

EBED-MELECH... the black man who rescued a prophet
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(JEREMIAH 38:7-13)

They were terrible days in Israel when one lone man fought the battles of the Lord. Unrest and fear had placed a terrifying hand upon the people; and to make matters worse, a Babylonian invasion seemed imminent. Yet the sinful leaders of the nation persisted in their contempt of God's law, and deliberately sought the help of idols. Against this tide of evil the prophet Jeremiah had vainly struggled; and his prediction of impending doom won for him the scorn of his fellow men. They declared that his untimely prophecies were undermining the morale of the defenders, and in order to silence him for ever, they cast him into an old muddy pit which had formerly been used as a dungeon. As he sank into the obnoxious filth, Jeremiah's position became extremely precarious; and then a man of Africa came to the rescue.

A Story of God's Watchfulness

"Now when Ebed-melech the Ethiopian . . . heard that they had put Jeremiah in the dungeon, he went forth out of the king's house, and spake to the king, saying, 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 likely to die for hunger in the place where he is: for there is no more bread in the city." The intervention of this gallant Ethiopian undoubtedly saved the life of God's servant, and at the same time it endangered his own, for had the noblemen heard of Ebed-melech's interference, their reactions would have been most violent. "Then the king commanded Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, saying, Take from hence thirty men with thee, and take up Jeremiah the prophet out of the dungeon, before he die. So Ebed-melech took the men . . . and old cast cloths and old rotten rags, and let them down by cords into the dungeon to Jeremiah. And he said, Put these . . . under thine armholes under the cords. So they drew up Jeremiah . . . and took him up out of the dungeon." The Almighty watched every movement of the rescue operation, and the account of His rewarding the brave Ethiopian makes good reading.

A Story of God's Thoughtfulness

As the threats of invasion increased, fear spread through the land, and even Ebed-melech was not immune from terror. Rumours of Babylonian savagery played havoc with his peace of mind, and he feared the worst. Then came the word of the Lord to Jeremiah saying, "Go and speak to Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Behold, I will bring my words upon this city for evil, and not for good; and they shall be accomplished in that day before thee. But I will deliver thee in that day, saith the Lord, and thou shalt not be given into the hand of the men of whom thou art afraid. For I will surely deliver thee . . . because thou hast put thy trust in me, saith the Lord " (Jer. 39:16-18). When the anxious man received this message, his confidence was restored. He realized that God's word was true; and although a thousand might fall at his side, and ten thousand at his right hand, the destruction would not harm him. God knew the state of His servant's mind, and with thoughtfulness characteristic of His unfailing care,

EBED-MELECH... the black man who rescued a prophet took Steps to restore the peace of His subject.

A Story of God's Faithfulness

When Jerusalem was overrun, the helpless people surely thought their world had come to an end. Arrogant Gentiles stalked through the holy places; blasphemy raised its ugly head to mock the cause of Israel, and everywhere defenders lay dead or dying. The eerie silence of the stricken city was broken only by the coarse jests of the conquerors, as captives assembled to march toward the slavery of a foreign land. Truly the prophet's word had been fulfilled. Yet in some mysterious fashion the Babylonian king recognized and respected the greatness of the prophet Jeremiah, and made provision for his safety. *The historian Josephus records how the prophet's request brought liberty once again to his own servant Baruch, and probably in the same manner, freedom was obtained for the brave African who had earlier risked his life to rescue God's minister. The Lord is no man's debtor, and happy indeed is that soul who receives his rewards from God's hand. Even a poor man may be confident if he be a friend of the divine Banker.

* Antiquities of the Jews, by Flavius Josephus: Book 10. Chapter 9, Para 1.

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