The Life of Jeremiah

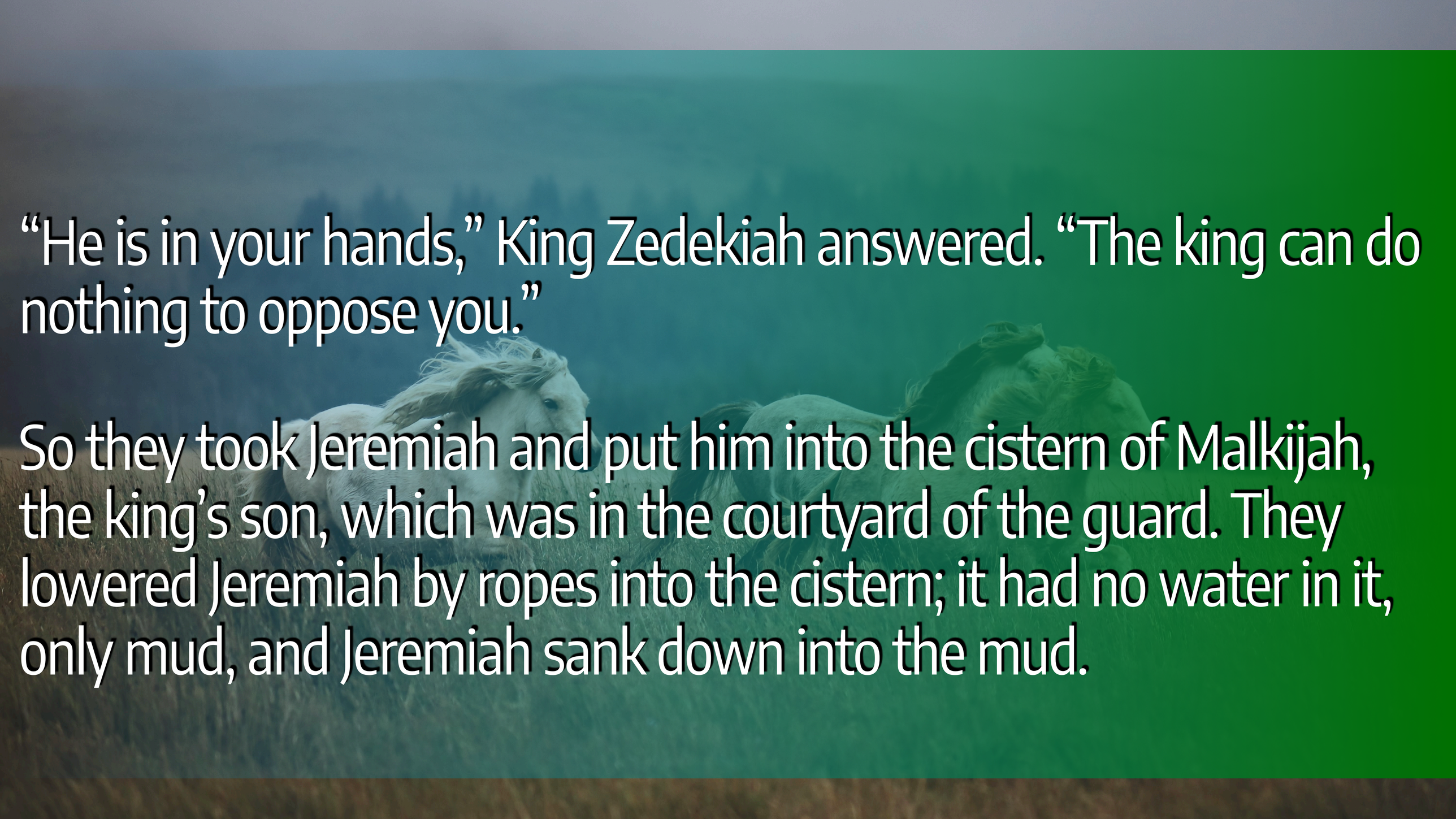


Ebed-Melek Stirred His Stumps

Jeremiah 38:1-13

Shephatiah son of Mattan, Gedaliah son of Pashhur, Jehukal son of Shelemiah, and Pashhur son of Malkijah heard what Jeremiah was telling all the people when he said, “This is what the Lord says: ‘Whoever stays in this city will die by the sword, famine or plague, but whoever goes over to the Babylonians will live. They will escape with their lives; they will live.’

And this is what the Lord says: ‘This city will certainly be given into the hands of the army of the king of Babylon, who will capture it.’ ”
Then the officials said to the king, “This man should be put to death. He is discouraging the soldiers who are left in this city, as well as all the people, by the things he is saying to them. This man is not seeking the good of these people but their ruin.”

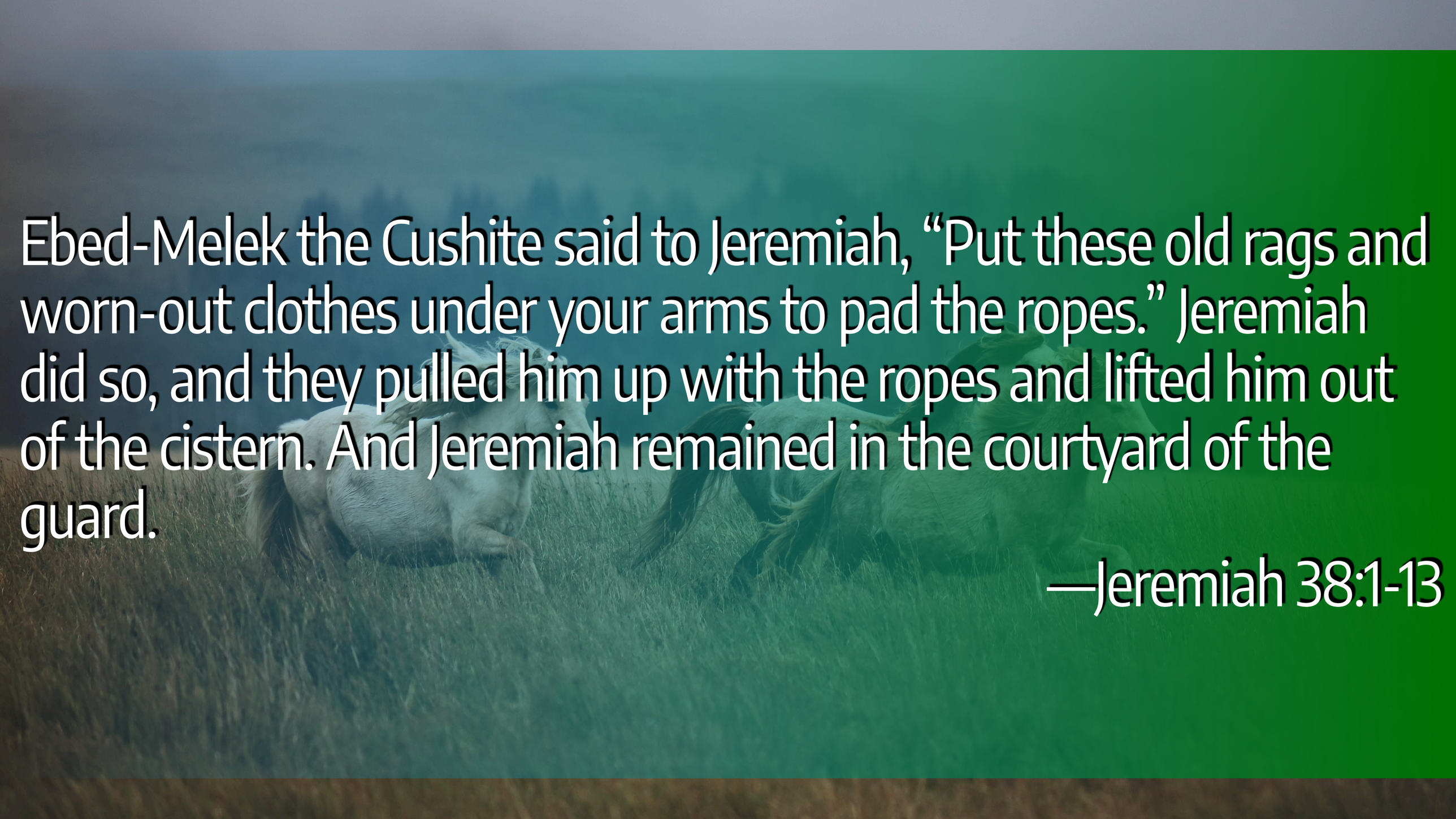


“He is in your hands,” King Zedekiah answered. “The king can do nothing to oppose you.”

So they took Jeremiah and put him into the cistern of Malkijah, the king’s son, which was in the courtyard of the guard. They lowered Jeremiah by ropes into the cistern; it had no water in it, only mud, and Jeremiah sank down into the mud.

But Ebed-Melek, a Cushite, an official p in the royal palace, heard that they had put Jeremiah into the cistern. While the king was sitting in the Benjamin Gate, Ebed-Melek went out of the palace and said to him, “My lord the king, these men have acted wickedly in all they have done to Jeremiah the prophet. They have thrown him into a cistern, where he will starve to death when there is no longer any bread in the city.”

Then the king commanded Ebed-Melek the Cushite, “Take thirty men from here with you and lift Jeremiah the prophet out of the cistern before he dies.” So Ebed-Melek took the men with him and went to a room under the treasury in the palace. He took some old rags and worn-out clothes from there and let them down with ropes to Jeremiah in the cistern.



Ebed-Melek the Cushite said to Jeremiah, “Put these old rags and worn-out clothes under your arms to pad the ropes.” Jeremiah did so, and they pulled him up with the ropes and lifted him out of the cistern. And Jeremiah remained in the courtyard of the guard.

—Jeremiah 38:1-13


Gedaliah son of Pashhur
Jucal son of Shelemiah
Credit: Gabi Laron, Institute of Archeology, The Hebrew University, © Eilat Mazar

Shephatiah son of Mattan

Gedaliah son of Pashhur (seal found)

Jehukal son of Shelemiah (seal found; Jeremiah 37:3; possibly related to captain of the guard Irijah of 37:13)

Pashhur son of Malkijah (Jeremiah 21:1-2)

They said: “Inquire now of the LORD for us because Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon is attacking us. Perhaps the LORD will perform wonders for us as in times past so that he will withdraw from us” (Jer. 21:2).

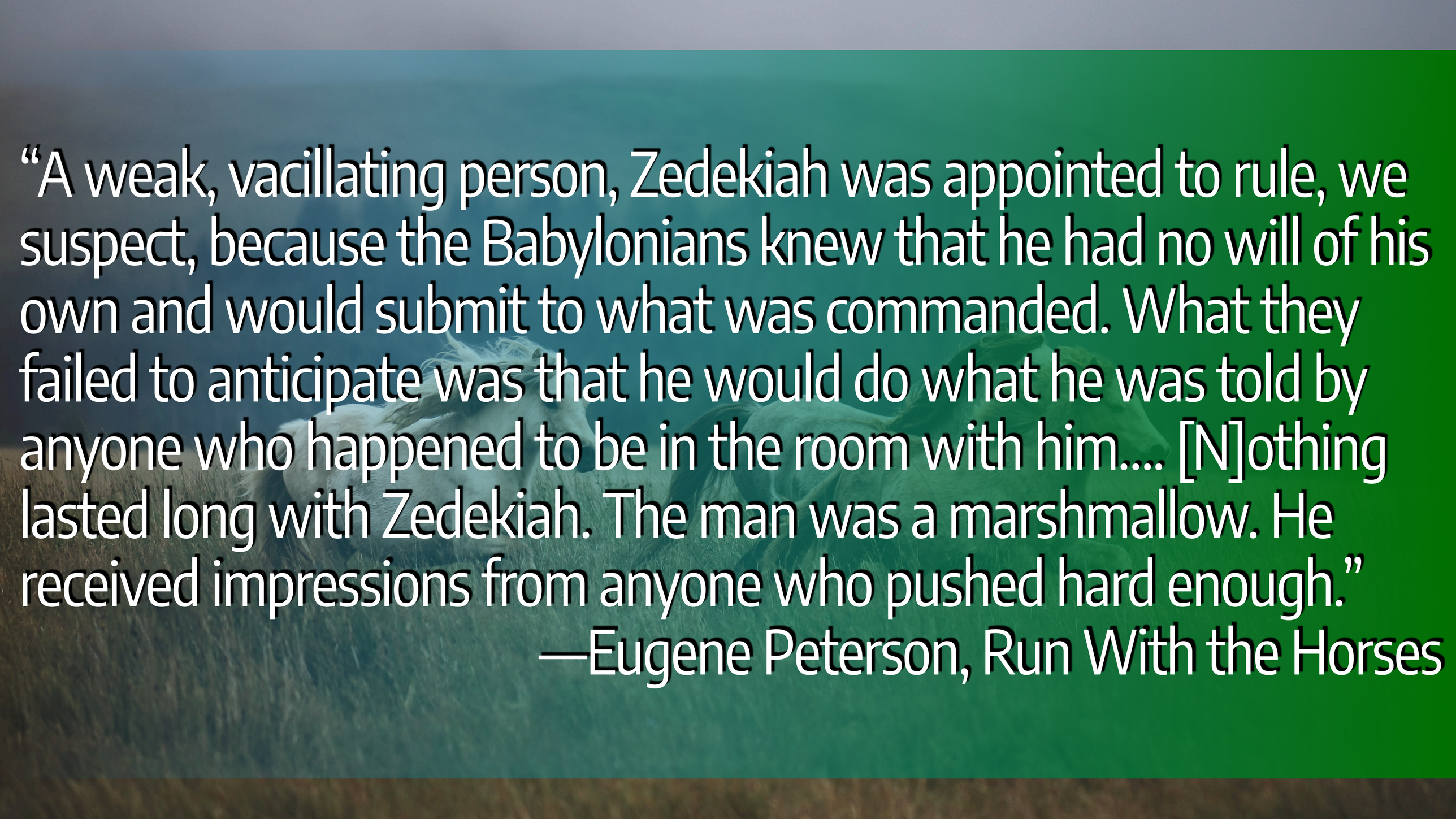
“Furthermore, tell the people, ‘This is what the LORD says: See, I am setting before you the way of life and the way of death. **Whoever stays in this city will die by the sword, famine or plague.** But whoever goes out and surrenders to the Babylonians who are besieging you will live; they will escape with their lives” (Jer. 21:8-9).

Hands

38:3 This city will certainly be given into the **hands** of the army of the king of Babylon...

38:4 This man should be put to death. He is **discouraging** the soldiers who are left in this city...

38:5 “He is in your **hands**,” King Zedekiah answered. “The king can do nothing to oppose you.”



“A weak, vacillating person, Zedekiah was appointed to rule, we suspect, because the Babylonians knew that he had no will of his own and would submit to what was commanded. What they failed to anticipate was that he would do what he was told by anyone who happened to be in the room with him.... [N]othing lasted long with Zedekiah. The man was a marshmallow. He received impressions from anyone who pushed hard enough.”

—Eugene Peterson, Run With the Horses

Cisterns

—Common near homes

—12-15 feet deep

—Shaped like bottom half of hourglass

—Emptier in summer

—Hole covered by stone





Ebed-Melek = “servant of the king”



Hands

38:10 Take thirty men **with you**

38:11 Ebed-Melek took the men **with him**

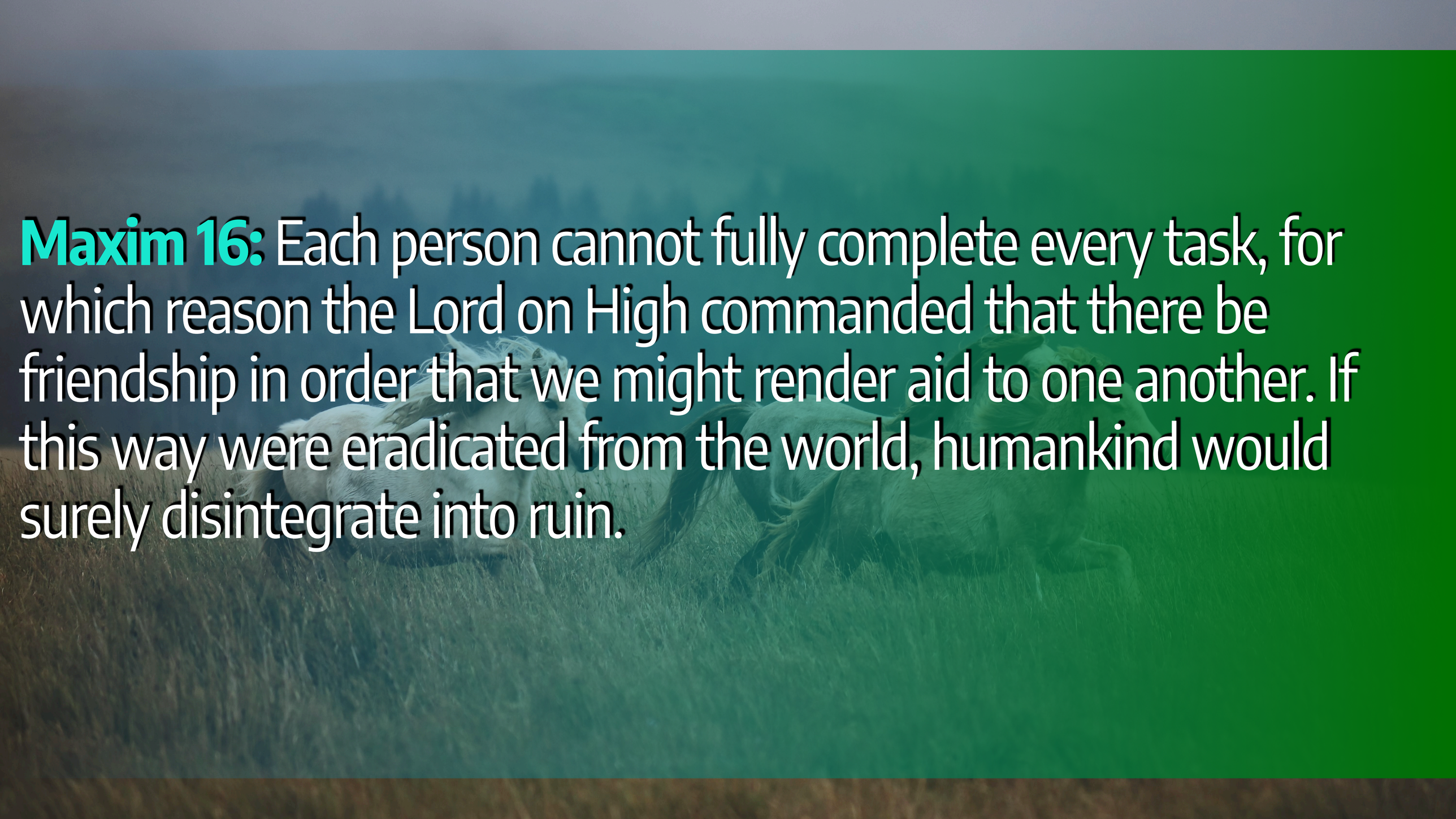
Hands

38:12 Put these rags under your **arms** to protect them



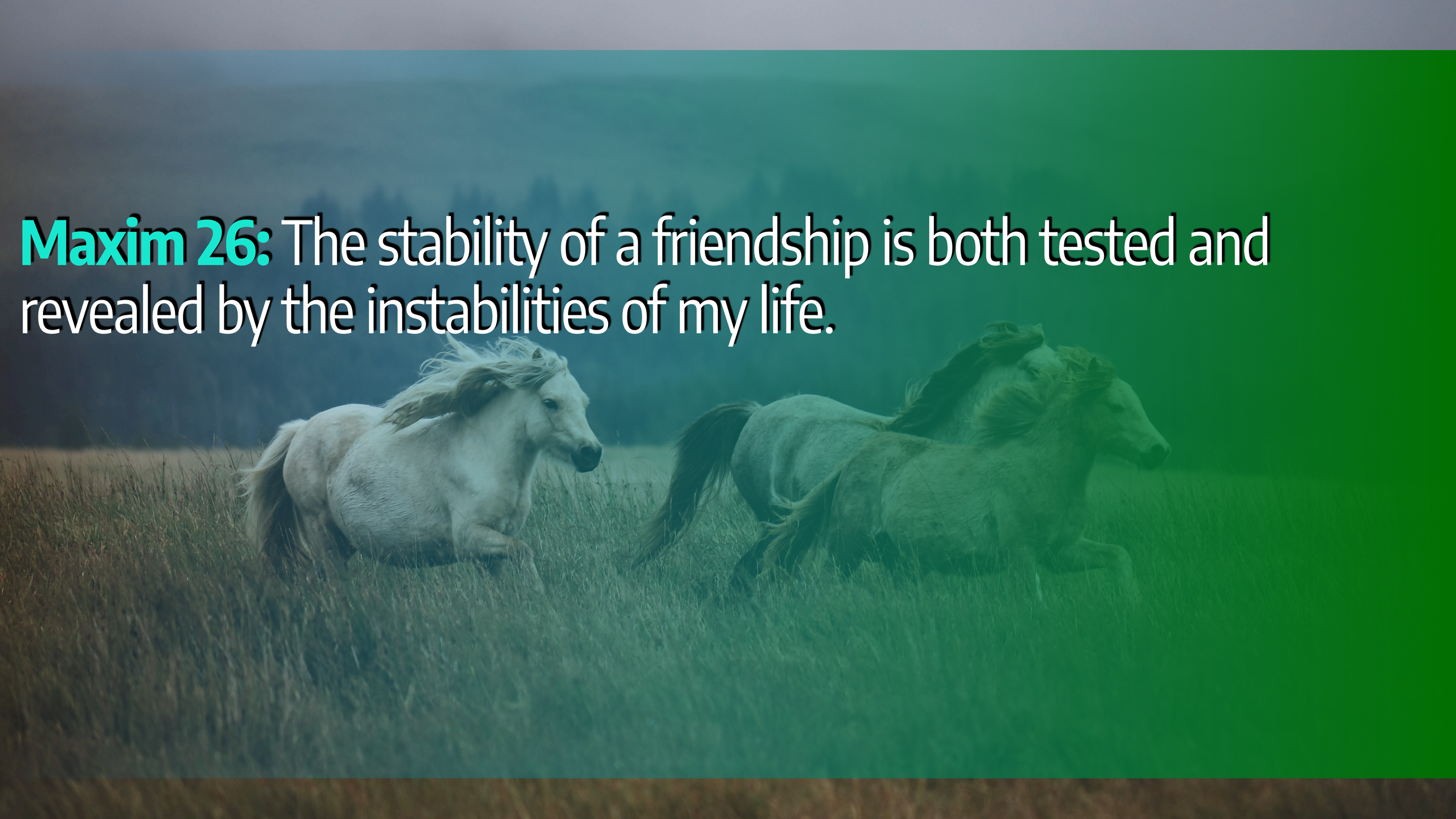
Jeremiah, the man whose message was weakening the hands of Judah's army, who found himself in the wrong hands of his enemies, doomed by a king with weak hands, is rescued by a friend who even goes so far as to protect Jeremiah's hands. All because he stirred his stumps.

Maxim 5: When life is peaceful and without trouble, it is difficult to distinguish the true from the false friend. Only when difficulties arise do the true feelings of a friend reveal themselves. For in a time of crisis, true friends will draw closer, and false friends will become increasingly scarce.



Maxim 16: Each person cannot fully complete every task, for which reason the Lord on High commanded that there be friendship in order that we might render aid to one another. If this way were eradicated from the world, humankind would surely disintegrate into ruin.

Maxim 26: The stability of a friendship is both tested and revealed by the instabilities of my life.

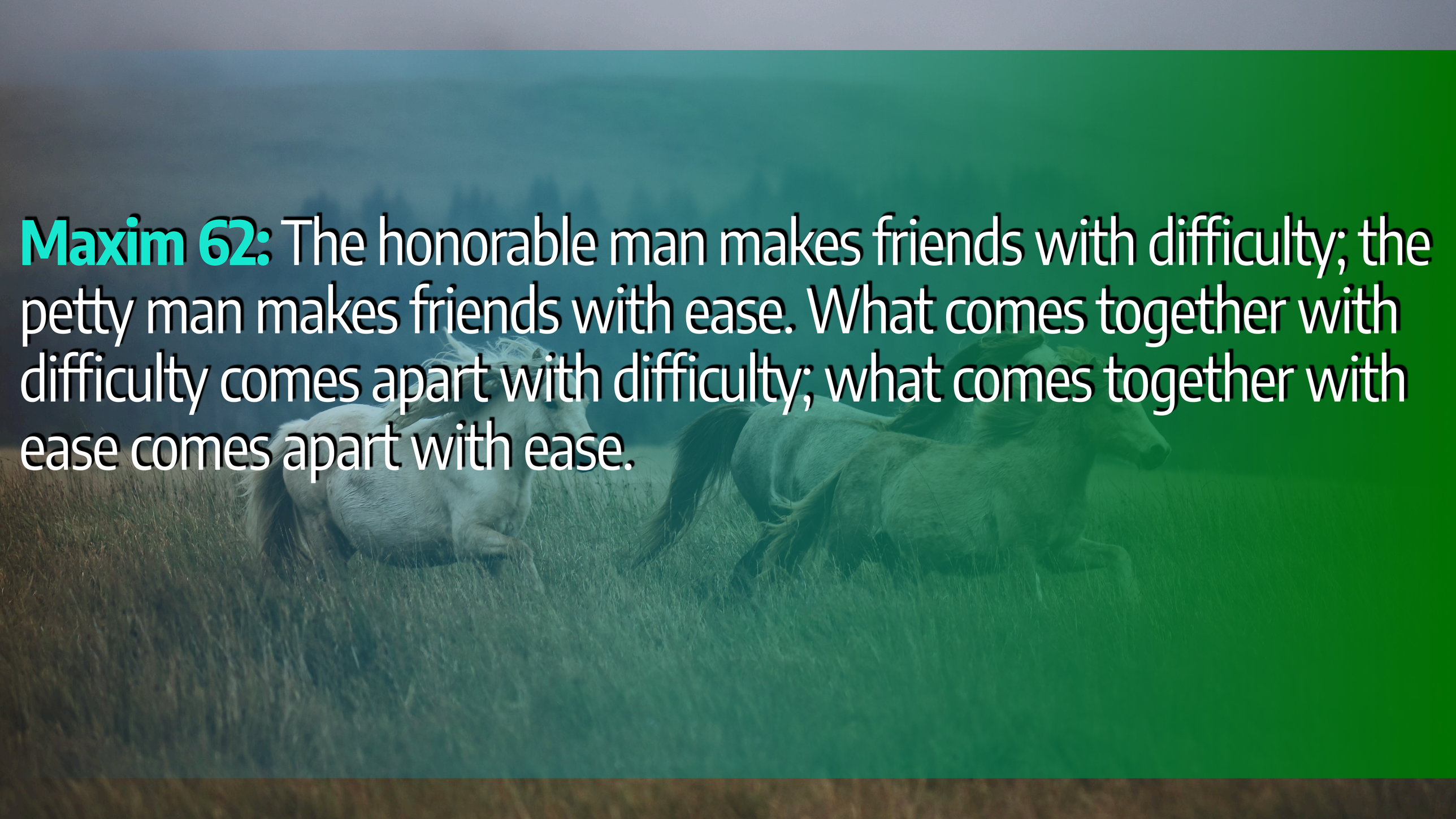




Maxim 33: If we tolerate the vices of a friend, then those vices become our own vices.



Maxim 48: An old friend is a great friend, one who should not be abandoned. If, for no reason, you change old for new, you will soon regret it.



Maxim 62: The honorable man makes friends with difficulty; the petty man makes friends with ease. What comes together with difficulty comes apart with difficulty; what comes together with ease comes apart with ease.

Maxim 72: The ritual of friends' praising one another is easy to perform. Helping one another, however, is difficult for friends. Because this is true, the great majority of friends are moved by the singing of their praises, but they forget the virtuousness of those who help them. Why is this? The reason is simply that one shows my strengths, while the other shows my weaknesses.