

Jeremiah 38:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

My lord the king, these men have done evil in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet, whom they have cast into the dungeon; and he is like to die for hunger in the place where he is: for there is no more bread in the city.

Analysis

My lord the king, these men have done evil in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet, whom they have cast into the dungeon; and he is like to die for hunger in the place where he is: for there is no more bread in the city. Ebed-melech's appeal demonstrates remarkable moral clarity and rhetorical skill. He directly accuses the officials of evil (here'u), using strong language that could have cost him dearly. The phrase "these men have done evil in all that they have done" emphasizes comprehensive wrongdoing—not a single mistake but systematic injustice.

The practical argument—"he is like to die for hunger"—appeals to both justice and pragmatism. Jeremiah's death by starvation would be murder, not judicial execution. The observation "there is no more bread in the city" heightens the cruelty: in a siege where everyone suffers hunger, casting a prophet into a waterless cistern with no food provision constitutes deliberate execution. Ebed-melech's appeal combines moral outrage with practical reasoning, demonstrating wisdom in advocacy.

Theologically, this verse teaches:

1. Evil should be named and opposed, even when done by powerful people
2. advocacy for the oppressed reflects God's character (Proverbs 31:8-9)

3. speaking truth to power requires both courage and wisdom
4. God uses human agents to accomplish deliverance—He could rescue Jeremiah miraculously but chooses to work through Ebed-melech's intervention.

The Reformed understanding of common grace explains how an Ethiopian eunuch could display such moral excellence—God's image remains in fallen humanity.

Historical Context

The phrase "there is no more bread in the city" confirms the siege's severity. Jeremiah 52:6 records that by the fourth month of Zedekiah's eleventh year, "the famine was sore in the city, so that there was no bread for the people of the land." Archaeological evidence from destruction layers shows evidence of starvation during ancient sieges, including at Lachish during this period.

Ancient siege warfare deliberately aimed to starve populations into submission. Babylon's systematic reduction of Judean cities before focusing on Jerusalem followed standard military practice. That Ebed-melech could appeal to the king while officials who imprisoned Jeremiah couldn't stop him suggests complex palace politics—Zedekiah was weak, manipulated by various factions. His permission for Jeremiah's rescue reveals either hidden sympathy for the prophet or inability to resist Ebed-melech's moral argument. History shows weak leaders often enable evil through passivity rather than active malice.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How does Ebed-melech's willingness to name evil directly challenge our tendency toward diplomatic silence in the face of injustice?

2. In what situations does God call you to be an advocate for those unable to defend themselves?
3. How can we combine moral courage with practical wisdom when opposing injustice, as Ebed-melech did?

Interlinear Text

אֲשֶׁר כָּל אֵת הָאֵל לָהּ הָעֹנֵשׁ יָם הִמָּלֵךְ אֲדֹנָי
My lord the king have done evil H113 H4428 H7489 H376 H428 H853 H3605 H834

אֲשֶׁר אֵת הַנָּבִיא לִיְרֵמְיָהוּ עָשׂוּ
in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet H6213 H3414 H5030 H853 H834

תַּחֲתָיו וַיָּמָת הַבּוֹר אֶל הַשָּׁלִי יִכּוּ
whom they have cast into the dungeon and he is like to die in the place H7993 H413 H953 H4191 H8478

עוֹד הֵל חֵם אֵין כִּי הָרָעָב מִפְּנֵי
for hunger where he is for there is no more bread H6440 H7458 H3588 H369 H5750 H3899

בְּעִיר:
in the city H5892