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The Flight to Egypt
41:16 to 42:22

The flight to Egypt DIG: Why are the army officers afraid, even though they had nothing to do with Gedaliah's murder (Second Kings 25:25-26)? How might Nebuchadnezzar interpret their act? What were their options? Are the people sincere in seeking guidance from Jeremiah and ADONAI? Why ask Jeremiah if their minds were already made up? What do you suppose they were thinking about during the ten-day delay, waiting to hear from God? What do you think Jeremiah did during those ten days? What did the LORD tell them and why? What is wrong with the Jews following their natural instincts and fleeing to "safety?" Why would they want to live in Egypt anyway?

REFLECT: Think about what you have said this past week. When were your questions really statements? When were your statements really questions? Do you have trouble asking for what you really want or how you really feel? In your decision-making process this past week, at what point did you seek ADONAI's counsel? Or the input of others? Did you really want their advice, or simply their blessing for what you had already made up your mind to do? Have you ever obeyed God's Word at a time when your gut instinct was screaming, "No!" What was the result of your obedience? What is your experience with waiting on YHVH?

586 BC after Gedaliah's assassination

For a long time, **Jeremiah** had made clear the only workable option for **his** people was to submit to **Babylon**. The three dominant figures of this story, **Gedaliah**, **Ishma'el** and **Johanan**, embody these policy options: **Gedaliah** was a Babylonian accommodator, **Ishma'el** was a fierce advocate for resistance and independence, and **Johanan** now opts for **Egypt**. While the flight to **Egypt** appears to be the most plausible option, **Yirmeyahu**, as we shall see, is unwavering in his pro-**Babylonian** insistence.

After the fall of **Jerusalem** the governorship of **Gedaliah** had been assassinated and the *de facto* leadership of the Jewish community (first with **Ishma'el** and then with **Johanan**) seems to have run out of options. It was exactly at that time that **Yirmeyahu** was invited back into the story. The last time we heard from **the prophet**, **he** said to Zedekiah: **Obey God by doing what I tell you. Then it will go well with you, and your life will be spared. But if you refuse to surrender . . . you will not escape from the king of Babylon and this City will be burned down (38:20-23).** Now it was time for **Jeremiah** to state **his** message from **YHVH**, which again will seem too costly, and again will be rejected.[364]

The Flight to Egypt: The Land was in chaos and public life was in total disarray. **Then Johanan son of Kareah and all the army officers who were with him led away the people of Mizpah who had survived, whom Johanan had recovered from Ishmael son of Nethaniah after Ishma'el had assassinated Gedaliah son of Ahikam – the soldiers** without weapons**, women, children, eunuchs** who took care of the daughters of the king taken by **Ishma'el, and court officials he had recovered from Gibeon. The remnant went** south **from Gibeon,** past **Jerusalem** that lay in ruins, **and** temporarily **stopped at Geruth Kimham** (a stopping place for caravans and their camels to stay overnight) **near Bethlehem on their way to Egypt to escape the Babylonians (41:16-17).** In other words, their minds were already made up about going **to Egypt**. So what happens in the next file (**to see link click Gi – Nebuchadnezzar Will Burn Down the Temples of the gods of Egypt**) was merely a hoax to what **they** had already decided to do in **their** hearts.

The reason – **Johanan** and **his** accomplices **were afraid of the Babylonians because they had killed Gedaliah, whom King Nebuchadnezzar had appointed as governor over the Land (41:18).** After the assassination, **they** suddenly became afraid of another invasion, another slaughter, and the possibility that **they** might end up as slaves in **Babylon**.

The Request of the Remnant: All the army officers, including Johanan and Jezaniah son of Hoshaiah, and all the people from the least to the greatest approached Jeremiah the prophet. It seems that **Johanan** was still the leader of the group because **he** is mentioned first. Apparently the next in line was **Jezaniah**, then **all the people**. **They said to the prophet, "Please hear our petition and pray to ADONAI your God for this entire remnant. For as you now see, though we were once many, now only a few are left. Pray that the LORD your God will tell us *where* we should go and *what* we should do."** Should we stay in **the Land** or go to **Egypt (42:1-3)**? But it was all just lip service. As so often happens, their desire was not really for guidance, but that **God** would bless the decision **they** had already made.

I have heard you, replied **Jeremiah. I will certainly pray to ADONAI your God as you have requested; I will tell you everything the LORD says and will keep nothing back from you.** Nothing more. Nothing less. **Then** they made a mockery of a commitment. **They said to Yirmeyahu, "May the LORD be a true and faithful witness against us if we do not act in accordance with everything ADONAI your God sends you to tell us."** Then **they** go one step further. "**Whether it is favorable or unfavorable, we will obey the LORD our God, to whom we are sending you, so that it will go well with us, for we will obey ADONAI our God" (42:4-6).** Again this promise is false because **they** had already decided to go to **Egypt (41:17)**. **They** are sure **ADONAI** will consign **their** decision in light of what **they** think will happen. Playing **Holy Spirit** can be a very dangerous thing to do, as **they** will find out.

God's Word to the Remnant: God did not respond immediately. **Ten days later the word of the LORD came to Yirmeyahu (42:7). This verse is very important for the insight it gives into the nature of the prophecy. God's prophet does not confuse divine revelation with the desires of the heart, or the conclusions of his own personal judgment. Otherwise he wouldn't have had to wait ten days. His waiting was not that his own mind might be made up, or to still the excitement among the people; for to prolong the suspense, especially when every hour seemed precious, would have been fatal to such an endeavor; nor yet in the hope that new circumstances might guide his decision. It was quite literally because he would not, could not, announce something that he did not know. It was an element in his prophetic gift that could clearly and sharply distinguish between objective and subjective, between the word of God and the thoughts and desires of**

his own heart.

So he called together Johanan and all the army officers who were with him and all the people from the least to the greatest (42:8). The rhetoric of this speech, in the long tradition of **Moshe, Joshua** and **Samuel,** is a pattern of blessings and curses that were determined completely by covenant obedience (*shema*) or disobedience (*lo' shema*).

There would be blessings for obedience. He said to them: **This is what the LORD, the God of Isra'el, to whom you sent me to present your petition,** says: **If you stay in the Land.** This is the key statement in the entire speech, everything else flows from it. **Then I will build you up and not tear you down; I will plant you and not uproot you, for I have relented** (see **Cw – At the Potter's House**) **concerning the disaster I have inflicted on you** (meaning the fall of **Jerusalem**)**. YHVH** now pines for good for **Y'hudah,** but **His** goodness will require obedient (*shema*) residence in **the City**. **Do not be afraid of the king of Babylon, whom you now fear. Do not be afraid of him,** declares **ADONAI, for I am with you and will save you and deliver you from his hands.** It is the mercy of **the LORD** that will make **Babylon** a merciful overlord, who will make living in **the Land** workable. **I will show you mercy so that Nebuchadnezzar will have compassion on you and restore you to your Land (42:9-12). The essence of the message was this, "Do not go down to Egypt."**

However, there would be curses for disobedience. If you say, "We will not stay in this Land," and so disobey the LORD your God, and if you say, "No, we will go and live in Egypt, where we will not see war or hear the trumpet or be hungry for bread without **fear** from **Babylon," then hear the word of ADONAI, you remnant of Judah (42:13-15a). Distance lends enchantment to the scene, and they conjured up a rosy picture of Egypt being peaceful and prosperous. None of which was true.** The seduction of **Egypt** is the assumption that such "flight" would be an escape from punishment, threat, and curse. **Egypt** appears to this desperate, frightened community to be a peaceable place, where there is no threat of war and no famine. **Egypt** regularly offers itself as an escapist alternative, both from the troubles of **the Land** and from the dangers of **Babylon**.[365]

This is what ADONAI-Tzva'ot, the God of Isra'el, says: **If you are determined to go to Egypt and you do go to settle there, then the sword you fear will overtake you there, and the famine you dread will follow you**

into Egypt, and there you will die. What **you fear in Judah** will happen **in Egypt**! **Indeed, all who are determined to go to Egypt to settle there will die by the sword, famine and plague; not one of them will survive or escape the disaster I will bring on them. God** will not be mocked and disobeyed. The flight to **Egypt**, which seemed like an escape, is in fact a sure **death** sentence. **This is what ADONAI of heaven's** angelic **armies, the God of Isra'el** says: **As My anger and wrath have been poured out on those who lived in Jerusalem, so will My wrath be poured out on you when you go to Egypt. You will be a curse and an object of reproach; you will never see this place again (42:15b-18).** No doubt **the remnant** thought that at some point **they** would return to **their** homeland. But **Jeremiah's** prophecy rejects that notion. If **they** leave **the Land**, **they** will never come back.

Remnant of Judah, ADONAI has told you, "Do not go down to Egypt." This was as strong and unambiguous as **the prophet** could be. It leaves nothing to the imagination. Be sure of this: **I warn you today that you made a fatal mistake when you sent Me to the LORD your God and** said: **Pray to ADONAI our God for us. Tell us everything He says and we will do it. I have told you today, but you still have not obeyed ADONAI your God in all He sent me to tell you.** In reality, **they** had no intention of obeying **YHVH** unless **He** consigned on **their** desire to go to **Egypt**. **So now, be sure of this: You** have deceived **yourselves** if you think **your** plan of **going down to Egypt** will be looked upon favorably by **God** like **you** thought it would. Instead, **you will die by the sword, famine and plague in the place where you want to go to settle (42:19-22).** This is the standard list of covenant curses. The remnant would be under a death sentence for its decision.

For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths (Second Timothy 4:3-4).