

Jer. 42:1-22 Praying After You Already Decided/ Falls Church AM 1/15/2023

Do we seek God's guidance first, or do we make up our own plans first, and then ask God to rubber stamp them?

Chapter 42 has a lesson for us on this topic. The situation is that a group of refugees from Jerusalem were in danger. They were running away from Jerusalem, and planning to run all the way to Egypt. They stopped part-way, and asked advice from the prophet Jeremiah. Jeremiah prayed, and after 10 days, God gave an answer. If they stayed, they would be safe. If they ran away to Egypt, they would be in danger.

This brings out spiritual lessons for us! Do we seek God's guidance first, or do we make up our own plans first, and then ask God to rubber stamp them?

**When God would not endorse their decision to trust/do the wrong thing, they mistrusted God and disobeyed Him, uncovering their desperate need for salvation.**

The lesson for us is found in Philippians 4:19, where the apostle Paul wrote, "...my God will supply every need of yours according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus." Do we trust God fully and implicitly for all areas of our lives? Or, do we trust ourselves, and just look to God to smile on our plans?

**1. On the road to where they wanted to go, pausing to ask for God's instructions. (v.1-4)**

They wanted to go to Egypt. When they asked Jeremiah to pray for them, it was really wanting God to approve of their plans, so that they could feel better about it all.

Verse 1, Johanan and all the commanders of the people gathered.

Verse 2, they asked Jeremiah to pray for them, but listen closely, can you hear the problem when I read their request to Jeremiah? It goes like this, "*Let our plea for mercy come before you, and pray to the LORD your God for us...*" God is your God, Jeremiah.

Also, back up 3 verses, to chapter 41, verse 17. These people ran from Jerusalem and were staying near Bethlehem, intending to do what? "*intending to go to Egypt.*" It does not say, "Intending to ask God what to do next." No. It says, "*intending to go to Egypt.*" We know their intent!

Now look at chapter 42:3, where they are asking Jeremiah to pray for them, "...*that the LORD YOUR God may show us the way we should go, and the thing that we should do.*" Right.

SI – one of my children called me on my cell phone. I will not identify which of my four children, because I cannot remember which one. "Hello?" "Hi, Dad" "I hear car noise, are you in the garage?" "No" "Where are you?" "Driving, at a stop light." "Where are you going?" "To my friend's house." "Who told you that you could go to your friend's house?" "That is what I was calling to ask you."

“You called me while you are on the way to your friend’s house, in order to ask permission to go to your friend’s house?” “Right” “What would you do if the answer is no?” [Long pause.] I would come home? “Right answer, but do you see the problem?” “the problem?” That you are out of sequence. Sequence? Is there an echo on the line? An echo on the line? It is called a rubber stamp. A rubber stamp?

The problem is how you see your Dad. You see your Dad as a permission giver, instead of a wisdom giver. Because of that, you are out of sequence - instead of first asking Dad for wisdom about your decision, you first made your decision and 2<sup>nd</sup>, acted upon it, and 3<sup>rd</sup>, asked Dad to line up with your decision. But you had already decided, and you already acted, and you are already half-way there, so all you see me as good for is a rubber-stamp on your decision. [Long pause.] That is really wise Dad, I’ll be home in a few minutes. Hey, Dad, when I get home, can we start over? Yes.

Consider the Lord Jesus Christ, and how He spoke to God His Father. What sort of submission did Jesus show to His Father? Listen to the prayer of Jesus in Luke 22:42, “*Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me. Nevertheless, not My will, but Yours, be done.*”

Philippians 2:8, Jesus “...*humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*”

Since this sort of obedience is shown by Christ the Son of God, then this sort of obedience is required of all the children of God our Father.

Back to our story. In verse 4, Jeremiah graciously said to the people who were half-way to Egypt, that Jeremiah would pray for them. Listen carefully to verse 4, do you get the sense that Jeremiah predicted that God would disapprove? Verse 4 reads, “*Jeremiah the prophet said to them, ‘I have heard you. Behold, I will pray to the LORD your God according to your request, and whatever the LORD answers you I will tell you. I will keep nothing back from you.’*”

## **2. Falsely pledging to comply with whatever God’s answer would be. (v.5-6)**

Verse 5, the people said, “May God be witness against us...” We hear this sort of language in the writing of the Apostle Paul, don’t we?

Verse 6, the people even said, “Whether it is good or bad, we will obey...and if you look at the end of verse 6, they actually said it a second time – that they would obey the voice of the LORD. Hm.

Did they mean that like Jesus meant that? Even if I must die for you, I will obey you? Did they mean it like that?

No.

They were being false. They were being fake. They were saying all the right words, but not meaning those words.

They lied. They lied to Jeremiah, lied to God, and lied to themselves.

I want you to notice something.

There is a pause of ten days between verse 6 and verse 7.

God sometimes lets time pass.

Just remember that, as you think about how prayer works.

God sometimes lets time pass.

Ten days is actually rather fast. Unless you live in a world with cell phones and texting and instant messaging. Or you are under 25 years old. Then ten days for an answer seems like a really long time. This brings us to our third point.

**3. Hearing God's unambiguously clear instructions and stark warnings! (v.7-22)** Verse 7, God's answer came to Jeremiah.

Verse 8, Jeremiah gathered everyone, not just the leaders, but everyone "*...from the least to the greatest.*"

Verse 9, Thus says the LORD.

Verse 10, Remain in the land, and I will build you up. Then God uses language that we remember from the initial call of Jeremiah in chapter 1:10, build up, not pull down, plant, not pluck up.

Verse 11, as far as the King of Babylon - who is upset that His appointee was assassinated - do not fear him. Why not? The LORD's answer is simple, "For I am with you." Immanuel! What does the nearness of God provide? God says He provides saving and delivering from anyone such as the King of Babylon.

In fact, in verse 12, God went on to say that God is even able to make the King of Babylon be merciful to them! What a beautiful thing. All they need to do is stay in the land. Do not flee. Do not mistrust God.

Verse 13 begins the warning. If they will not remain in the land....if they will not obey God verse 14, if they go to Egypt...

Then verse 15 hear the LORD's answer to that, in verse 16, the sword that you fear from the King of Babylon, will actually over take you in Egypt! Not only the sword, but also starvation. They will starve to death!

Verse 17, we get a repeat of the triple threat - dying by sword, by famine, and by pestilence. No remnant. No survivors. This disaster will be from the LORD Himself!

Verse 18, God's anger and wrath were poured out on Jerusalem in the overthrow by Babylon, so also will God's wrath be poured out on these refugees when they flee to Egypt. God now added four more words beyond the famous 3 words. Now we read that the people would become "*an execration (which is to detest), a horror, a curse, and a taunt...*" And they shall never see the land again!

Verse 19, God has been so clear - do not go to Egypt!

Verse 20, it is a fatal mistake, it will cost them their lives for sure.

Verse 20, Jeremiah reminded them that they promised to obey whatever answer came back from God.

Verse 21, Jeremiah came back with the answer from God, but they did not obey it.

Verse 22, Egypt equals death. Pretty clear. But God is not vindictive or hateful.

Rather, God wants to teach them. God want to be clear, so that they will learn. Hebrews 12:5, "...have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? 'My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the LORD, nor be weary when reproved by [the LORD]. For the Lord disciplines the one He loves, and chastises every son whom He receives.'" And in verse 11, we read, "For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it."

God wants to teach and to train. Do we want to be taught and to be trained?

God our Father has a heart that wants to disciple us and show us.

Do we have hearts that desire to be disciplined, to be shown, to be corrected and guided?

Do we see God our heavenly Father as the permission giver for our plans, or do we see Him as the wisdom giver for His plans for us?

What happens when we ignore God's leading?

Is it safe to run away from God, from His land, from His Word, from His guidance?

The God who would destroy His city and His temple, when sin were upon them, would He destroy people who left His land, left His guidance, left Him? The God who would destroy His own Son, when sin was placed upon Him, would this God destroy people who left His church, left His Word, left Him?

It is not safe to leave the LORD.

What happens when we ignore God's leading is we enter spiritual danger.

Best thing to do is stop. Pray. Lord, what shall I do now?

You will have clear instruction from God with stark contrast painted about what happens if you do the right thing, and what happens if you decide to do the wrong thing instead. Famine, sword, pestilence.

Fast forward. Jesus came to Jerusalem. Sins placed upon Him, and beatings, crucifixion, and a crown of thorns.

God will not allow you and your inner lawyer to put up the foggy defense. You sought God's guidance, but the answer was too foggy. No. If your mind was made up all along, then God will reveal to you that your mind was made up all along.

Are your plans yours? Give up your plans. Start over.

Pray to God with some guidance and help, such as words from our closing hymn. *Thy way, not mine, O Lord,  
How ever dark it be!*

*Lead me by thine own hand,  
Choose out the path for me;  
Smooth let it be or rough,  
It will be still the best;  
Winding or straight, it leads  
Right onward to thy rest.*

*The kingdom that I seek  
Is thine; so let the way  
That leads to it be thine,  
Else I must surely stray.  
I dare not choose my lot;  
I would not if I might:  
Choose thou for me, my God,  
So shall I walk aright.*

*Take thou my cup, and it  
With joy or sorrow fill  
As best to thee may seem;  
Choose thou my good and ill.  
Not mine, not mine the choice  
In things or great or small;  
Be thou my Guide, my Strength,  
My Wisdom, and my All.*

### **Conclusion:**

1. God's guidance is clear, and don't say otherwise. Stay in the land. This represents staying in the realm of faith and the ways of God, and not turning to the ways of the world. Trusting that God's judgment through Babylon points ahead to God's judgment on Christ at the cross. The exile points ahead to Christ's burial followed by His resurrection. Staying in the land means submitting to the need for sins to be punished by a holy God in the way that God say for sins to be punished. God's clear guidance is the gospel. God's clear guidance is to come to Christ in repentance and faith, and trust in Him alone for salvation. God's guidance is to continually seek Christ through His Word and Spirit. God's guidance was given through Jeremiah, and later was given clearly through His Son the Lord Jesus Christ. Listen to the words of Jesus in Luke 9:23-24, "*And [Jesus] said to all, 'If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.'*" God's guidance is clear, and don't say otherwise.

2. When you are afraid, go to God for protection and comfort. When David was afraid of the Philistines, he wrote in Psalm 56:3, “*When I am afraid, I put my trust in you.*” This bears on our salvation and our Christian living. The enemies of Babylonians, and the Egyptians, and the Philistines are all picture of the enemies of God’s people today, our own sinful natures, and the world, and the devil, and even death itself. Hebrews 10:19-23, “...*since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.*” When we are afraid, we go to God our Father through Jesus the risen Son, for protection and comfort, for God our Father is faithful.

3. When you seek God’s guidance, start by obeying the guidance you already have. Another way to say it is God has been trying to get your attention for a long time. The people we studied today in chapter 42, already had been given the guidance to submit to God’s plan of the overthrow of Babylon, the exile, and the later restoration from the exile. If they had started with that, they would not have been praying about fleeing to Egypt. Proverbs 16:25, “*There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.*” God has given us the way of life. Don’t try to invent your own ways to go through this broken world, and ask for God’s rubber stamp. Jeremiah 21:8, the LORD said, “*Behold, I set before you the way of life and the way of death...*” Fast forward years later, our Lord Jesus repeated this guidance for the people in the same city in Matthew 7:13-14, “*Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.*” Start with obeying the clear guidance from God that you already have. Turn to God the Father through Jesus Christ the Son of God, who died and rose again to become the Way to God for us. John 14:6, “*I am the way, the truth, and the life, no man comes to the Father, except through me.*” We must come to God through Jesus Christ by saving faith. When we seek God’s guidance, we need to start by obeying the guidance we already have.

4. Live on the Word and prayer. Don’t start by making up your own plans. Start by digging into the Word of God. What does the Bible say about your question? Take it to the Lord in prayer. Jesus taught us to pray the Lord’s prayer, “*Father... Your will be done.*” Is that truly your prayer? Do you want God’s will?

Or do you want God to breath out energy and blessing onto your will, your preferences, your way of structuring the world? You could pray the prayer of Jeremiah 42:3, but unlike those people you have to mean it. "...show us the way we should go, and the thing that we should do." And when the Lord answers back, you need to live that out, and rejoice in it. Let me give you an example. You pray for a problem to be taken away. The answer comes back from God's Word in Romans 12:12, "*Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.*" Live on the Word and prayer. That is the Christian life. Paul wrote it out in Romans 12:1, "*I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable, and perfect.*" Choose life. We live on the Word and prayer.