

CHAPTER 42

Johanan and the captains being strongly bent upon going into Egypt, either their affections or politics advising them to take that course, they had a great desire that God should direct them to do so too like Balaam, who, when he was determined to go and curse Israel, asked God leave. Here is,

I. The fair bargain that was made between Jeremiah and them about consulting God in this matter (v. 1-6).

II. The message at large which God sent them, in answer to their enquiry, in which,

- 1.** They are commanded and encouraged to continue in the land of Judah, and assured that if they did so it should be well with them (v. 7-12).
- 2.** They are forbidden to go to Egypt, and are plainly told that if they did it would be their ruin (v. 13-18).
- 3.** They are charged with dissimulation in their asking what God's will was in this matter and disobedience when they were told what it was; and sentence is accordingly passed upon them (v. 19-22).

42 JEREMIAH 42:1-6

JEREMIAH AGREES TO CONSULT GOD

We have reason to wonder how Jeremiah the prophet escaped the sword of Ishmael; it seems he did escape, and it was not the first time that the Lord hid him. It is strange also that in these violent turns he was not consulted before now, and his advice asked and taken. But it should seem as if they knew not that a prophet was among them. Though this people were *as brands plucked out of the fire*, yet have they not *returned to the Lord*. This people has a *revolting and a rebellious heart*; and contempt of God and his providence, God and his prophets, is still *the sin that most easily besets* them. But now at length, to serve a turn, Jeremiah is sought out, and *all the captains, Johanan* himself not excepted, with *all the people from the least to the greatest*, make him a visit; they *came near* (v. 1), which

intimates that hitherto they had kept at a distance from the prophet and had been shy of him. Now here,

I. They desire him by prayer to ask direction from God what they should do in the present critical juncture, v. 2, 3. They express themselves wonderfully well.

1. With great respect to the prophet. Though he was poor and low, and under their command, yet they apply to him with humility and submissiveness, as petitioners for his assistance, which yet they intimate their own unworthiness of: *Let, we beseech thee, our supplication be accepted before thee.* They compliment him thus in hopes to persuade him to say as they would have him say.

2. With a great opinion of his interest in heaven: “*Pray for us, who know not how to pray for ourselves. Pray to the Lord thy God, for we are unworthy to call him ours, nor have we reason to expect any favour from him.*”

3. With a great sense of their need of divine direction. They speak of themselves as objects of compassion: “*We are but a remnant, but a few of many; how easily will such a remnant be swallowed up, and yet it is a pity that it should. Thy eyes see what distress we are in, what a plunge we are at; if thou canst do any thing, help us.*”

4. With desire of divine direction: “*Let the Lord thy God take this ruin into his thoughts and under his hand, and show us the way wherein we may walk and may expect to have his presence with us, and the thing that we may do, the course we may take for our own safety.*” Note, In every difficult doubtful case our eye must be up to God for direction. They then might expect to be directed by a *spirit of prophecy*, which has now ceased; but we may still in faith pray to be guided by a *spirit of wisdom* in our hearts and the hints of Providence.

II. Jeremiah faithfully promises them to pray for direction for them, and, whatever message God should send to them by him, he would deliver it to them just as he received it without adding, altering, or diminishing, v. 4. Ministers may hence learn,

1. Conscientiously to pray for those who desire their prayers: *I will pray for you according to your words.* Though they had slighted him, yet, like

Samuel when he was slighted, he will not *sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for them*, ¹⁹²³1 Samuel 12:23.

2. Conscientiously to advise those who desire their advice as near as they can to the mind of God, not *keeping back any thing that is profitable for them*, whether it be pleasing or no, but to *declare to them the whole counsel of God*, that they may approve themselves true to their trust.

III. They fairly promise that they will be governed by the will of God, as soon as they know what it is (v. 5, 6), and they had the impudence to appeal to God concerning their sincerity herein, though at the same time they dissembled: *“The Lord be a true and faithful witness between us; do thou in the fear of God tell us truly what his mind is and then we will in the fear of God comply with it, and for this the Lord the Judge be Judge between us.”* Note, Those that expect to have the benefit of good ministers' prayers must conscientiously hearken to their preaching and be governed by it, as far as it agrees with the mind of God. Nothing could be better than this was: *Whether it be good, or whether it be evil, we will obey the voice of the Lord our God, that it may be well with us.*

1. They now call God *their* God, for Jeremiah had encouraged them to call him so (v. 4): *I will pray to the Lord your God*. He is ours, and therefore *we will obey his voice*. Our relation to God strongly obliges us to obedience.

2. They promise to *obey his voice* because they sent the prophet to him to consult him. Note, We do not truly desire to know the mind of God if we do not fully resolve to comply with it when we do know it.

3. It is an implicit universal obedience that they here promise. They will do what God appoints them to do, *whether it be good or whether it be evil*: *“Though it may seem evil to us, yet we will believe that if God command it it is certainly good, and we must not dispute it, but do it. Whatever God commands, whether it be easy or difficult, agreeable to our inclinations or contrary to them, whether it be cheap or costly, fashionable or unfashionable, whether we get or lose by it in our worldly interests, if it be our duty, we will do it.”*

4. It is upon a very good consideration that they promise this, a reasonable and powerful one, *that it may be well with us*, which intimates a

conviction that they could not expect it should be well with them upon any other terms.

~~42:7~~ JEREMIAH 42:7-22

JEREMIAH'S ADDRESS TO THE PEOPLE

We have here the answer which Jeremiah was sent to deliver to those who employed him to ask counsel of God.

I. It did not come immediately, not till *ten days after*, v. 7. They were thus long held in suspense, perhaps, to punish them for their hypocrisy or to show that Jeremiah did not speak of himself, nor what he would, for he could not speak when he would, but must wait for instructions. However, it teaches us to continue waiting upon God for direction in our way. *The vision is for an appointed time, and at the end it shall speak.*

II. When it did come he delivered it publicly, both to the *captains* and to all the *people*, from the meanest to those in the highest station; he delivered it fully and faithfully as he received it, as he had promised that he would keep nothing back from them. If Jeremiah had been to direct them by his own prudence, perhaps he could not have told what to advise them to, the case was so difficult; but what he has to advise is what *the Lord the God of Israel saith*, to whom they had sent him, and therefore they were bound in honour and duty to observe it. And this he tells them,

1. That it is the will of God that they should stay where they are, and his promise that, if they do so, it shall undoubtedly be *well with them* he would have them still to *abide in this land*, v. 10. Their brethren were forced out of it into captivity, and this was their affliction; let those therefore count it a mercy that they may stay in it and a duty to stay in it. Let those whose lot is in Canaan never quit it while they can keep it. It would have been enough to oblige them if God had only said, "I charge you upon your allegiance to *abide still in the land;*" but he rather persuades them to it as a friend than commands it as a prince.

(1.) He expresses a very tender concern for them in their present calamitous condition: *It repenteth me of the evil that I have done unto you.* Though they had shown small sign of their repenting of their sins, yet

God, as one *grieved for the misery of Israel* (^{<716>}Judges 10:16), begins to repent of the judgments he had brought upon them for their sins. Not that he changed his mind, but he was very ready to change his way and to return in mercy to them. God's time to repent himself concerning his servants is when he sees that, as here, their strength is gone, and *there is none shut up or left*, ^{<626>}Deuteronomy 32:36.

(2.) He answers the argument they had against abiding in this land. *They feared the king of Babylon* (^{<2418>}Jeremiah 41:18), lest he should come and avenge the death of Gedaliah upon them, though they were no way accessory to it, nay, had witnessed against it. The surmise was foreign and unreasonable; but, if there had been any ground for it, enough is here said to remove it (v. 11): "*Be not afraid of the king of Babylon*, though he is a man of great might and little mercy, and a very arbitrary prince, whose will is a law, and therefore you are afraid he will upon this pretence, though without colour of reason, take advantage against you; *be not afraid of him*, for that fear will bring a snare: fear not him, for *I am with you*; and, if God be for you to save you, who can be against you to hurt you?" Thus has God provided to obviate and silence even the causeless fears of his people, which discourage them in the way of their duty; there is enough in the promises to encourage them.

(3.) He assures them that if they will still abide in this land they shall not only be safe from the king of Babylon, but be made happy by the King of kings: "*I will build you and plant you*; you shall take root again, and be the new foundation of another state, a phoenix-kingdom, rising out of the ashes of the last." It is added (v. 12), *I will show mercies unto you*. Note, In all our comforts we may read God's mercies. God will show them mercy in this, that not only the king of Babylon shall not destroy them, but he shall *have mercy upon them* and help to settle them. Note, Whatever kindness men do us we must attribute it to God's kindness. He makes those whom he pities to be pitied even by *those who carried them captives*, ^{<5104>}Psalms 16:46. "The king of Babylon, having now the disposal of the country, shall *cause you to return it to your own land*, shall settle you again in your own habitations and put you in possession of the lands that formerly belonged to you." Note, God has made that our duty which is really our privilege, and our obedience will be its own recompense. "*Abide in this land*, and it shall be your own land again and you shall continue in it. Do not quit it now that you stand so fair for the enjoyment

of it again. Be no so unwise as to *forsake your own mercies for lying vanities.*”

2. That as they tender the favour of God and their own happiness they must by no means think of going into Egypt, not thither of all places, not to that land out of which God had delivered their fathers and which he had so often warned them not to make alliance with nor to put confidence in. Observe here,

(1.) The sin they are supposed to be guilty of (and to him that knew their hearts it was more than a supposition): “You begin to say, *We will not dwell in this land* (v. 13); we will never think that we can be safe in it, no, not though God himself undertake our protection. We will not continue in it, no, not *in obedience to the voice of the Lord our God*. He may say what he please, but we will do what we please. We will *go into the land of Egypt, and there will we dwell*, whether God give us leave and go along with us or no,” v. 14. It is supposed that their hearts were upon it: “*If you wholly set your faces to enter into Egypt*, and are obstinately resolved that you will go and *sojourn there*, though God oppose you in it both by his word and by his providence, then take what follows.” Now the reason they go upon in this resolution is that “*in Egypt we shall see no war, nor have hunger of bread,; as we have had for a long time in this land,*” v. 14. Note, It is folly to quit our place, especially to quit the holy land, because we meet with trouble in it; but greater folly to think by changing our place to escape the judgments of God, and that evil which pursues sinners in every way of disobedience, and which there is no escaping but by returning to our allegiance.

(2.) The sentence passed upon them for this sin, if they will persist in it. It is pronounced in God's name (v. 15): “*Hear the word of the Lord, you remnant of Judah*, who think that because you are a remnant you must be spared of course (v. 2) and indulged in your own humour.”

[1.] Did the sword and famine frighten them? Those very judgments shall pursue them into Egypt, shall overtake them, and overcome them there (v. 16, 17): “You think, because war and famine have long been raging in this land, that they are entailed upon it; whereas, if you trust in God, he can make even this land a land of peace to you; you think they are confined to it, and, if you can get clear of this land, you shall get out of the reach of them, but God will send them after you wherever you go.” Note, the evils we think to escape by sin we certainly and inevitably run ourselves upon.

The men that go to Egypt in contradiction to God's will, to escape *the sword and famine*, shall *die in Egypt by sword and famine*. We may apply it to the common calamities of human life; those that are impatient of them, and think to avoid them by changing their place, will find that they are deceived and that they do not at all better themselves. The grievances common to men will meet them wherever they go. All our removes in this world are but from one wilderness to another; still we are where we were.

[2.] Did the desolations of Jerusalem frighten them? Were they willing to get as far as they could from them? They shall meet with the second part of them too in Egypt (v. 18): *As my anger and fury have been poured out here upon Jerusalem, so they shall be poured out upon you in Egypt*. Note, Those that have by sin made God their enemy will find him a consuming fire wherever they go. And then you shall be *an execration and an astonishment*. The Hebrews were of old an abomination to the Egyptians (⁴⁸²Genesis 43:32), and now they shall be made more so than ever. When God's professing people mingle with infidels, and make their court to them, they lose their dignity and make themselves a reproach.

3. That God knew their hypocrisy in their enquiries of him, and that when they asked what he would have them to do they were resolved to take their own way; and therefore the sentence which was before pronounced conditionally is made absolute. Having set before them good and evil, the blessing and the curse, in the close he makes application of what he had said. And here,

(1.) He solemnly protests that he had faithfully delivered his message, v. 19. The conclusion of the whole matter is, "*Go not down into Egypt; you disobey the command of God if you do, and what I have said to you will be a witness against you; for know certainly that, whether you will hear or whether you will forbear, I have plainly admonished you; you cannot now plead ignorance of the mind of God.*"

(2.) He charges them with base dissimulation in the application they made to him for divine direction (v. 20): "*You dissembled in your hearts; you professed one thing and intended another, promising what you never meant to perform.*" *You have used deceit against your soul* (so the margin reads it); for those that think to put a cheat upon God will prove in the end to have put a damning cheat upon themselves.

(3.) He is already aware that they are determined to go contrary to the command of God; probably they discovered it in their countenance and secret mutterings already, before he had finished his discourse. However, he spoke from him who knew their hearts: “*You have not obeyed the voice of the Lord your God; you have not a disposition to obey it.*” Thus Moses, in the close of his farewell sermon, had told them (⁴⁸¹²Deuteronomy 31:27, 29), *I know thy rebellion and thy stiff neck, and that you will corrupt yourselves.* Admire the patience of God, that he is pleased to speak to those who, he knows, will not regard him, and deal with those who, he knows, will *deal very treacherously*, ²³⁸⁸Isaiah 48:8.

(4.) He therefore reads them their doom, ratifying what he had said before: *Know certainly that you shall die by the sword*, v. 22. God's threatenings may be vilified, but cannot be nullified, by the unbelief of man. *Famine and pestilence* shall pursue these sinners; for there is no place privileged from divine arrests, nor can any malefactors go out of God's jurisdiction. *You shall die in the place whither you desire to go.* Note, We know not what is good for ourselves; and that often proves afflictive, and sometimes fatal, which we are most fond of and have our hearts most set upon.