

# RIGHT WORDS, WRONG HEART

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In 586 B.C., King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon's siege of the city of Jerusalem finally came to an end. As God had foretold, the city fell, and was completely destroyed by the Babylonians, including the temple. Only a small remnant survived the fall of the city, and the prophet Jeremiah was among them. This remnant was determined "*to go to enter into Egypt, because of the Chaldeans: for they were afraid of them, because Ishmael the son of Nethaniah had slain Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, whom the king of Babylon made governor in the land*" (Jer 41:17-18). In Jeremiah chapter 42, this remnant asked Jeremiah to pray to the Lord to find out where they should go and what they should do to remain safe from harm.

## **Do all in the name of the Lord**

The remnant of the people wanted to go into Egypt, but asked Jeremiah to find out from God where they should go. This was the right thing to do. Jeremiah 42:1-4 says, "Then all the captains of the forces, and Johanan the son of Kareah, and Jezaniah the son of Hoshaiiah, and all the people from the least even unto the greatest, came near, And said unto Jeremiah the prophet, Let, we beseech thee, our supplication be accepted before thee, and pray for us unto the Lord thy God, even for all this remnant; (for we are left but a few of many, as thine eyes do behold us;) *that the Lord thy God may show us the way wherein we may walk, and the thing that we may do.* Then Jeremiah the prophet said unto them, I have heard you; behold, I will pray unto the Lord your God according to your words; and it shall come to pass, that whatsoever thing the Lord shall answer you, I will declare it unto you; I will keep nothing back from you." These people correctly (though insincerely) acknowledged that man should not take a step on his own. Jeremiah 10:23 says, "O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." Man does not determine what is right and wrong for himself or decide what is good and evil. Only God does that, and only in His holy word (Psa 119:105; Matt 4:4; 19:17-18; Luke 4:4; 18:19). The remnant of Israel was correct that only the word of the Lord our God "may show us the way wherein we may walk, and the thing that we may do" (Jer 42:3). Today, Christians are commanded: "*And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him*" (Col 3:17).

## **God's warning**

Ten days after Jeremiah prayed for the remnant of Judah, they had two possible courses of action to choose between: they could either remain in the land of Israel or go to Egypt. God told them what the outcome would be for each of those options. The Lord said, "*If ye will still abide in this land, then will I build you, and not pull you down, and I will plant you, and not pluck you up:* for I repent me of the evil that I have done unto you. Be not afraid of the king of Babylon, of whom ye are afraid; be not afraid of him, saith the Lord: for I am with you to save you, and to deliver you from his hand. And I will shew mercies unto you, that he may have mercy upon you, and cause you to return to your own land" (Jer 42:10-12). "But if ye say, We will not dwell in this land, neither obey the voice of the Lord your God, saying, No; but we will go into the land of Egypt, where we shall see no war, nor hear the sound of the trumpet, nor

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have hunger of bread; and there will we dwell: and now therefore hear the word of the Lord, ye remnant of Judah; Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; *If ye wholly set your faces to enter into Egypt, and go to sojourn there; then it shall come to pass, that the sword, which ye feared, shall overtake you there in the land of Egypt, and the famine, whereof ye were afraid, shall follow close after you there in Egypt; and there ye shall die. So shall it be with all the men that set their faces to go into Egypt to sojourn there; they shall die by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence: and none of them shall remain or escape from the evil that I will bring upon them.* For thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; As mine anger and my fury hath been poured forth upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem; so shall my fury be poured forth upon you, when ye shall enter into Egypt: and ye shall be an execration, and an astonishment, and a curse, and a reproach; and ye shall see this place no more. The Lord hath said concerning you, O ye remnant of Judah; Go ye not into Egypt: know certainly that I have admonished you this day” (Jer 42:13-19). The same basic two roads (God’s way versus any other way) are before us today. Matthew 7:13-14 says, *“Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.”*

## **Insincere hearts**

The remnant of Judah had originally promised to Jeremiah, “The Lord be a true and faithful witness between us, if we do not even according to all things for the which the Lord thy God shall send thee to us. Whether it be good, or whether it be evil, we will obey the voice of the Lord our God, to whom we send thee; that it may be well with us, when we obey the voice of the Lord our God” (Jer 42:5-6). Yet the Lord knew their hearts, and they had no intention of doing as the Lord said. God admonished the remnant of Judah for their insincere request to know His will concerning whether or not they should go to Egypt, and for their insincere promise to obey whatever God told them. God said, *“For ye dissembled in your hearts, when ye sent me unto the Lord your God, saying, Pray for us unto the Lord our God; and according unto all that the Lord our God shall say, so declare unto us, and we will do it. And now I have this day declared it to you; but ye have not obeyed the voice of the Lord your God, nor any thing for the which he hath sent me unto you. Now therefore know certainly that ye shall die by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence, in the place whither ye desire to go and to sojourn”* (Jer 42:20-22). The leaders of the Jews in Christ’s time on the earth were the same as this remnant. Of them, the Lord said, “Ye hypocrites, well did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying, *This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoreth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me.* But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (Matt 15:7-9). Instead of being like these insincere children of God, *“Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering”* (Heb 10:22-23).