

Jeremiah 42:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Then all the captains of the forces, and Johanan the son of Kareah, and Jezaniah the son of Hoshaiah, and all the people from the least even unto the greatest, came near,

Analysis

The remnant's approach to Jeremiah—'Then all the captains of the forces, and Johanan the son of Kareah, and Jezaniah the son of Hoshaiah, and all the people from the least even unto the greatest, came near'—appears to show humility and desire for divine guidance. The comprehensive phrase 'from the least even unto the greatest' indicates this was a corporate decision involving the entire community, not just leadership. However, subsequent events reveal their minds were already made up; they sought prophetic endorsement rather than genuine guidance. This represents a recurring human pattern: asking God's will while having predetermined our course, hoping He'll simply validate our decisions. The detail that they 'came near' to Jeremiah suggests formal approach, possibly covenant ceremony-like, indicating surface respect for prophetic office even while planning to disobey if the word didn't align with their preferences. Their lengthy profession of commitment to obey (verses 2-6) would make their eventual rebellion more egregious. This passage warns against using prayer and seeking guidance as religious formalities while maintaining autonomous decision-making authority.

Historical Context

This consultation occurred at Geruth Chimham near Bethlehem (41:17), with the remnant already positioned on the route to Egypt. The timing—shortly after Gedaliah's assassination and Ishmael's massacre—meant they were traumatized and fearful. The leadership included military commanders (Johanan, Jezaniah) who

had shown tactical wisdom but would soon demonstrate spiritual foolishness. That 'all the people from the least even unto the greatest' participated suggests this was a communal covenant renewal attempt, similar to gatherings at Sinai, Shechem (Joshua 24), or under Josiah (2 Kings 23). However, unlike those occasions where Israel genuinely submitted to God's revealed will, this gathering merely sought divine sanction for human plans. The inclusion of all social classes ('least even unto the greatest') demonstrated democratic decision-making but also shared culpability—when they eventually rejected Jeremiah's word, it was corporate rebellion. Ancient Near Eastern practice included consulting prophets, oracles, and priests before major decisions, so this approach wasn't unusual. What made it hypocritical was their prior decision to flee to Egypt regardless of divine counsel.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. How can believers distinguish between genuinely seeking God's guidance and merely wanting His approval for predetermined decisions?
2. What does the inclusive 'from the least even unto the greatest' teach about corporate responsibility when communities collectively reject God's revealed will?
3. Why do people often maintain religious forms (consulting prophets, praying for guidance) while refusing to submit to God's actual direction?

Interlinear Text

וָנָשׁוּ came near H5066	כָּל H3605	שָׂרֵי י Then all the captains H8269	הַחֲיָלִים of the forces H2428	וַיּוֹחָנָן and Johanan H3110	בֶּן the son H1121
קָרֵחַ of Kareah H7143	וַיִּזְנֶה ה and Jezaniah H3153	בֶּן the son H1121	הוֹשָׁעִיָּה of Hoshaiiah H1955	וְכָל H3605	הָעָם and all the people H5971
מִקָּטָן from the least H6996	וְעַד H5704	גָּדוֹל: even unto the greatest H1419			

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 6:13 (Parallel theme): For from the least of them even unto the greatest of them every one is given to covetousness; and from the prophet even unto the priest every one dealeth falsely.

Jeremiah 41:11 (Parallel theme): But when Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces that were with him, heard of all the evil that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah had done,

Jeremiah 40:13 (Parallel theme): Moreover Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces that were in the fields, came to Gedaliah to Mizpah,

Jeremiah 44:12 (Parallel theme): And I will take the remnant of Judah, that have set their faces to go into the land of Egypt to sojourn there, and they shall all be consumed, and fall in the land of Egypt; they shall even be consumed by the sword and by the famine: they shall die, from the least even unto the greatest, by the sword and by the famine: and they shall be an execration, and an astonishment, and a curse, and a reproach.

Jeremiah 40:8 (Parallel theme): Then they came to Gedaliah to Mizpah, even Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and Johanan and Jonathan the sons of Kareah, and Seraiah the son of Tanhumeth, and the sons of Ephai the Netophathite, and Jezaniah the son of a Maachathite, they and their men.

Jeremiah 42:8 (Parallel theme): Then called he Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces which were with him, and all the people from the least even to the greatest,

Acts 8:10 (Parallel theme): To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God.

Jeremiah 8:10 (Parallel theme): Therefore will I give their wives unto others, and their fields to them that shall inherit them: for every one from the least even unto the greatest is given to covetousness, from the prophet even unto the priest every one dealeth falsely.