

Jeremiah 38:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Then Zedekiah the king said, Behold, he is in your hand: for the king is not he that can do any thing against you.

Analysis

Behold, he is in your hand—Zedekiah's abdication of responsibility echoes Pilate washing his hands (Matthew 27:24). The king surrenders his prophet to the princes' murderous intent, claiming powerlessness: **for the king is not he that can do any thing against you**. This is political cowardice masquerading as constitutional constraint.

The phrase reveals Zedekiah's tragic weakness. He privately consulted Jeremiah (37:17, 38:14-16), recognized him as God's prophet, and even sought his counsel—yet publicly betrayed him to appease political opponents. The claim that 'the king is not he that can do any thing' was transparently false; absolute monarchs like Zedekiah wielded supreme authority. His grandfather Josiah had reformed the nation; his predecessor Jehoiakim had executed prophets (26:20-23). Zedekiah had the power but lacked the courage.

This pattern of knowing truth yet capitulating to pressure appears throughout history. Pilate knew Jesus was innocent but condemned Him anyway (John 18:38, 19:12-16). Felix knew the gospel but chose political convenience (Acts 24:24-27). The fear of man proves a snare (Proverbs 29:25)—Zedekiah's attempt to please everyone resulted in catastrophe for all, including himself. His eyes were gouged out after watching his sons' execution (39:6-7), the ultimate blindness for one who refused to see truth.

Historical Context

Zedekiah inherited a weakened monarchy after Jehoiakim's rebellion brought Babylonian wrath. Made king by Nebuchadnezzar as a vassal, he swore an oath of loyalty but later rebelled—violating his word and bringing God's judgment (Ezekiel 17:11-21). By 588 BC, his authority was undermined by powerful princes who advocated resistance. Jewish leaders were divided between a pro-Egyptian party (hoping for rescue) and Jeremiah's counsel to submit to Babylon as God's will. Zedekiah lacked his grandfather Josiah's spiritual courage or his uncle Jehoiakim's ruthless decisiveness. He tried to appease all factions, satisfying none, and ultimately led the nation to ruin.

Related Passages

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. How does Zedekiah's claim of powerlessness expose the danger of preferring political expediency over truth?
2. What does this passage teach about the 'fear of man' and its consequences for moral leadership?
3. In what ways might we be tempted to know truth yet capitulate to pressure, claiming we have no choice?

Interlinear Text

בְּיַדְךָ מֶלֶךְ
Behold he is in your hand

הִנֵּה בְּיַדְךָ מֶלֶךְ
Then Zedekiah said to the king

בְּיַדְךָ מֶלֶךְ
for the king is in your hand

אָמַר לְךָ מֶלֶךְ
I said to you, O king

לֹא תִּשְׁעַל אֶת־יְהוָה
do not you offend the Lord

לֹא תִּשְׁעַל אֶת־יְהוָה
for the king is not he that can

אָמַר לְךָ מֶלֶךְ
I said to you, O king

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