove to be a snare (Proverbs 29:25) in Zedekiah's decision?
2. What imagined consequences do we allow to prevent obedience to God's clear commands?
3. How might Zedekiah's story have differed if he had feared God more than public opinion?

Interlinear Text

אָתָּה דְּאָגָּה אָנָּה יְאַמְּרָה
said the king And Zedekiah unto Jeremiah I am afraid
H559 H4428 H6667 H413 H3414 H589 H1672 H853

לֹא תַּחֲזֹק יְמֵנִים אֲשֶׁר נִפְלָאוּ
of the Jews that are fallen to the Chaldeans
H3064 H834 H5307 H413 H3778 H6435 H5414

בְּנֵי יִהְתַּעַלְלּוּ בְּיַד מֵאֲנָתִים
me into their hand and they mock
H3027 H5953 H0

Additional Cross-References

John 12:42 (Parallel theme): Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue:

Isaiah 57:11 (Parallel theme): And of whom hast thou been afraid or feared, that thou hast lied, and hast not remembered me, nor laid it to thy heart? have not I held my peace even of old, and thou fearest me not?

Jeremiah 38:22 (Kingdom): And, behold, all the women that are left in the king of Judah's house shall be brought forth to the king of Babylon's princes, and those women shall say, Thy friends have set thee on, and have prevailed against thee: thy feet are sunk in the mire, and they are turned away back.

Jeremiah 39:9 (Parallel theme): Then Nebuzar-adan the captain of the guard carried away captive into Babylon the remnant of the people that remained in the city, and those that fell away, that fell to him, with the rest of the people that remained.

1 Samuel 31:4 (Parallel theme): Then said Saul unto his armourbearer, Draw thy sword, and thrust me through therewith; lest these uncircumcised come and thrust me through, and abuse me. But his armourbearer would not; for he was sore afraid. Therefore Saul took a sword, and fell upon it.