

The Remnant's Disobedience

Jeremiah 42-43

Jeremiah 42:1-6 - *"Now all the captains of the forces, Johanan the son of Kareah, Jezaniah the son of Hoshaiah, and all the people, from the least to the greatest, came near ² and said to Jeremiah the prophet, "Please, let our petition be acceptable to you, and pray for us to the Lord your God, for all this remnant (since we are left but a few of many, as you can see), ³ that the Lord your God may show us the way in which we should walk and the thing we should do."*

⁴ Then Jeremiah the prophet said to them, "I have heard. Indeed, I will pray to the Lord your God, according to your words, and it shall be, that whatever the Lord answers you, I will declare it to you. I will keep nothing back from you."

⁵ So they said to Jeremiah, "Let the Lord be a true and faithful witness between us, if we do not do according to everything which the Lord your God sends us by you. ⁶ Whether it is pleasing or displeasing, we will obey the voice of the Lord our God to whom we send you, that it may be well with us when we obey the voice of the Lord our God."

Background Notes

Jeremiah 39 recorded the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians under the leadership of Nebuchadnezzar. Chapter 40 recorded the Nebuchadnezzar's appointment of Gedaliah as the puppet governor of Jerusalem, and how the Babylonian commander allowed Jeremiah to choose to go with the captives to Babylon or stay with the poor people in the ruined land. Jeremiah chose to stay in the Land with the refugees and the poor people of Judah.

Jeremiah 41 recorded the sad event of the assassination of the governor, Gedaliah, after a rule of only two months. Ishmael, who had some connections to royalty, killed him. Ishmael was able to escape across the Jordan River to the country of Ammon.

In Jeremiah 42, all the people who were left in Jerusalem asked Jeremiah to go to the Lord and ask for direction. Should they stay in Jerusalem to face another possible attack by the Babylonians? After all, Gedaliah, who was Nebuchadnezzar's handpicked governor, had been assassinated. Or should they go to Egypt, where they thought they would be safe from Babylonian revenge?

Doctrinal Points

Even God's people say one thing but *do* another.

Jeremiah 42:7-22 - *"And it happened after ten days that the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah. ⁸ Then he called Johanan the son of Kareah, all the captains of the forces which were with him, and all the people from the least even to*

the greatest, ⁹ and 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 still remain in this land, then I will build you and not pull you down, and I will plant you and not pluck you up. For I relent concerning the disaster that I have brought upon you.

¹¹ Do not be afraid of the king of Babylon, of whom you are afraid; do not be afraid of him,’ says the Lord, ‘for I am with you, to save you and deliver you from his hand. ¹² And I will show you mercy, that he may have mercy on you and cause you to return to your own land.’

¹³ “But if you say, ‘We will not dwell in this land,’ disobeying the voice of the Lord your God, ¹⁴ saying, ‘No, but we will go to the land of Egypt where we shall see no war, nor hear the sound of the trumpet, nor be hungry for bread, and there we will dwell’—

¹⁵ Then hear now the word of the Lord, O remnant of Judah! Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: ‘If you wholly set your faces to enter Egypt, and go to dwell there, ¹⁶ then it shall be that the sword which you feared shall overtake you there in the land of Egypt; the famine of which you were afraid shall follow close after you there in Egypt; and there you shall die. ¹⁷ So shall it be with all the men who set their faces to go to Egypt to dwell there. They shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence. And none of them shall remain or escape from the disaster that I will bring upon them.’

¹⁸ “For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: ‘As My anger and My fury have been poured out on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so will My fury be poured out on you when you enter Egypt. And you shall be an oath, an astonishment, a curse, and a reproach; and you shall see this place no more.’

¹⁹ “The Lord has said concerning you, O remnant of Judah, ‘Do not go to Egypt!’ Know certainly that I have admonished you this day. ²⁰ For you were hypocrites in your hearts when you sent me to the Lord your God, saying, ‘Pray for us to the Lord our God, and according to all that the Lord your God says, so declare to us and we will do it.’ ²¹ And I have this day declared it to you, but you have not obeyed the voice of the Lord your God, or anything that He has sent you by me. ²² Now therefore, know certainly that you shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence in the place where you desire to go to dwell.”

Jeremiah agreed to go before the Lord and ask for His direction. This is always a good thing to do in your decision making process - that is, if you **really** want to know the Lord’s will for your life, and you’re **really** willing to do as the Lord directs. Unfortunately, the people of Judah were not willing to do what the Lord told them to do.

Although they said, “Whether it is pleasing or displeasing, we will obey the voice of the Lord our God to whom we send you, that it may be well with us when we obey the voice of the Lord our God.” They said the right words, but did they mean them? No. Just ten days later, when the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, the people wouldn’t believe the truth. The Lord told them to stay in the Land, and not go to Egypt. He promised to protect them from Nebuchadnezzar if they stayed in the Land. In fact, the Lord said He would change Nebuchadnezzar’s heart so that he would show them compassion (v12).

But He also told them that if they chose to go to Egypt, they would die there (v16). The sword of the Babylonians would overtake them in Egypt, and they would never see Jerusalem again. They would die by sword, by famine, and by pestilence in Egypt (v22). This was the clear and straightforward word of the Lord.

So what did the people do? *“So they went to the land of Egypt, for they did not obey the voice of the Lord” (Jeremiah 43:7).* They went to Egypt! Can you believe it? Incredible! Why? They went to Egypt because *they wanted* to go to Egypt. They went, even though they said they would do whatever the Lord said, whether pleasant or unpleasant. That’s what they said - but it was only words. They had an agenda. They wanted to go to Egypt - so they went to Egypt. God’s people may say one thing, but do another.

This is still true today, wouldn’t you agree? Many times I’ve seen Christian people ask for counsel because they say they want to do God’s will, but then they only follow the biblical counsel if it agrees with what they intended to do in the first place! Even God’s people **say** one thing and **do** another. They do what they want to do.

Doctrinal Point for Jeremiah 43

Even God’s people reap what they sow.

Jeremiah 43 - *“Now it happened, when Jeremiah had stopped speaking to all the people all the words of the Lord their God, for which the Lord their God had sent him to them, all these words, ² that Azariah the son of Hoshaiah, Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the proud men spoke, saying to Jeremiah, “You speak falsely! The Lord our God has not sent you to say, ‘Do not go to Egypt to dwell there.’ ³ But Baruch the son of Neriah has set you against us, to deliver us into the hand of the Chaldeans, that they may put us to death or carry us away captive to Babylon.” ⁴ So Johanan the son of Kareah, all the captains of the forces, and all the people would not obey the voice of the Lord, to remain in the land of Judah. ⁵ But Johanan the son of Kareah and all the captains of the forces took all the remnant of Judah who had returned to dwell in the land of Judah, from all nations where they had been driven — ⁶ men, women, children, the king’s daughters, and every person whom Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard had left with Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, and Jeremiah the prophet and Baruch the son of Neriah. ⁷ So they went to the land of Egypt, for they did not obey the voice of the Lord. And they went as far as Tahpanhes.*

⁸ Then the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah in Tahpanhes, saying, ⁹ “Take large stones in your hand, and hide them in the sight of the men of Judah, in the clay in the brick courtyard which is at the entrance to Pharaoh’s house in Tahpanhes; ¹⁰ and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: “Behold, I will send and bring Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant, and will set his throne above these stones that I have hidden. And he will spread his royal pavilion over them. ¹¹ When he comes, he shall strike the land of Egypt and deliver to death those appointed for death, and to captivity those appointed for captivity, and to the sword those appointed for the sword. ¹² I will kindle a fire in the houses of the gods of Egypt, and he shall burn them and carry them away captive. And he shall array himself with the land of Egypt, as a shepherd puts on his garment, and he shall go out from there in peace. ¹³ He shall also break the sacred pillars of Beth Shemesh that are in the land of Egypt; and the houses of the gods of the Egyptians he shall burn with fire.””

Galatians 6:7 says, *“Do not be deceived. God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that shall he reap.”* If we’re under the impression that this principle applies only to unbelievers, just look at the context of Galatians 6. It was written to **believers**. Even God’s people reap what they sow.

That principle is illustrated in Jeremiah 43. The people who were left in Judah accused Jeremiah of purposely lying – that he was trying to get the people killed or exiled (v2-3)! What a terrible accusation! Clearly the people disobeyed the Lord when they went to Egypt, taking Jeremiah with them (v4&7).

They settled in the northeast Nile Delta area, at Tahpanhes, where the pharaoh had a palace. There the Lord gave Jeremiah another object lesson for the people. Jeremiah was to take some large stones and hide them in a brick terrace by pharaoh’s palace. The meaning was that the Jewish people, who thought they would be safe and hidden from Nebuchadnezzar in Egypt, were actually like “sitting ducks.” Nebuchadnezzar would invade Egypt, and they would not escape. The Babylonians invaded Egypt in 568-567 BC, and all that Jeremiah predicted (v12-13) came to pass. In fact, the giant obelisk in Central Park of New York City is a sacred item that was taken from Egypt. God’s word is true and accurate.

As God’s people in Jeremiah’s day reaped what they had sown, so God’s people today will reap what they sow. Don’t play games with God! Don’t imagine that He will overlook your disobedience. Even God’s people reap what they sow.

Practical Application

Let’s not crawl off the altar!

The people of Judah committed themselves to do whatever God wanted, whether it was pleasant or unpleasant - but then they didn’t keep their promise. In the same way, many Christians today don’t keep their commitments. For example, in Romans 12:1 we’re exhorted to present our bodies as living sacrifices for the Lord’s service – but sometimes after believers say they’ll lay their lives on the altar as living sacrifices, they “crawl off the altar.” They don’t want to do what the Lord asks them to do, so they go back on their commitment. Like the people of Judah, they do what **they** want to do.

What about us? The Lord wants us to present ourselves as living sacrifices for His service, whether it’s pleasant or unpleasant.

Let’s not crawl off the altar!