

## Was Jeremiah a False Teacher?

Nebuchadnezzar had marched on Judah destroying all the cities in his path, just as God had warned the Israelites. The king of Babylon now sets up Gedaliah as a governor over Judah (Jer. 40:7). Gedaliah encourages the surviving Jews to submit to the rule of Babylon (Jer. 40:9ff). Ishmael, a man of royal descent that had found refuge in Ammon, came to Mizpah where Gedaliah resided and unmercifully murdered him with all that were in his house (Jer. 41:1-2). Johanan had attempted to warn Gedaliah of this assassination; however, Gedaliah refused to believe him (Jer. 40:13-14). Ishmael now takes the remaining Jews of Mizpah captive and travels northeast to Ammon for refuge, after murdering 70 Jews who were on their way to Jerusalem to worship Jehovah. Johanan gains intelligence of the murderous spree of Ishmael and intercepts him at Gibeon (Jer. 41:12). Ishmael is defeated and escapes to Ammon. Johanan now leads the captive Jews down to Egypt that they may have protection from the Chaldeans. Johanan reckoned that when Nebuchadnezzar gained intelligence of the murder of Gedaliah, he would send troops to Judah for more wars.

Before entering Egypt, Jeremiah is sought after by Johanan, his captains, and the people in general. They request that Jeremiah pray to God that the Lord may give them direction (Jer. 42:3). The people promise Jeremiah that whatever the Lord commands (whether it be what they want to hear or not) they would obey (Jer. 42:1-6). Ten days pass and Jeremiah comes to the people and delivers God's message; i.e., do not go to Egypt. Jeremiah gives the consequences of not obeying the voice of the Lord in this matter being death by sword, famine, and pestilence. The people respond to Jeremiah saying, "*thou speakest falsely*" (Jer. 43:2).

Was Jeremiah a false teacher (instructor)? Let us notice a few things about the character of Johanan to determine the answer to this question. To begin with, what may seem to be a noble act of warning Gedaliah of assassination only exposes the depraved character of Johanan. It was Johanan's desire to "*secretly*" murder Ishmael before Ishmael had a chance to murder Gedaliah. Johanan was a depraved vigilante. Secondly, Johanan determines to bring the people to Egypt for safety because he feared the Chaldeans (Jer. 41:17-18). Johanan does the right thing by asking Jeremiah for God's word in the matter, yet when he receives God's word he rejects it calling Jeremiah a false instructor. Thirdly, Johanan takes the Jews on into Egypt even after the horrid consequences were pronounced by Jeremiah for such disobedience. The Jews remain in Egypt for several years and begin worshipping the "*queen of the heaven*" (Jer. 44:17). Here was a man who took matters into his own hands and the result was the practice of idolatry on the part of the Jews now living in Egypt.

Was Jeremiah a false teacher or did his words not settle well with Johanan and the people? Generally, it seems, most religious people want to think that they truly love God and would follow Him where ever that may be; yet when they find that God's instructions are not what they had conceived within their minds they turn away from the Lord. Isaiah recorded, "*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith Jehovah. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts*" (Isa. 55:8-9). Jeremiah hits the nail on the head when identifying man's problem of rebellion saying, "*they are not humbled even unto this day, neither have they feared, nor*

*walked in my law, nor in my statutes...*” (Jer. 44:10). Judah had gained comfort in their sin through the instruction of real false teachers (Jer. 23:13-17). Many today follow certain teachers and preachers because they teach and preach a message that comforts one in their current error rather than exposing the sin (Eph. 5:11).

When man is humble he will repent rather than coming up with his own doctrine to justify his error (cf. Ps. 51; Isa. 57:15; 66:1-2). When man fears God he will certainly seek out God’s laws and follow them (Prov. 1:7). When man allows his thoughts to over-rule the laws of God then such a one has rejected God’s mercy, grace, peace, and promises of salvation. Jeremiah was not a false teacher seeking to lead Judah astray. Jeremiah was a prophet who was only speaking the words of the Lord (cf. Jer. 26:12-14). Let us give ear to those who preach and represent truth!

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