

Monday Evening Bible Reading Group: June 19th: Jeremiah 42: Some Notes

We know the original writers/editors did not use chapters, and at this stage in our reading of Jeremiah it is a useful discipline to think why the chapter creator created these odd little sections which really need the bit before and the bit after to “make sense”. What can we learn from the middle bit on its own.

In Chapter 52, those poised to escape to Egypt consult Jeremiah about what they are proposing to do – seeking not his opinion, but his help in finding out what God thinks. They say, significantly, please ask **your** God. Equally significantly, he promises to consult **your** God. Both how they ask, and all the previous history, make it pretty clear that they are expecting a “don’t go answer”, and that Jeremiah is expecting them to go anyway. But Jeremiah presses them, and they say firmly that they will do what God says – not least because that way lies God’s blessing. Despite all that Jeremiah has heard from God and passed on to the rulers and the people before about obeying God and Moses in NOT going back to Egypt (reversing the Exodus), Jeremiah does as is his wont, and waits prayerfully ten days for God to speak. No glib repetition of what he (Jeremiah) has heard and said before. The God message is a powerful: not just advice to stay, but a command to stay... and the promise of safety and well-being if they do stay. If the would-be exiles insist on going to Egypt, they will be disobeying an order and rejecting a promise, and deciding that they know better than God.

In the Jeremiah message there is a fascinating sentence which almost suggests that God regrets having punished his people. Tied up in this sentence is the reality – hugely important to hang on to in the face of other Old Testament hints and indeed phrases that suggest God gets a kick out of punishing us. He doesn’t. Indeed we might legitimately say that while “This is going to hurt me as much as it hurts you” is usually rubbish, in the case of the God/human relationship it is true!

There are some big things to think about, including:

Why did the group go to Jeremiah? Why did they use the “your God” terminology?

Where do we stand on asking others to talk to God on our behalf? (Keep in mind the African who recently starved themselves to death because their pastor said God wanted this... and there have been examples of this sort on other continents.)

Our Parliament has opening prayers – very few MPs attend them!

We know Tony Blair prayed about the Iraq war decision, so.....

Do we ourselves tend to ask God to confirm our prejudices and back our decisions, rather than genuinely waiting (10 days or however long it takes) on the Lord?

God always offers a new start! So couldn't Babylon, Tahpanhes, Mizpah, Ammon, or Jerusalem all be a basis for a new start?

Jeremiah wasn't allowed to choose his destination. Where do you think he would have chosen if allowed to choose? (This is post-Gadaliah.)