

Jeremiah 42:13

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But if ye say, We will not dwell in this land, neither obey the voice of the LORD your God,

Analysis

God explicitly forbids their Egypt plan: '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 have hunger of bread; and there we will dwell.' This verse articulates their actual reasoning: Egypt promises 'no war' (escape from Babylonian threat), 'nor hear the sound of the trumpet' (no military alarms), 'nor have hunger of bread' (food security). These were genuine concerns—war, siege alarms, and famine had devastated them during Jerusalem's fall (Jeremiah 38:9, 52:6). Egypt appeared to offer everything Judah lacked: safety, peace, prosperity. However, God labels this reasoning as disobedience: choosing Egypt means 'neither obey the voice of the LORD your God.' The passage exposes how rational-sounding pragmatism can be fundamental rebellion when it contradicts God's explicit command. Their logic—flee danger, seek security—seemed sensible, but God demanded faith-based obedience over fear-driven pragmatism. The tragedy is that Egypt couldn't deliver what they sought; subsequent prophecy (verses 15-18) warned they'd find in Egypt the very sword, famine, and pestilence they feared in Judah. Disobedient flight provides no actual refuge.

Historical Context

The remnant's perception of Egypt as refuge had historical basis: Egypt was ancient, powerful, and traditionally beyond Babylon's easy military reach. Many Judeans had fled there during previous crises (2 Kings 25:26, Jeremiah 26:21).

Egypt's agricultural productivity (thanks to Nile irrigation) meant famine was rare, contrasting with Judah's drought-prone highlands. Egyptian military power, though declining, still made it formidable enough that Babylon couldn't easily extend control there. These factors made Egypt appear rationally superior to remaining in devastated, governor-less Judah where Babylonian reprisal loomed. However, several factors undermined this reasoning: First, Egypt was itself a Babylonian target and would eventually face conquest (Jeremiah 43:8-13, fulfilled historically when Nebuchadnezzar invaded Egypt around 568-567 BC). Second, Egypt represented return to the place of former bondage, symbolically reversing the Exodus. Third, and most importantly, God explicitly commanded them to remain in Judah with specific promises of protection. No amount of pragmatic calculation could sanctify choosing security through disobedience over danger through obedience. Their choice demonstrated that apparent safety pursued through rebellion against God's revealed will is neither safe nor faithful.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. How does this passage expose the tension between pragmatic reasoning about safety and faith-based obedience to God's commands?
2. What does the remnant's Egypt reasoning teach about how seemingly rational risk assessment can be fundamental rebellion when it contradicts God's revealed will?
3. In what ways do believers today choose apparent security through disobedience over faithful obedience despite uncertain circumstances?

Interlinear Text

וְאָמַרְתָּ	אָמַרְתָּ	אָמַרְתָּ	לֹא	נִשְׁכַּח	בְּזֶה הָאָרֶץ	הַזֹּאת
H518	But if ye say	H859	H3808	We will not dwell	in this land	H2063
	H559			H3427	H776	
לְבַלֹּתִי	שְׁמִי	בְּקוֹל	יְהוָה	אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:		
H1115	neither obey	the voice	of the LORD	your God		
	H8085	H6963	H3068	H430		

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 44:16 (References Lord): As for the word that thou hast spoken unto us in the name of the LORD, we will not hearken unto thee.

Exodus 5:2 (References Lord): And Pharaoh said, Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the LORD, neither will I let Israel go.