

Jeremiah 42 is one of the clearest pictures in the Bible of people who say they want God's will, but in reality have already made up their minds. They come to the prophet, use spiritual language, ask for prayer, and even promise obedience—but God, who sees the heart, exposes that their request was never sincere.

This chapter speaks powerfully to us today. It shows us how easy it is to use God to bless our own plans, instead of surrendering to His. It also shows the kindness of God—He was still willing to speak to them, still willing to bless them, still willing to plant them in the land—if they would simply obey. And it warns us that running to “Egypt” (the world, our own solutions, the place of self-protection) will not save us; it will destroy us.

Jeremiah 42 – When We Ask but Do Not Want to Obey

1. A Very Spiritual-Sounding Request (Jeremiah 42:1–6)

“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 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... that the Lord your God may show us the way in which we should walk and the thing we should do.’” (Jeremiah 42:1–3)

On the surface, this sounds wonderful. They ask for prayer. They ask for direction. They speak humbly. But notice the wording: *“the Lord your God.”* They were still holding God at arm's length.

Jeremiah answers correctly:

*“Then Jeremiah the prophet said to them, ‘I have heard. Indeed, I will pray to the Lord **your** God according to your words...’”* (Jeremiah 42:4)

Jeremiah refuses to let them treat God as “Jeremiah's God” only. He says, “No—He is **your** God. If you are asking, you must own Him.”

Then they make a very strong promise:

“Whether it is pleasing or displeasing, we will obey the voice of the Lord our God... that it may be well with us when we obey...” (Jeremiah 42:6)

That is the right confession. That is what real worship looks like: “Lord, whatever You say, yes.” But as the rest of the chapter shows, their mouths said “yes,” but their hearts said “Egypt.”

Practical application:

- It is possible to sound spiritual and still resist God.
- Asking for prayer is not the same as surrendering to God.
- The test is not, “Will I pray about it?” but, “Will I obey when God answers?”

2. God's Delay and God's Direction (Jeremiah 42:7–12)

“And it happened after ten days that the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah.” (Jeremiah 42:7)

This is such an important detail. Jeremiah did not get the answer instantly. He waited ten days. Sometimes God delays His answer to test our sincerity. Do we really want His will, or do we just want a quick confirmation of our own plan? God is never in a hurry, and His timing is always perfect.

Then Jeremiah gathers everyone and gives them God's answer:

“Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel... ‘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. Do not be afraid of the king of Babylon... for I am with you, to save you and deliver you from his hand. And I will show you mercy, that he may have mercy on you and cause you to return to your own land.’” (Jeremiah 42:9–12)

What a gracious word. God says:

- “Stay where I put you.”
- “I will build you.”
- “I will plant you.”
- “Do not be afraid.”
- “I am with you... to save you.”

They were afraid of Babylon—but God said, *You do not need to be afraid of Babylon if you walk with Me.* Fear of people often pushes us away from the will of God. God says, “You are afraid—but you do not have to be.”

Practical application:

- Sometimes the will of God is to stay put.
- God can protect you in the hard place.
- The safest place in the world is where God told you to be.
- Obedience is not always comfortable, but it is always blessed.

3. The Forbidden Option: Egypt (Jeremiah 42:13–19)

God now exposes what was really in their hearts:

“But if you say, ‘We will not dwell in this land,’ disobeying the voice of the Lord your God, 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 42:13–14)

Now we see it. They wanted safety, comfort, and control. Egypt represented:

- no war,
- no trumpet of battle,
- no hunger.

In other words: “We just want an easy life.”

But God warns them:

“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 42:16)

The very things they were trying to run from would chase them if they ran outside of God’s will.

Practical application:

- Running from problems does not remove them.
- Disobedience never produces the peace it promises.
- Egypt (the world, self-reliance, our own plans) always looks safer than trusting God—but it never is.
- If we seek security apart from God, we will lose both security and blessing.

4. God’s Final Word: “Do Not Go to Egypt” (Jeremiah 42:19–22)

“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 42:19)

God could not have been clearer. They asked. He answered. He laid out both paths:

- Stay → I will build you, plant you, protect you.
- Go to Egypt → you will fall by sword, famine, and pestilence.

Then God uncovers their hypocrisy:

“For you were hypocrites in your hearts when you sent me to the Lord your God, saying, ‘Pray for us... and according to all that the Lord your God says, so declare to us and we will do it.’ And I have this day declared it to you, but you have not obeyed...” (Jeremiah 42:20–21)

God says plainly: “You did not really want My will. You wanted My approval.”

Practical application:

- God sees beneath religious language to our motives.
- It is dangerous to use spiritual talk to cover a rebellious heart.
- God’s guidance is not for debating—it is for obeying.
- The clearest word of God is often the one we resist the most.

A Challenge for Believers

Jeremiah 42 presses on us three questions:

1. Do I really want God's will—or just His blessing on my will?
True discipleship says, "Lord, whatever You say, yes." Not, "Lord, yes—if it makes sense."
2. Am I willing to stay where God put me?
The remnant wanted to run. God said stay. Sometimes staying in a hard marriage, a hard ministry, a hard town, or a humble assignment is the very obedience that God will use to "build and plant" you (Jeremiah 42:10).
3. Will I walk by faith instead of fear?
Fear of Babylon drove them to Egypt. But faith in God would have kept them in the land. Believer, do not let fear be your shepherd. Let God's Word be your guide.

"For we walk by faith, not by sight." (Second Corinthians 5:7)

An Invitation to Non-Believers

This chapter is not just about ancient Israel. It is about you and me. God lays two roads before every person:

- The road of obedience and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ
- The road of self-reliance, doing it our way, running to "Egypt"

The Bible is clear:

- *"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."* (Romans 3:23)
- *"The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."* (Romans 6:23)

God does not save us because we are good or because we belong to a certain group. He saves us because Jesus shed His blood on the cross for our sins. On the cross, He took the judgment we deserve. Then He rose from the dead, declaring forever that He is God, Savior, and Lord.

So today, God is saying to you, just as He said to Judah: "Do not go to Egypt." Do not run to the world, to religion without Christ, to self-effort, to good works. Come to Jesus.

You can pray right now:

"Lord Jesus, I believe that You died on the cross for my sins and that You rose again. I turn from my own way, and I surrender to You. Be my Savior, be my Lord. Wash me in Your blood, forgive me, and make me Yours. I choose Your will, not mine. In Jesus' name. Amen."

If you prayed that sincerely, the Lord heard you. He delights to forgive. He delights to plant, to build, and to restore.

Closing

Jeremiah 42 is God saying: *“I am still willing to bless you—if you will stay where I put you and trust Me.”*

Let us not be people who ask for God’s will while secretly holding on to Egypt.

Let us be people who say—and mean—“Whether it is pleasing or displeasing, we will obey the voice of the Lord our God.”