

JEREMIAH 42

“DON'T GO DOWN TO EGYPT!”

“Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help; and stay on horses and trust in chariots because they are many; and in horsemen because they are very strong; but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the Lord!” Such was the language addressed by Isaiah to the Jewish nation in his day (Isa. 31:1). In the most impressive manner, he reproved his people for their confidence in that country; for the Egyptians were “men and not God, and their horses flesh and not spirit” (Isa. 31:3). “The strength of Pharaoh would be their shame, and the trust in the shadow of Egypt their confusion” (Isa. 30:3).

From such predictions, as well as from those of Jeremiah, Johanan and his companions ought to have seen the folly of the course which they were now planning to follow. Nevertheless, they resolved to pursue it – for they had convinced themselves that in Egypt alone, they would be safe from the hands of the Babylonians, and that there they would find a refuge and a home. Therefore, they left Mizpah and headed in the direction of Egypt – taking with them all the men, women, and children whom Nebuzaradan had committed to the care of Gedaliah, including King Zedekiah’s own daughters. Apparently, they even took Jeremiah himself with them. Perhaps it was not without reason that they were afraid, but was there no other remedy at hand? Would not the blessing of God have rested upon their conduct, if they had placed their confidence in Him?

Having halted at the inn of Chimham, the people earnestly debated whether they should go forward to Egypt or stay in the land of Judah. They came to Jeremiah and asked him to give himself to prayer, so that the Lord would show them what they should do. The prophet promised to comply with their request, with the understanding that no matter what the Lord’s reply might be, they would obey it. And in the most solemn manner, they promised to do so. But sadly, although they professed their willingness to be guided entirely by Jehovah’s will, they had already determined to go down into Egypt; and they were simply entertaining a hope that the prophet’s answer from the Lord would be favorable to their wishes. Thus they were like the false prophet Balaam, who asked God for permission to go and curse Israel, because that was what he had already determined in his mind to do – even though he already knew the Lord’s will in the matter. Alas! It is not infrequent for persons to wish to take a certain path, and so they pray that it may be opened to them – even though they know beforehand, by the still small voice within their conscience, that it is not the will of God. If He has made clear to you what you should do, then do it without asking anything more about it – except that you may do it cheerfully and well!

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ *Johanan and all the people desire Jeremiah to pray for them, and to ask the Lord for His directions concerning what they ought to do – verses 1-6*
- ❖ *God gives Jeremiah His message, and he conveys it to the people – verses 7-22*

Ten days elapsed before the Lord returned an answer to Jeremiah's prayers. This delay gave the people more time for reflection over the state of their affairs, and it ought to have caused them to be better prepared for the reply. God *could* always answer the prayers of His servants immediately; but for the wisest reasons, He sometimes waits – thus teaching them to be patient and submissive, and calling into exercise their strongest faith.

But when the reply from the Lord did come, it was very much opposed to the desires of the people's hearts. They wanted to go down into Egypt; but they were commanded to remain in their own land, and not be afraid of the king of Babylon – for God would deliver them out of his hand. Moreover, He would build them up, and not pull them down; He would plant them, and not pluck them up. However, the Lord made it very clear that if they went ahead and persisted in their own ways, they would not find them to be as easy as they expected. They fondly imagined that if they went to Egypt, they would see no more war, hunger, or plagues; but the Lord assured them that the very evils which they dreaded would follow them to that place. There they would be overtaken by the sword, the famine, and the pestilence; and they would never again see their native land. They would die in the land into which they had forced themselves, and none of them would remain or escape.

How earnestly and faithfully the prophet delivered this expostulation! But alas! It was of no avail. These proud men who stood before him had already made up their minds as to what course they would take; and as we shall see in the next chapter, they answered him with the greatest insolence. As Jeremiah spoke, he must have become sadly aware that during the ten days which he had devoted to intercession on their behalf, their resolution in favor of Egypt had been growing. It must have been greatly disappointing for him to realize that his words would not stop the strong current which was bearing them southward to that land.

It would be well for us to observe that from the very first threatenings against the people of Judah, up to the words recorded in this chapter – the Lord's message continually remained the same. And if Zedekiah and his people had only listened to it, what calamities would have been spared them! But let us not overlook the personal interest that we have, in the present hour, to the same truths. If sinners would only look steadfastly to Jesus, and trust in His righteousness alone; and if they would not place their hope in the righteousness of themselves or any other creature – their salvation would be certain. But if we make the reeds of Egypt our confidence, instead of the Rock of Ages, what is this except the same conduct that Johanan and his countrymen were guilty of?

Lord, we confess that we have often been guilty of the same obstinate rebellion that was exhibited by Johanan and his people. Help us to turn for help and guidance to You, our living God, and not to lean on arms of flesh! Amen.