

Jeremiah 42-44 • Seeking God's Counsel

Introduction

The context for this lesson takes place immediately after the fall of Jerusalem. Jeremiah has been rescued by the captain of the Babylonian army, Nebuzaradan, and offered a safe haven in Babylon. Jeremiah, however, elects to stay in Judah. Meanwhile, Nebuchadnezzar has appointed Gedaliah as governor of Judah. Gedaliah fails to heed warnings and is assassinated by Ishmael, a member of the royal family, who is angry that it was Gedaliah who was appointed governor and not himself. Fearing reprisal by Nebuchadnezzar, Ishmael flees Judah taking the remnant with him, including Jeremiah. Ishmael is pursued by Johanan, one of Judah's remaining commanders, and Ishmael, upon seeing he is greatly outnumbered, flees with his men to the Ammonites leaving the remnant and Jeremiah behind. Johanan and the remnant relocate near Bethlehem with the intent of proceeding south into Egypt because they, too, fear reprisal by Nebuchadnezzar over Gedaliah's assassination. We pick up the story in chapter 42.

¹Then all the commanders of the forces, Johanan the son of Kareah, Jezeiah the son of Hoshai, and all the people both small and great approached ²and said to Jeremiah the prophet, "Please let our petition come before you, and pray for us to the LORD your God, that is for all this remnant; because we are left but a few out of many, as your own eyes now see us, ³that the LORD your God may tell us the way in which we should walk and the thing that we should do."

⁴Then Jeremiah the prophet said to them, "I have heard you. Behold, I am going to pray to the LORD your God in accordance with your words; and I will tell you the whole message which the LORD will answer you. I will not keep back a word from you."

⁵Then they said to Jeremiah, "May the LORD be a true and faithful witness against us if we do not act in accordance with the whole message with which the LORD your God will send you to us."

⁶Whether it is pleasant or unpleasant, we will listen to the voice of the LORD our God to whom we are sending you, so that it may go well with us when we listen to the voice of the LORD our God."

[Read 42:1-6]

Q: What is it that Johanan and the other commanders want Jeremiah to pray about?

A: Whether or not they should remain in Judah or proceed south to relocate in Egypt (v. 3)

Q: But how did they WORD their request? What gives it a scope far beyond just seeking a way out of the present circumstances?

A: The request for the present situation is "...God may tell us...the thing that we should do..."; however, they qualified it by also requesting that God "...tell us the way in which we should walk...". This is a lifestyle question that opens the door to seeking not just how to survive the moment but how to live their entire life in a manner worthy and approved by God. They should have expected an answer that would provide not just a temporary change in their conditions but a life-long change in their hearts.

Q: According to v.4, how will Jeremiah approach his request to God on their behalf? Is he seeking to bless or sanction their preferences?

A: Jeremiah only promises to use their exact words and reply with God's exact words; nothing more or less.

Q: What do they promise will be their response to Jeremiah's answer no matter what it is? From whom do they acknowledge the answer will come?

A: They promise that they will do whatever Jeremiah tells them to do, regardless of what it is. They acknowledge that the word will come from the LORD Himself (v. 6)

⁷Now at the end of ten days the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah. ⁸Then he called for Johanan the son of Kareah and all the commanders of the forces that were with him, and for all the people both small and great, ⁹and said to them, “Thus says the LORD the God of Israel, to whom you sent me to present your petition before Him: ¹⁰‘If you will indeed stay in this land, then I will build you up and not tear you down, and I will plant you and not uproot you; for I will relent concerning the calamity that I have inflicted on you. ¹¹Do not be afraid of the king of Babylon, whom you are now fearing; do not be afraid of him,’ declares the LORD, ‘for I am with you to save you and deliver you from his hand. ¹²I will also show you compassion, so that he will have compassion on you and restore you to your own soil. ¹³But if you are going to say, “We will not stay in this land,” so as not to listen to the voice of the LORD your God, ¹⁴saying, “No, but we will go to the land of Egypt, where we will not see war or hear the sound of a trumpet or hunger for bread, and we will stay there”; ¹⁵then in that case listen to the word of the LORD, O remnant of Judah. Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, “If you really set your mind to enter Egypt and go in to reside there, ¹⁶then the sword, which you are afraid of, will overtake you there in the land of Egypt; and the famine, about which you are anxious, will follow closely after you there in Egypt, and you will die there. ¹⁷So all the men who set their mind to go to Egypt to reside there will die by the sword, by famine and by pestilence; and they will have no survivors or refugees from the calamity that I am going to bring on them.””

¹⁸For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, “As My anger and wrath have been poured out on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so My wrath will be poured out on you when you enter Egypt. And you will become a curse, an object of horror, an imprecation and a reproach; and you will see this place no more.”

[Read 42:7-18]

Q: For how long a period did Jeremiah seek the Lord's counsel?

A: 10 days (v. 7)

Q: List the promises God has for the remnant if they choose to remain in the land of Judah.

A: Approximately 6 good things will happen to them, recorded in verses 10-12.

1. God will build them up. (v.10)
2. God will plant them (v.10)
3. God will ease the effects of His judgment (v.10)
4. God will protect them from the king of Babylon (v.11)
5. God will show them compassion (v.12)
6. God will restore the remnant to their land (v.12)

Q: List the promises God has for the remnant if they choose to seek refuge in Egypt.

A: Approximately 7 bad things will happen to them, recorded in verses 16-18.

1. The sword will overtake them. (v.16)
2. The famine will follow them there and result in death. (v.16)
3. Death will also come by pestilences. (v.17)
4. There will be no survivors or even refugees. (v.17)
5. God's anger and wrath will be poured out upon them. (v.18)
6. They will become a curse, a reproach. (v.18)
7. They will never see Israel again. (v.18)

¹⁹The LORD has spoken to you, O remnant of Judah, “Do not go into Egypt!” You should clearly understand that today I have testified against you. ²⁰For you have only deceived yourselves; for it is you who sent me to the LORD your God, saying, “Pray for us to the LORD our God; and whatever the LORD our God says, tell us so, and we will do it.” ²¹So I have told you today, but you have not obeyed the LORD your God, even in whatever He has sent me to tell you. ²²Therefore you should now clearly understand that you will die by the sword, by famine and by pestilence, in the place where you wish to go to reside.

^{43:1}But as soon as Jeremiah, whom the LORD their God had sent, had finished telling all the people all the words of the LORD their God—that is, all these words— ²Azariah the son of Hoshaiah, and Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the arrogant men said to Jeremiah, “You are telling a lie! The LORD our God has not sent you to say, ‘You are not to enter Egypt to reside there’; ³but Baruch the son of Neriah is inciting you against us to give us over into the hand of the Chaldeans, so they will put us to death or exile us to Babylon.” ⁴So Johanan the son of Kareah and all the commanders of the forces, and all the people, did not obey the voice of the LORD to stay in the land of Judah. ⁵But Johanan the son of Kareah and all the commanders of the forces took the entire remnant of Judah who had returned from all the nations to which they had been driven away, in order to reside in the land of Judah— ⁶the men, the women, the children, the king’s daughters and every person that Nebuzaradan the captain of the bodyguard had left with Gedaliah the son of Ahikam and grandson of Shaphan, together with Jeremiah the prophet and Baruch the son of Neriah— ⁷and they entered the land of Egypt (for they did not obey the voice of the LORD) and went in as far as Tahpanhes.

[Read 42:19-22]

Q: Who is speaking now?

A: Jeremiah is speaking. The Lord was speaking in verses 9-18.

Q: What is Jeremiah’s appendix to the Lord’s word?

A: Essentially, “You haven’t ever listened to me before. Why would you start now? And if you don’t, these really bad things are going to happen to you.”

Q: Who often had Jeremiah been correct in the past?

A: Like a true prophet, he was always correct, never wrong. Everything he had predicted before was unheeded but came true.

[Read 43:1-7]

Q: What is so incredible about these verses? What’s the dynamic going on here? Why do you think they would proceed to Egypt in spite of Jeremiah’s prophecy?

A: The incredible thing is that, true to Jeremiah’s prediction, they didn’t listen to his counsel even though they had said that they would. The dynamic is one of self-deception. They will only follow what goes along with their own feelings/opinion of the circumstances, not God’s. In verse 2 they accuse Jeremiah of telling a lie, but who is the one lying?

Application: *Can you come up with examples or parallels in your own life or in the lives of people you know where they have failed to heed counsel? What about our own approach to God’s Word? Do we heed the counsel from God’s Word? If not, why?*

¹¹“Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, ‘Behold, I am going to set My face against you for woe, even to cut off all Judah. ¹²And I will take away the remnant of Judah who have set their mind on entering the land of Egypt to reside there, and they will all meet their end in the land of Egypt; they will fall by the sword and meet their end by famine. Both small and great will die by the sword and famine; and they will become a curse, an object of horror, an imprecation and a reproach. ¹³And I will punish those who live in the land of Egypt, as I have punished Jerusalem, with the sword, with famine and with pestilence. ¹⁴So there will be no refugees or survivors for the remnant of Judah who have entered the land of Egypt to reside there and then to return to the land of Judah, to which they are longing to return and live; for none will return except a few refugees.”

¹⁵Then all the men who were aware that their wives were burning sacrifices to other gods, along with all the women who were standing by, as a large assembly, including all the people who were living in Pathros in the land of Egypt, responded to Jeremiah, saying, ¹⁶“As for the message that you have spoken to us in the name of the LORD, we are not going to listen to you! ¹⁷But rather we will certainly carry out every word that has proceeded from our mouths, by burning sacrifices to the queen of heaven and pouring out drink offerings to her, just as we ourselves, our forefathers, our kings and our princes did in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem; for then we had plenty of food and were well off and saw no misfortune. ¹⁸But since we stopped burning sacrifices to the queen of heaven and pouring out drink offerings to her, we have lacked everything and have met our end by the sword and by famine.”

¹⁹“And,” said the women, “when we were burning sacrifices to the queen of heaven and were pouring out drink offerings to her, was it without our husbands that we made for her sacrificial cakes in her image and poured out drink offerings to her?”

[Read 44:11-19]

Q: How do these verses help explain why the remnant failed to remain in the land of Judah?

A: It boils down to economic factors. Rather than obey God they would rather sell out to other gods for the sake of the economy. What’s wrong with this picture?

Q: Who ends up blaming whom?

A: The husbands blame the wives (v. 15) and the wives turn around and blame the husbands (v. 19). It’s like the men saying, “Well, *she* started it” and the wives responding, “Yes, but you did it too!”

Q: What’s being said in verse 18?

A: It appears that in the two-year siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, some may have actually stopped idol worship for fear of invasion, hoping that God would grant them a reprieve. What they didn’t know (because they didn’t listen to Jeremiah) was that regardless of who they worshipped, God was intent of destroying Jerusalem because (1) the enormous sins that had gone before them culminating in the sins of Manasseh, son of Josiah, and (2) it was their hearts that weren’t right even if they temporarily stopped worshiping idols. So they have returned to idol worship in hopes of making things “prosperous” like they were before. Like many Christians today, they incorrectly assumed that prosperity and abundance was a sign that things were okay between them and God.

FYI: “...the queen of heaven...” *The MacArthur Study Bible* states, “The Jews were worshipping Ishtar, an Assyrian and Babylonian goddess also called Ashtoreth and Astarte, the wife of Baal or Molech. Because these deities symbolized generative power, their worship involved prostitution.” Also, “This is a title Roman Catholicism erroneously attributes to Mary, the mother of Jesus, in a blending of Christianity with paganism. The Jews’ twisted thinking credits the idol with the prosperity of pre-captivity Judah, further mocking the goodness of God.”

Q: What ever happened to this remnant and to Jeremiah?

A: What happens to the remnant is predicted in Jeremiah 43:8-13; 44:1-10; 20-30; 46:1-26. Though there is no biblical record of this, history records that Nebuchadnezzar invaded Egypt and utterly destroyed it. Before it could rise again, the Persians maintained control of Egypt, followed by Alexander the Great. Egypt was never again a great world power. Regarding Jeremiah, Jewish tradition states that it was Jeremiah who was “sawn in two” by his own people while in Egypt.

“They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated”

—Hebrews 11:37

Overall Application

Regardless of how things might appear on the surface, what is the most important factor in life to receive God's blessings?

*Samuel said, "Has the Lord as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices As in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams."
— 1 Samuel 15:22*

*Individually, have each person in the group share how he or she can better obey the Lord. Offer prayer up for the things shared. Are you or someone in the group struggling with **NOT** receiving an answer from God in the way hoped or desired?*