



The **Fiery** Bones

Jeremiah 20:9

Text

Jeremiah 41:16 - 43:13

Topic

The Jews ask The Lord if they should continue fleeing to Egypt even though they have no intentions of obeying Him if He says "No"

"To Flee or Not to Flee, That is the Question"

Introduction

"What are you prepared to do?"

If you're a movie buff you might recognize that line of dialog from the 1987 film *The Untouchables*. Kevin Costner played legendary lawman Elliot Ness and Sean Connery was an Irish beat cop named Jim Malone. When Ness and Malone first meet, Malone asks Ness, "What are you prepared to do?" He wanted to know how far Ness was willing to go to stop gangster Al Capone.

Later in the film Malone is confronted in his apartment by a knife-wielding assassin. Just after he uttered another iconic line, "Isn't that just like a wop. Brings a knife to a gunfight," he's shot by a machine gun from across the street.

(I can say that and remain politically correct, by the way, 'cause I'm 100% Italian).

Ness gets to Malone just as he is about to die and Malone grabs him by his lapels and with his dying breath shouts, "What are you prepared to do?"

The challenge, "what are you prepared to do," or we might say, "what are you *willing* to do," provides a vantage point for us to approach our text in Jeremiah. Israeli soldiers and civilians were fleeing Judah headed for Egypt. On their way they stop and ask Jeremiah to pray to discern the Lord's will. Should they continue to Egypt? Or should they stay in the land?

I can almost hear Jeremiah saying to them, "What are you prepared to do?" Were they really willing to stay in the land if that was God's answer?

They were not. Going to God in prayer was an exercise in hypocrisy.

What about us? What are we prepared to do with regard to God and His will for our lives? Do we go to prayer, then get up from prayer, willing to do His will?

I'll organize my thoughts around two questions: #1 Do You Go To Prayer With A Willingness To Hear God?, and #2 Do You Get Up From Prayer With A Willingness To Heed God?

#1 Do You Go To Prayer With A Willingness To Hear God?

(41:16 - 42:22)

We're picking up in the middle of the story. An Israeli captain named Ishmael assassinated the Babylonian appointed Jewish governor of Judah. He also killed a few Chaldean soldiers and seventy Jewish pilgrims on their way to worship at the burned-out Temple. Ishmael was fleeing to Ammon with hostages. Loyal Israeli soldiers led by Johanan pursued and overtook them. The hostages were freed and most of Ishmael's men were killed. He escaped.

Jeremiah 41:16 Then Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces that were with him, took from Mizpah all the rest of the people whom he had recovered from Ishmael the son of Nethaniah after he had murdered Gedaliah the son of Ahikam - the mighty men of war and the women and the children and the eunuchs, whom he had brought back from Gibeon.

Jeremiah 41:17 And they departed and dwelt in the habitation of Chimham, which is near Bethlehem, as they went on their way to Egypt,

Jeremiah 41:18 because of the Chaldeans; for they were afraid of them, because Ishmael the son of Nethaniah had murdered Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, whom the king of Babylon had made governor in the land.

It doesn't seem too farfetched to think that the Chaldeans would want to exact revenge for Ishmael's rebellion by killing Johanan and the other captains. At least, that was the working theory, so off to Egypt they fled.

You'll note that they formulated their plan prior to seeking The Lord. Our plans may make sense, they may seem right, they may involve a certain wisdom and experience; but none of those things make them the Lord's plans. We must always subordinate all those things, everything, to The Lord and seek His will.

Jeremiah 42:1 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

Jeremiah 42:2 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),

Jeremiah 42:3 that the LORD your God may show us the way in which we should walk and the thing we should do."

It's no good going to God in prayer to ask Him to rubber stamp your plans. There's no use going to God in prayer unless you are willing to hear Him and do what He says. There needs to be a predisposition that you will obey - no matter the cost or the consequences.

We should have mixed feelings about this. Sure it's great they stopped to seek The Lord. But they were insincere. They had no intention of staying in the land regardless God's answer.

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Jeremiah 42:4 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."

Jeremiah 42:5 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.

Jeremiah 42:6 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."

They had put their lives on the line to avenge the murder of Gedeliah and the others. No one could accuse them of being slackers; they were serving God, in the very thick of it.

For all that, they were not really predisposed to obey God in all things.

I might be predisposed to obey God in some things, even in most things, but not in all things. I can't justify ignoring or refusing God's will just because I am 'mostly' obedient.

The rich young ruler comes to mind. He came to Jesus and asked what he must do to inherit eternal life. He'd been doing a lot by keeping God's commandments, at least outwardly. Jesus told him he lacked one thing: "Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in Heaven; and come, follow me" (Luke 18:22).

He didn't do it. He was unwilling to go from there obeying Jesus. He was mostly obedient but then refused God's answer and went his own way.

Jeremiah 42:7 And it happened after ten days that the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 42:8 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,

Jeremiah 42:9 and said to them, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, to whom you sent me to present your petition before Him:

Jeremiah 42:10 '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.

Jeremiah 42:11 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.

Jeremiah 42:12 And I will show you mercy, that he may have mercy on you and cause you to return to your own land.'

Jeremiah 42:13 "But if you say, 'We will not dwell in this land,' disobeying the voice of the LORD your God,

Jeremiah 42:14 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' -

Jeremiah 42:15 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,

Jeremiah 42:16 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.

Jeremiah 42:17 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.'

Ten days may not seem long but with the potential for the Chaldean army to be in hot pursuit it must have seemed an eternity. Kudos to them, at least, for their patience.

The ten days emphasize that Jeremiah really sought The Lord. He wasn't giving them his informed opinion.

It also puts us on notice that God has His own timing in revealing things to us, and its mostly later than sooner.

If this ten day prayer-period happened today we'd give it a catchy name and would want to market it and repeat it every year. *"Drop to Your Knees and Give Me 10?"*

There are any number of programs, some annually, that Christians get involved with. I'm not saying they are all bad - but I am saying participation is all wrong unless your heart is predisposed to obey God no matter what He shows you. And, if it is, *you don't need them*. All they do s distract you.

God's answer, clear as can be, was to stay and exercise faith believing that He would protect and keep them from harm from their oppressors.

God knew they would not obey Him and He busts them for being hypocrites for even asking Him.

Jeremiah 42:18 "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.'

Notice God said "**when** you enter Egypt." He knew they were bent on going despite His Word and warning. They had already decided.

Why ask Jeremiah to pray? Well, they had a 50-50 chance that God would agree with them. Plus it gave the appearance of being spiritual - and folks like to keep up appearances.

Jeremiah 42:19 "The LORD has said concerning you, O remnant of Judah, 'Do not go to Egypt!' Know certainly that I have admonished you this day.

Jeremiah 42:20 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.'

Jeremiah 42:21 And I have this day declared it to you, but you have not obeyed the voice of the LORD your God, or anything which He has sent you by me.

Jeremiah 42:22 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."

Ouch. "You were hypocrites in your hearts." They had no intention of staying in the land.

Willingness is an important prerequisite for prayer. I ran across this anonymous paragraph on willingness:

*I am willing to receive what You send;
To lack whatever You don't send;
I am willing to let go of what You take;
I am willing to put myself at Your disposal as You inflict things;*

*I am willing to do what You ask me to do;
And I am willing to be what You require me to be.*

There are many facets of willingness - including things we don't necessarily consider, like God withholding things or allowing them to be taken from us; or permitting things to "inflict" us.

Nobody wants to be Job. Truth is, all the saints in the Bible who have preceded us to glory were put to the test, pushed to their limits. If you want to be called the friend of God; or the most humble man that ever lived; or the man after God's own heart; or the greatest among men that was ever born; then there are going to be many episodes in your life when your heart must say, "not my will, but Thy will be done."

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You are every bit a Bible character as Abraham, Moses, David or John the Baptist. Draw near to God with willingness, prepared to do whatever He asks and directs.

#2 Do You Get Up From Prayer With A Willingness To Heed God?

(43:1-13)

What do you do when God's plans are not your plans? You can always blame someone else!

Jeremiah 43:1 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, Jeremiah 43:2 that Azariah the son of Hoshai, 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.'

Jeremiah 43:3 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."

Baruch was Jeremiah's faithful secretary. As far as what's recorded here, he had nothing to do with God's answer. As for Jeremiah, this was an insult to his integrity - suggesting that Baruch could influence Jeremiah to falsify God's Word.

When God reveals His will, His plan, and you are unwilling to follow it, you need an excuse or a scapegoat. You need to blame someone or something else - because if you admit the truth, your only play is to repent and do God's will.

Jeremiah 43:4 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.

Jeremiah 43:5 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 -

Jeremiah 43:6 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.

Jeremiah 43:7 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.

Whether it's Catholics observing 40 days of Lent or Protestants observing some annual program, too often folks go right back to their old lives after it's over. They remain essentially unchanged.

One reason is because so often a program emphasizes will-power - **your** will-power - to accomplish something for a short time, whereas God wants your willingness at all times. Then He provides the power.

Jeremiah 43:8 Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah in Tahpanhes, saying,

Jeremiah 43:9 "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;

Jeremiah 43:10 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.

Jeremiah 43:11 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.

Jeremiah 43:12 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.

Jeremiah 43:13 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." ' "

Jeremiah acted out a drama before the people to emphasize the Word of God with regard to the coming of Nebuchadnezzar.

You can't say that God was silent, or secretive; He was constantly trying to communicate with His people - even in their disobedience.

We sometimes act as though God is silent; or that His will is a secret we cannot discover. As we pointed out in our last study, God's will in most of the important roles of our daily lives is already clearly revealed in the Bible. His moral will has been made clear as well.

In more specific areas, in certain particulars, we have the indwelling Holy Spirit to counsel and guide us.

It usually isn't a question of what to do but whether I am willing to do it. Fear or worry or pride or some such thing can make me unwilling - which is often exactly why God might direct me a certain way. He might want me to exercise faith that overcomes fear, worry and pride.

Which leads us to a realization. While I am looking at my current situation, God is looking to the endgame.

'Endgame' is the ending scenario of a particular game; when and how it will end, most prominently used in chess.

I don't play chess; some of you might play, but all of us understand a little about the game.

I've heard it said about chess masters that they see the whole board and foresee many possible moves - including future moves that will result from each possible current move. They play from that position of foresight.

When it comes to our lives, we are more like chess pieces than chess players. We must trust God to see the whole board of our lives and to foresee all possible moves - including every future move that results from the choices we make and that every other person makes.

I must admit, there are times I feel more like a pawn in the game of life. But God says I'm a king; or, ladies, a queen.

We **do** know, beyond any doubt, the endgame. We are predestinated to be conformed into the image of Jesus. We will awake in His likeness - either resurrected from the dead or raptured at His imminent return.

Knowing where we are headed and how we will spend eternity ought to inspire willingness to hear and obey - to go to prayer with a willingness to obey, no matter what, and to get up from prayer prepared to put God's will into action.

