



The Fiery Bones

Jeremiah 20:9

Text

Jeremiah 40:1-12

Topic

In the aftermath of Jerusalem's fall Jeremiah is given a choice to live in either Babylon or Judah

Title

"Choosey Prophets Choose Judah"

Introduction

Do you *always* do God's will?

No, you don't; I don't. Others don't. If we did we wouldn't need to pray, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven."

Most of us believe God has a perfect will for our lives but that He gives us the freedom to choose whether or not to find and follow it. Some call this second tier God's permissive will.

I'm guilty of oversimplifying. The matter of God's will is a vast theological landscape. But while the scholars are arguing about it, you and I have practical decisions to make. We need to find and follow God's will.

While our text cannot make your choices for you, it can offer you two very important perspectives on choosing when it comes to God's perfect will for your life.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 You Should Choose To Remain In God's Will, and #2 You Should Choose To Return To God's Will.

#1 You Should Choose To Remain In God's Will

(v1-6)

Jerusalem had fallen to Babylon after a thirty-month siege. Chapters forty through forty-four focus on Jeremiah and on those Jews who survived the devastation and remained in Judah and in the nearby countries.

The Babylonians appointed Gedeliah, a Jew, as governor. He encouraged the Israeli troops out in the fields to lay down their arms and live at peace with Babylon, and he invited Jews who had fled or been driven from Judah and were living in nearby countries to return.

Gedeliah's governorship won't last long. The king of Ammon will plot with a Jewish soldier named Ishmael to assassinate him.

The last few verses of chapter forty start to get into that part of the history. We'll get into all the details next time we are together studying Jeremiah. Today we see Jeremiah, then the Jewish rebels and refugees, have an important choice to make.

Jeremiah 40:1 The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD after Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard had let him go from Ramah, when he had taken him bound in chains among all who were carried away captive from Jerusalem and Judah, who were carried away captive to Babylon.

In chapter thirty-nine we read that Jeremiah had been set free. How is it he was "bound in chains" in Ramah?

Probably, in the aftermath of the siege, the Babylonian soldiers mistakenly took Jeremiah prisoner along with the other captives and brought him to Ramah, which was a small town just a few miles outside of Jerusalem.

Another possibility is that Jeremiah was set free in Jerusalem but decided to accompany the captives to give them encouragement. Not realizing who he was and that he had been freed, the soldiers rearrested him.

In either case Nebuzaradan recognized him in Ramah and had him released.

Jeremiah 40:2 And the captain of the guard took Jeremiah and said to him: "The LORD your God has pronounced this doom on this place.

Jeremiah 40:3 Now the LORD has brought it, and has done just as He said. Because you people have sinned against the LORD, and not obeyed His voice, therefore this thing has come upon you.

Nebuzaradan was certainly not a believer. That didn't stop him from seeing prophecy being fulfilled.

Whether they realize it or not, nonbelievers are seeing prophecy being fulfilled before their very eyes. Israel is a nation again and in their land creating problems for the nations of the world - all in fulfillment of centuries old prophecies. Each week we suggest many other fulfillments of prophecy.

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If you want to get even more specific, Jesus Christ fulfilled over 300 prophecies in His birth, life, death and resurrection. The odds of one person doing that are almost incalculable.

If someone doesn't believe in Jesus, it's not because there is no evidence. It's because they don't want to.

Jeremiah 40:4 And now look, I free you this day from the chains that were on your hand. If it seems good to you to come with me to Babylon, come, and I will look after you. But if it seems wrong for you to come with me to Babylon, remain here. See, all the land is before you; wherever it seems good and convenient for you to go, go there."

Jeremiah was free to choose. He could accompany those being deported to Babylon where he would be treated well and be protected by Nebuzaradan. Or he could remain in Judah. His choices weren't unlimited (they never are!) but they were genuine.

Jeremiah 40:5 Now while Jeremiah had not yet gone back, Nebuzaradan said, "Go back to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, whom the king of Babylon has made governor over the cities of Judah, and dwell with him among the people. Or go wherever it seems convenient for you to go." So the captain of the guard gave him rations and a gift and let him go.

It almost sounds as though Jeremiah were hesitating between the two choices. Maybe he was. It only emphasizes for us that he was being given a real choice.

Jeremiah 40:6 Then Jeremiah went to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, to Mizpah, and dwelt with him among the people who were left in the land.

Jeremiah chose to remain in the land. Was this a good choice? Was it the right choice? More to our point, had he chosen the perfect will of God?

In this case we can without hesitation or reservation say, "Yes!", staying in the land was definitely God's perfect will for Jeremiah.

It was always God's will for a Jew to live in the land.

So much of what God had promised to the Jews involved their living in the land. Their lives and destinies were rooted in the Promised Land. From the Exodus forward they were to enter the land, possess the land, find their identity and blessing in the land.

They were only being dispossessed from the land temporarily, by God, on account of their sin. God had promised to return them to the land after the Babylonian captivity. He'd also made statements about them permanently dwelling in the land in the far future.

Jews were supposed to live in Judah. If you were carried off captive, forced away from Judah, fine; there was nothing you could do about that. Daniel and Ezekiel had been thus forced away to live in Babylon. But if you had the choice - and Jeremiah did - God's perfect will was to choose to remain in the land.

Our choices always seem more complicated but most times they are quite simple. God has revealed, in His Word, a great deal of what we would call His perfect will for our lives. We should remain in it.

Why would Jeremiah even hesitate? Well, for one thing, life in Babylon would be a lot more comfortable and much safer than life in Judah. He could settle there into a kind of retirement. After all, he was very old and persecution had taken its toll on him physically. There wouldn't be any real work to do - not compared to the rebuilding of Jerusalem anyway. As we will see, things got very dicey in Judah.

In the end he chose not just to remain in the land but to remain in God's will for his life.

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I often use marriage as an example in our studies because it is something we all can relate to. We know God's perfect will for marriage. If you are a believer His perfect will is that you marry another believer. God's will for marriage is that it be a monogamous relationship between one man and one woman to last their lifetime on this earth. There are a few grounds for divorce but even then it isn't commanded, only permitted.

God has gifted marriage with sexual gratification but any sex outside of marriage is sin. We are told plainly that "this is the will of God... that you should abstain from sexual immorality..." (First Thessalonians 4:3).

In every major area of our lives God has established what His will is for us. Whether it's the home or the church or our employment, we can read-up on God's will for us as believers and we can choose God's way. We can choose God's way because we have God's grace to empower us.

OK, but what about the more particular choices? I mean, we see God's will for marriage but how do I know who I should marry? Or what church to attend? Or what job to take?

We don't just have guidelines and the grace to follow them; we have a Guide to accompany us in life. Jesus promised He would send the Holy Spirit to live in us. He would be, and is, our Guide, applying the Word to the specific situations of our lives.

God has revealed His will for our lives. We are to remain in it - but we need to choose to remain in it. Make no mistake; there will be choices along the way. There is always going to be a Babylon that seems safer and more comfortable. We should reject it and submit to God's will trusting that God, in His love, knows what is ultimately best for us spiritually.

#2 You Should Choose To Return To God's Will

(v7-12)

It wasn't hard for the Jewish rebels and refugees to know God's will for them in the aftermath of the fall of Jerusalem. God had revealed through Jeremiah for decades that His will was for them to surrender to Babylon and thereby submit to His discipline for their sin. With the fall of Jerusalem as proof Jeremiah's words were true, it was time to return to God's will by surrendering to and submitting to the Babylonians.

Israeli soldiers were still out in the fields when Jerusalem fell. Gedeliah's first order of business was to get them to lay down their arms and serve Babylon.

Jeremiah 40:7 And when all the captains of the armies who were in the fields, they and their men, heard that the king of Babylon had made Gedaliah the son of Ahikam governor in the land, and had committed to him men, women, children, and the poorest of the land who had not been carried away captive to Babylon, Jeremiah 40:8 then they came to Gedaliah at Mizpah - Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, Johanan and Jonathan the sons of Kareah, Seraiah the son of Tanhumeth, the sons of Ephai the Netophathite, and Jezaniah the son of a Maachathite, they and their men.

Jeremiah 40:9 And Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, took an oath before them and their men, saying, "Do not be afraid to serve the Chaldeans. Dwell in the land and serve the king of Babylon, and it shall be well with you.

Jeremiah 40:10 As for me, I will indeed dwell at Mizpah and serve the Chaldeans who come to us. But you, gather wine and summer fruit and oil, put them in your vessels, and dwell in your cities that you have taken."

For a soldier to surrender, that's hard. But they weren't really surrendering to an enemy; they were surrendering to God. If they had been surrendered to Him all along they would not have been besieged.

In your marriage, for example, you aren't submitting to your spouse; you're submitting to The Lord by submitting to your spouse. (And guys, submission is mutual; it's not just for the ladies).

We'd do well to remember our lives are as unto The Lord.

Quite a lot of Jews had fled Judah and were living in nearby countries.

Jeremiah 40:11 Likewise, when all the Jews who were in Moab, among the Ammonites, in Edom, and who were in all the countries, heard that the king of Babylon had left a remnant of Judah, and that he had set over them Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan,

Jeremiah 40:12 then all the Jews returned out of all places where they had been driven, and came to the land of Judah, to Gedaliah at Mizpah, and gathered wine and summer fruit in abundance.

Whether or not they should have fled, or were "driven" to these countries, now they certainly should return to Judah.

'Return' is a great word. When you find yourself fighting God and fleeing God, stop and return to submitting to His will for your life.

In some cases you've made a mess of your life and the lives of others. There may be consequences; you may not be able, ever, to return to things the way they once were.

But you can *always* return to The Lord, begin walking with Him again in His will.

I should tell you that Jeremiah is going to have a rough time in Judah. Johanan will succeed Gedaliah. Refusing to listen to Jeremiah's counsel, Johanan flees to Egypt, taking with him Jeremiah and Baruch, Jeremiah's faithful scribe and servant. There the aged prophet seems to have spent the remainder of his life.

There is no authentic record of his death. One tradition is that he was stoned to death by Jews, but nothing is certain - except that it wasn't a life of ease.

I add this as a postscript to say that surrendering to God's perfect will doesn't mean ease and smooth sailing. It can even seem foolish. I mean, look at Jeremiah. He chose to remain in the land only to be forcibly taken away from the land to end his days in Egypt. Wouldn't he have been better off in Babylon?

Jeremiah was supposed to be in the land. If he was later forced to leave, *that was in the will of God for his life.*

God's will can be hard to accept, but it's not that hard to know. It's mostly already been revealed to you. Remain in it, or return to it. Your life may not get any easier but you're living it will be filled with the wonder of God's grace enabling you to endure to the end.

One final thought. If you're not a Christian, it's God's will that you be saved. He is not willing that any should perish, but that all - that **you** - should come to know His Son, your Savior, Jesus Christ.