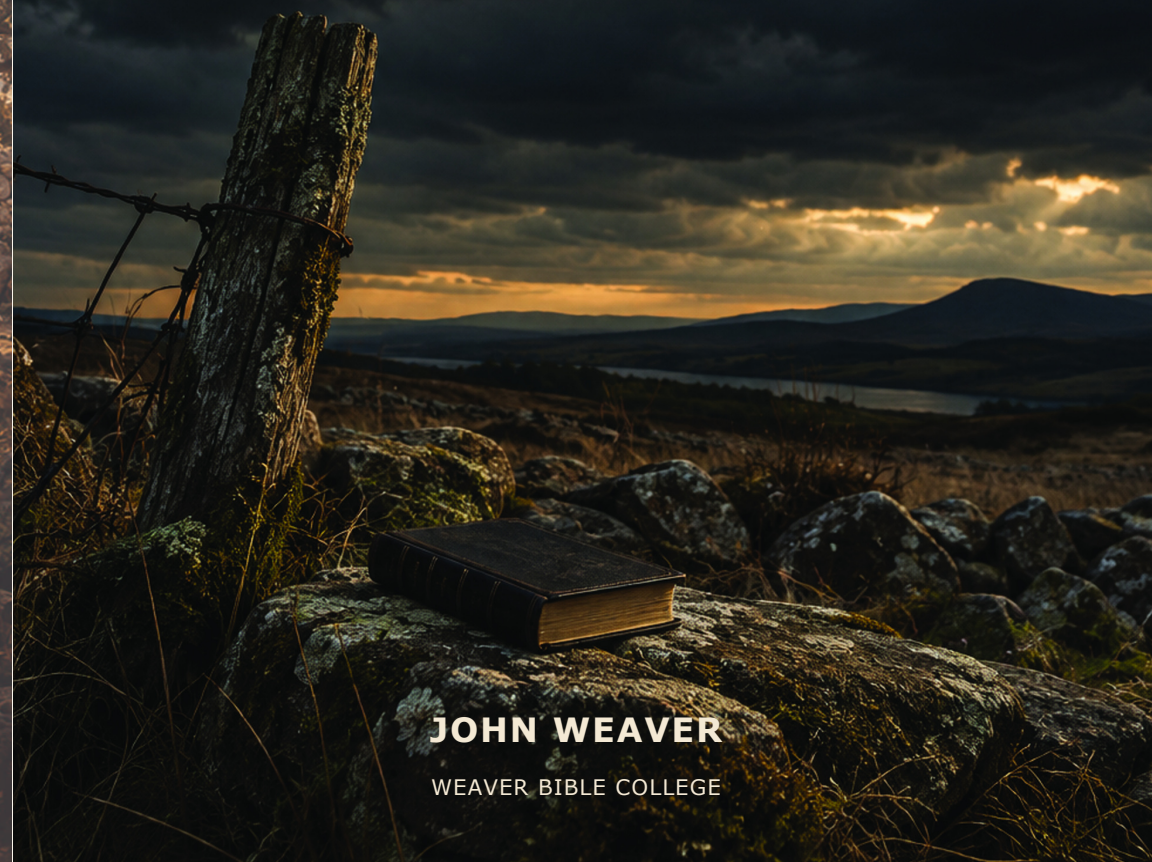
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So, You Wish To Challenge God

"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet,
and a light unto my path."

PSALM 119:105



JOHN WEAVER

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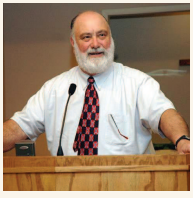
Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.

JAMES 4:10

Human presumption does not remove accountability to God. John Weaver examines the refusal of correction, the seriousness of His commands, and the consequences of treating divine authority as a matter of personal preference. These messages challenge readers to consider whether their conduct expresses submission or a determination to have their own way.

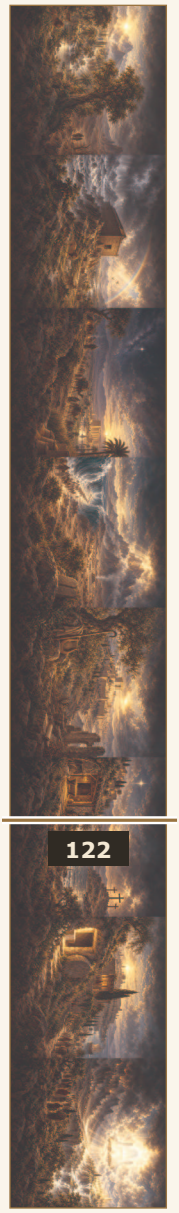
“There is no way that you can slip up on God's blind side, for God does not have a blind side.”

JOHN WEAVER



John Weaver

John Weaver's sermons form the teaching collection presented by Weaver Bible College. This volume gathers his teaching from that collection.



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CHAPTER 1

So, You Wish To Challenge God

Part One of Two

Introduction: The Nature of Challenges

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 to the greatest, came near, and said unto Jeremiah the prophet, “Let, we beseech thee, our supplication be accepted before thee, and pray for us unto the Lord thy God, even for all this remnant. For we are left but a few of many, as thine eyes do behold us, that the Lord thy God may show us the way wherein we may walk, and the thing that we may do.” Then Jeremiah the prophet said unto them, “I have heard you. Behold, I will pray unto the Lord your God according to your words, and it shall come to pass that whatsoever the Lord shall answer you, I will declare it unto you. I will keep back nothing from you.”

And they said to Jeremiah, “The Lord be a true and faithful witness between us, if we do not even according to all the things for

the which the Lord thy God shall send thee to us. Whether it be good, or whether it be evil, we will obey the voice of the Lord our God, to whom we send thee, that it may be well with us, that we may obey the voice of the Lord our God."

So you wish to challenge God. And challenges are everywhere. There are charity challenges, ice bucket challenges, sweat challenges, weight loss challenges, fight challenges, and even scriptural memorization challenges.

Competition seems to be built into the human spirit. We wish to test ourselves and we wish to prove ourselves. We want to be the best, the strongest, the most powerful, the wisest, and even the winner in every situation. And we tend to forget that for every winner, there's a loser. And for everyone who proves himself the best, others prove themselves the second best or third best or fourth best or right on down the line.

But usually our challenges are based upon equality and proportionality. By that, I simply mean this: a 10-year-old is not going to challenge a 21-year-old to a fight. And likewise, a 90-pound weakling is not going to challenge a 250-pound man to a wrestling match. Or if he does so, he's not very smart in doing that, I can assure you.

It is true that I have seen younger and smaller men win in matches, but usually that does not happen. Even if someone challenged a man of the same age and build, I would not necessarily wish to challenge a ten-time martial arts champion. That would be out of my league, and I would have absolutely no hope of winning.

When it comes to fighting, I would say this: years ago I learned a very plain and simple truth, one that becomes more appreciated with age. If the fight is not over in thirty to forty-five seconds, you have lost. A man my age, seventy-six, is not going to get on the ground and wrestle someone for ten or fifteen minutes. It simply will not work. Therefore, if I am in a dangerous situation, I plan on striking first, fast, and hard, and getting it over with.

You can watch all the movies you want, especially martial arts movies, but no one can fight for thirty, forty, or fifty minutes straight. Look at the martial arts championships on television,

including the Ultimate Fighting Championships. Even when contestants are competing for the grand prize and the belt of the best, they have only five-minute matches, followed by a break, and may go three or four rounds. The lesser matches are only two or three minutes, followed by a break.

Years ago, when Alice and I were taking Shorin-ryu Kempo, we put on all our protective fighting gear and sparred. We threw our punches and kicks as hard as we could. The most you could go was about two or three minutes before you were out of breath. Watch the men who fight in the Ultimate Fighting Championship: after about the second round, when they sit down, they are gasping for air. I am simply pointing out the fact that, the older you get, if it is not over in thirty to forty-five seconds, you have lost. This shows the truth of what I am going to tell you.

Years ago, I had a friend who was a bodybuilder. He was much younger than I was and probably twenty times stronger. One of his shoulders would cover both of mine. He not only worked out regularly; he owned the gym. He was probably six feet three to six feet four inches tall and weighed 250 pounds of solid muscle.

I saw him one day on the street talking to another man. I pulled over my truck, parked, and trotted toward him. Just as I reached him, I put my hands on my hip and did like this.

He looked at me and said, “What’s wrong?” I said, “Well, I woke up this morning feeling mean and mad, like I just wanted to whip somebody. When I saw you, I said, ‘That’s the fella I want to whip.’ So I came over here to jump on you. I just happened to reach around and felt a back brace. I thought, well, it might not be too wise to get into a fight with a back brace on.”

He kind of wiped his brow and said, “Boy, it’s my lucky day.” I said, “No, sir. You don’t understand. If I was a bucket of water, you couldn’t pour me on you.” I am simply saying that it would be absolutely ridiculous for me to want to fight that man. There’s no one in this room crazy enough to want to fight someone you know is bigger, stronger, faster, more flexible, and better. You don’t want to fight him.

We call that common sense. And yet there are people with absolutely no hope of winning who will challenge the sovereign God of heaven and earth, who is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent. Men regularly thumb their noses at God, spit in His face, anger Him, and challenge Him to do His absolute worst to them. They are like Jeroboam. You know what God said about King Jeroboam.

He said in 1 Kings 14:9, "But thou hast done evil above all that were before thee, for thou hast made thee other gods and molten images, to provoke me to anger, and hast cast me behind thy back." God said, "You did this purposely, deliberately to provoke me to anger." It was not just Jeroboam. Israel did that as well. In Psalm 78:40, he said, "How often did they provoke me in the wilderness and grieve me in the desert?" There were ten major provocations of God by the Israelites, not necessarily counting the smaller ones. When you begin to challenge God, provoke and anger Him, tempt Him, and fight against Him, it is not only going to fail, but it is also going to bring confusion and judgment into your life. God said in Jeremiah 7:19, "Do they not provoke me to anger? saith the Lord. Do they not provoke themselves to the confusion of their own faces?"

It is like saying, "I am going to challenge James and Steve and Gary and Francis to a fight right now, and I will take them all at one time." I am afraid it would not turn out too well for me. I would end up not only confused, but humiliated and defeated as well. Anybody who is foolish enough to challenge God and fight Him is insane as well.

The Context of Jeremiah 42

In Jeremiah chapter 42, we will see three distinct ways that these Judahites challenged God. The context of our passage is simple. Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, had defeated Judah and Jerusalem. He had killed thousands upon thousands of people and taken a large number into captivity. After conquering the land, he put Gedaliah in charge as governor and left the very poorest of the people to till the land, produce fruit, and at least pay him something in taxes, I suppose.

But there was a man named Ishmael who did not care for Gedaliah. He came to Gedaliah and had a meal with him, then rose up and murdered Gedaliah. He also murdered all the men who were with Gedaliah.

Moreover, at the same time, he murdered the Babylonians who were there—Babylonian soldiers. Look in your Bibles to Jeremiah 41, and begin reading with verse 1. Watch carefully.

"Now it came to pass in the seventh month that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah the son of Elishama, of the seed royal, and of the princes of the king, even ten men with him, came unto Gedaliah the son of Ahikam to Mizpah. And there they did eat bread together in Mizpah. Then arose Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and the ten men that were with him, and smote Gedaliah the son of Ahikam the son of Shaphan with the sword, and slew him, whom the king of Babylon had made governor over the land. Ishmael also slew all the Jews that were with him, even with Gedaliah at Mizpah, and the Chaldeans that were found there, and the men of war."

The Chaldeans were the same as the Babylonians. He had diplomats, counselors, and soldiers there. So he not only murdered Gedaliah and his men; he murdered these Babylonians as well. If you read the rest of the chapter, Ishmael ultimately escaped into the land of the Ammonites.

Now the people are in absolute chaos and confusion. Gedaliah has been murdered, and the Babylonians have been murdered. The only thing they can think of is this: Nebuchadnezzar is going to want vengeance. "We did not do it, but we are going to be the recipients of it, because he is the one who put Gedaliah in charge. He is the one who sent his diplomats and soldiers over here. Now they are gone, and they are going to come and destroy us."

The Remnant's Request and Pious Vow

When you get to Jeremiah chapter 42, the people come to Jeremiah and say, "Look, you need to pray for us. You need to intercede for us." They said, "that the Lord thy God may show us the way wherein we may walk and the thing that we may do." In other words, they were in a state of confusion and did not know which way to turn.

Verses 1 through 6 are important:

"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 the greatest, came near, and said unto Jeremiah the prophet, 'Let, we beseech thee, our supplication be accepted before thee, and pray for us unto the Lord thy God, even for all this remnant, for we are left but a few of the many, as thine eyes do behold.'"

Here is why they want him to pray: "that the Lord thy God may show us the way wherein we may walk, and the thing that we may do." Then Jeremiah the prophet said unto them, "I have heard you. Behold, I will pray unto the Lord your God according to your words, and it shall come to pass that whatsoever the Lord shall answer you, I will declare it unto you. I will keep nothing back from you."

Then they said to Jeremiah, "The Lord be a true and faithful witness between us, if we do not even according to all things for the which the Lord thy God shall send thee to us. Whether it be good, or whether it be evil, we will obey the voice of the Lord our God, to whom we send thee, that it may be well with us, when we obey the voice of the Lord our God."

These words would make the heart of any true pastor or any true man of God leap for joy. Here are people who come and ask for prayer, direction, and the will and way of God in their lives. And they say, "Now, Jeremiah, you pray."

And here is our statement: God is going to be a witness between us and you, and we are going to obey God. We will do whatever God tells you to tell us to do, whether we like it or whether we do not, whether it be good or whether it be evil. We want the will of God in our lives.

How badly do you really want the will of God for your life, for your family, and for your church? Are you willing to let go of your will, your desires, and your determinations? What if the will of God contradicts your will, crosses your desires and aspirations, or contradicts that which you think is best? What if it crosses everything that you believe is right and necessary? Let me ask it another way: What if it is the will of God for you to suffer?

No one likes to suffer. However, we must understand that suffering is a gift of God. How can I say that? Philippians 1:29 says, “For unto you it is given on behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.” Note the words, “for unto you it is given.” It is a gift. Just as faith is the gift of God, suffering is the gift of God. Moreover, as He does not give His faith to every individual, He does not give the gift of suffering to every individual. Those to whom He gives the gift of suffering are enabled by His grace to suffer for His honor, His glory, and their good. Suffering is just as much the gift of God as His faith. We still do not like to suffer, but if God gives you that gift, you will be able to do so for His honor and His glory.

I remember years ago a lady in our church who was dying with cancer of the bone. She was in excruciating pain; nothing could touch it. I would go into the hospital to see her, and you could be fifty yards away, coming down the hall to her room, and hear her screaming in pain. I would walk into the room and say, “Mrs. Kitchens, how are you?”

“Oh, I’m doing just fine by the grace of God. I’m doing wonderful.” I had heard her screaming and knew she was in pain. But when God gives you the gift of suffering, she never ever complained. Never. And yet, she suffered greatly.

These people had come to Jeremiah and said, “We want you to pray for us. We need to know the will of God. We need to know the way of God. We want what God will have for our lives.”

God's Clear Will Revealed

The interesting thing is that God did tell the remnant of Judah exactly what His will was and exactly what He wanted for them. Beginning with verse 7 of Jeremiah 42: “And it came to pass after ten days that the word of the Lord came unto Jeremiah.” God does not necessarily answer all prayers instantaneously. Jeremiah prayed, and it was ten days before God gave him the answer.

When he received the answer, he called Johanan the son of Kareah, all the captains of the forces who were with him, and all the people, from the least even to the greatest, and said, “Thus saith the

Lord God of Israel, unto whom you sent me to present your supplications before him."

Here is what God said: "If you will still abide in this land, then will I build you and not pull you down, and I will plant you and not pluck you up. For I repent me of the evil that I've done unto you. Be not afraid of the king of Babylon, of whom you are afraid. Be not afraid of him, saith the Lord, for I am with you to save you and to deliver you from his hand. And I will show mercies unto you, that he may have mercy upon you and cause you to return to your own land.

"But if you 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 for bread, and there will we dwell.' And now therefore hear the word of the Lord, you remnant of Judah. Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, if you wholly set your faces to enter into Egypt and go to sojourn there, then it shall come to pass that the sword which you feared shall overtake you there in the land of Egypt, and the famine whereof you were afraid shall follow"

The Lord said concerning the remnant of Judah, "Go ye not into Egypt." He warned them that if they went there, they would die by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence. None of those who remained or escaped would avoid the evil He would bring upon them. "For thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, as mine anger and my fury have been poured forth upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so shall my fury be poured forth upon you." When they entered Egypt, they would become "an execration, and an astonishment, and a curse, and a reproach," and they would see that place no more. God said, "Know certainly that I have admonished you this day."

God's will was that they remain in the land. If they stayed, He would build and plant them; He would not tear them up or tear them down. They did not have to fear Nebuchadnezzar, because God would take care of that. It was His will that they remain in Judah, enjoy His protection and provision, and not go down into Egypt. They were warned that if they went there, they would die.

The People's Hypocrisy and Fear

Several problems appear in this passage, and these same problems are prominent in Christians today. The first is found in verse 20, a verse to which we will return several times. Jeremiah said to the people, “For you dissembled in your hearts when you sent me unto the Lord your God, saying, ‘Pray for us unto the Lord our God, and according to all that the Lord our God shall say, so declare unto us, and we will do it.’” He said, “You dissembled in your hearts.” You played the hypocrite.

Here is an absolute truth: Most Christians—not unsaved people, but most Christians—really do not want the will of God. The reason they do not want God’s will is that they do not trust God or His judgment. They trust their own minds, their own understanding, their own wills, and their own determination. This will be shown a little later.

The very first thing is that they played the hypocrite. They said they wanted the will of God, but in reality they did not. The second thing is that they were more afraid of Nebuchadnezzar than they were of God. God said, “You don’t have to be afraid of Nebuchadnezzar. I can take care of him. I’m sovereign.” Yet Proverbs 29:25 says, “The fear of man bringeth a snare, but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe.” Certainly, the fear of man brought a snare to the people here in Judah.

The very fact that one would challenge God and challenge His will evidences a lack of trust and faith in Him. To challenge God not only illustrates that we doubt His knowledge, His wisdom, and His sovereignty; we also doubt His love. Our Lord says, “If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit?” and, in other passages, “and good things to them that fear him.” Now listen: “to them that obey him.”

If we, being evil, know how to give good gifts to our children, there is none in this room, and none in this world, as holy as the Lord. There is none as loving and kind as Him. Every one of us who has had children has given good things to them simply because they asked, and sometimes they did not even ask. We knew they wanted it

and desired it, so we went out and got it. God said, “If you’re being evil and still know how to give good gifts, how much more can I do that?” Certainly, He could do that. Their challenging God’s will evidenced that they were doubting His grace, mercy, knowledge, and love.

When we consider our text and the lives of professing Christians today, one thing strikes us very plainly: most Christians are really afraid—afraid of the will of God, suffering, and losing. We do not wish to suffer, do without, or be deprived of the things we desire. Somehow, we think that God is going to strip us and destroy us. The remnant that wanted to go into Egypt feared Nebuchadnezzar more than they feared God. They believed Nebuchadnezzar more than they believed God. They were afraid of hunger, thirst, disease, and death. And God promised them.

He said, “If you just remain in the land, I’m going to take care of you. But if you go to Egypt, you’re going to die.”

The amazing thing is this: they did not trust God; they trusted in themselves. Go back to Jeremiah 42, and let’s begin reading there with verse 20 again. Jeremiah says to these Judahites, “The Lord hath said concerning you, O ye remnant of Judah, Go ye not into Egypt? know certainly that I have admonished you this day.” That is verse 19. “For ye dissembled in your hearts, when ye sent me unto the Lord your God, saying, Pray for us unto the Lord our God; and according unto all that the Lord our God shall say, so declare unto us, and we will do it. And now I have this day declared it to you; but ye have not obeyed the voice of the Lord your God, nor any thing for the which he hath sent me unto you.”

The Consequences of Disobedience

Now therefore know certainly that ye shall die by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence, in the place whither ye desire to go and to sojourn. They were running from Nebuchadnezzar because they were afraid of him. They were running from famine and pestilence. What did they do when they disobeyed God? They ran straight into Nebuchadnezzar, into famine, and into pestilence. Why? Because God was going to send Nebuchadnezzar to destroy Egypt.

Look in chapter 43, beginning with verse 1: “And it came to pass, that when Jeremiah had made an end of speaking unto all the people all the words of the Lord their God, for which the Lord their God had sent him to them, even all these words; Then spake Azariah the son of Hoshaiah, and Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the proud men, saying unto Jeremiah, Thou speakest falsely: the Lord our God hath not sent thee to say, Go not into Egypt to sojourn there: But Baruch the son of Neriah setteth thee on against us, for to deliver us into the hand of the Chaldeans, that they might put us to death, and carry us away captives into Babylon. So Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces, and all the people, obeyed not the voice of the Lord, to dwell in the land of Judah. But Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces, took all the remnant of Judah, that were returned from all nations, whither they had been driven, to dwell in the land of Judah.”

“Even men and women and children, and the king's daughters, and every person that Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard had left with Gedaliah the son of Ahikam the son of Shaphan, and Jeremiah the prophet and Baruch the son of Neriah.” They kidnapped Jeremiah and Baruch, along with these other people, and forced them into Egypt. “So they came into the land of Egypt, for they obeyed not the voice of the Lord. Thus they came even to Tahpanhes. Then came the word of the Lord into Jeremiah in Tahpanhes, saying, ‘Take great stones in thine hand, and hide them in the clay in the brick kiln, which is at the entry of Pharaoh's house in Tahpanhes, in the sight of the men of Judah, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Behold, I will send and take Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and will set his throne upon these stones that I have hid, and he shall spread his royal pavilion over them.’”

"When he cometh, he shall smite the land of Egypt, and deliver such as are for death to death, and such as for captivity to captivity, and such as for the sword to the sword. And I will kindle a fire in the houses of the gods of Egypt, and he shall burn them and carry them away captives, and he shall array himself with the land of Egypt as a shepherd putteth on a garment, and he shall go forth from thence in peace. He shall break also the images of Beth-shemesh that is in the

land of Egypt, and the houses of the gods of the Egyptians shall he burn with fire." Wow.

Look back to Jeremiah 42:20: "For you dissembled in your hearts when you sent me unto the Lord your God, saying, 'Pray for us unto the Lord our God.'" Do you know what these people wanted? They really wanted their own will and their own way. I have found over nearly 57 years of preaching that most people are not desirous of having the will of God in their lives. They do not want it because they are afraid to trust God. They believe somehow that He is not going to give them the best, and that their wisdom and understanding are far superior to God's. They do not believe that He will do everything for their good and for His glory. They do not truly believe that God loves them as a father loves a child.

The Deceitful Heart and Self-Trust

It is a strange thing for someone to claim to love the Lord and yet not truly want His will in his life. I have found the same thing in counseling. When most people set up an appointment to be counseled, they actually do not want counseling. They come to the session with their minds made up. They do not want to hear what God says or what God commands. They are not interested in changing or doing anything differently.

You may ask, "If that is not the reason they come to counseling, why do they come?" They come because they want you to put your stamp of approval upon what they have already determined and decided to do. They want someone to say, "You're right. You just go right ahead and do exactly what you decided to do."

When you look at verse 20, He says, “for you dissembled in your hearts.” The word “dissembled” in the Hebrew, ta'ah, refers to one who is deceived, wanders, goes astray, staggers as a drunken man, or is led astray. So here is somebody who dissembles. He is not only a hypocrite, but he is out of his mind. Have you ever seen a drunken man stagger and stumble? He does not know which way he is going or even which way he is falling—except down.

I have a pastor friend who, before God saved him, was a drunk. He was a big man, probably weighing 230 or 240 pounds, and he

had a sweet little wife who weighed perhaps 110 or 120 pounds soaking wet. One night he came home drunk as a skunk and fell on the walkway leading up to their house. Joy saw him, went out, and somehow, struggling, lifted that big man. With her arms around his waist and his arm around her neck, she slowly but surely walked him to the door to put him to bed.

He looked at his wife, drunk as he could be, and said, “If my wife knew I was going home with you, she’d kill me.” I told Joy I would have dropped him right there. He would have slept on the concrete that night, I can assure you. He did not even know his own wife; he was out of his mind.

This is what the word “dissembled” means. Anybody insane enough to challenge God has to be out of his mind. Why? Because the Bible says in Jeremiah 17:9, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.” Your own mind will deceive you. I have heard pastors and Christians say, “Well, if I know my own heart,” but the truth is, you do not. You may know what you think in a moment, but your heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. It is treacherous. When you trust your own heart, you are insane.

The Bible says in Isaiah 44:20, “He feedeth on ashes”; listen: “a deceived heart hath turned him aside.” And in Obadiah 1:3, God said, “The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee.”

Our own pride and our own deception are enough to lead us astray. I want to make one thing exceedingly clear: you cannot trust your own heart, and you cannot trust your own understanding.

Proverbs 3:5 says, "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not to thine own understanding." Watch carefully: "Lean not to thine own understanding." You know what it is like when you start leaning. You lean this way just a little, just a little, just a little, and you keep leaning until all of a sudden you fall. Now God says, "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, lean not to thine own understanding, in all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths."

Verse 7 continues: "Be not wise in thine own eyes, fear the Lord, and depart from evil. It shall be health to thy navel, and marrow to thy bones." We have to learn to trust in the Lord and lean not to our

own understanding. In all our ways we are to acknowledge Him. Then He says, "Be not wise in thine own eyes." When we lean to our own understanding, we are being wise in our own eyes. When we choose our will above God's will, we are being wise in our own eyes.

Proverbs 28:26 says, "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool, but whoso walketh wisely, he shall be delivered." How do you walk wisely? By walking according to the will of God and the word of God. A man who trusts in his own heart is a fool.

Jeremiah 17:5 says, "Thus saith the Lord, Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, whose heart departeth from the Lord." You cannot lean upon your own understanding without departing from the Lord. You cannot trust in yourself without departing from the Lord. Therefore, "Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, whose heart departeth from the Lord."

We think we know best. We think we are wise. We think we know what we desire and what will make us happy. We think we are capable of determining all things for ourselves, but the truth of the matter is, that is wrong. We do not know. The safest place for any child of God is right smack dab in the middle of God's will. Even in suffering, God can cause us to prosper mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and later on physically. What was it John wished—that the one to whom he wrote would be in health and prosper even as his soul prospered? I've got news for you: if our bodies were as prosperous as our souls, most of us would have very poor bodies.

The people in Judah fled from God's will. They followed their own understanding, desires, and emotions, and ran straight into that which they were afraid of. They were afraid of Nebuchadnezzar; they found him in Egypt. They were afraid of hunger; they found it in Egypt. They were afraid of pestilence; they found it in Egypt.

The Bible says in Psalm 37:4, "Delight thyself in the Lord and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart." All these people had to do was stay in the land, delight themselves in the Lord, and enjoy His protection, provision, and promotion. But they refused. They challenged the will of God and lost. It was their fear, their lack of

trust in the Lord, and their holding on to their own understanding that caused them to flee into Egypt.

Applications for Today

They ran into everything they were fearful of, and they lost everything. You cannot challenge God and win. You cannot challenge His will and win.

Let me make a couple of applications. First, I am sure that you realize you have a loving, kind, and gracious Heavenly Father. Once you realize this truth, you understand that God is not going to do anything to us except that which is for our good and for His glory. His wisdom is infinite; ours is finite. His love is eternal; ours is temporal. His power is omnipotence; ours is limited.

His tender mercies, the Bible says, are over all of His works. You never lose by trusting in Him. You never lose by submitting to His will or surrendering to His Word.

The second application is this: If we really and truly desire His will, He will give it to us. In John 7:17, He said that if you will to do His will, you shall know the doctrine. Here is the problem. These Judahites came to Jeremiah and said, "We want you to pray for us that we can know God's will and the way that we should walk." The truth was that they did not want to know God's will. They did not want to know the way God thought they should walk, because their minds were already made up.

They were going into Egypt. They believed that they knew better than God and knew more than God. God is far more interested in you doing His will than you are in doing His will. If you genuinely want to know the will of God, He has promised to reveal it to you. But He will never reveal His will to an unstable, double-minded, hypocritical individual who cares less whether he does the will of God. God is not going to waste His time on someone who is merely playing around.

That is exactly what these Judahites were doing. Here is what most professing Christians do: "Oh, Lord, please show me Your will. I want to know Your will." But it is not, "I want to know Your will so that I may do it regardless of the circumstances, the situation, or

suffering. I want Your will more than anything in the world." Instead, it is, "Lord, show me Your will, and if I like it, I'll do it, and if I don't, I won't. Lord, I want a choice in this matter." That is where most Christians are. They are really not interested in doing the will of God. Yet God has promised that if we really want His will, He will reveal it to us, and He has revealed it in His Word.

Here is the third one. Stop and think about the situation in which the Judahites found themselves. Their land had been destroyed; their people had been murdered and taken captive; and they were under a foreign power. The ruler appointed by that power had been murdered, along with Babylonian diplomats and soldiers. Now there was only chaos and confusion, because the army had taken over.

The men with the weapons even kidnapped Jeremiah and Baruch, along with others, and forced them into Egypt, compelling them to do their will. Do you realize? We are basically in the same situation in this country. We are under a foreign power, and there is confusion and chaos. You look at the fighting that is about to occur, in all probability, because if Biden does not get in, the left is going to unleash its murderous designs upon any conservative. Why? They have already started compiling lists of enemies. If Trump stays in and wins, of course they will be greatly upset. If Biden gets in, they will say, "This is our mandate. We are going to destroy; we are going to take." It does not matter one way or the other. We are basically in the same situation in this country right now as the Judahites were in Jeremiah's day. We had better find out the will and way of God, be willing to walk in His will, and not challenge Him. You would have to be a sot—staggering, drunk, insane, and out of your mind—to challenge the sovereign, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, eternal, immutable, majestic, infinite God of the universe. Do not challenge God.

Do His will, and He will prosper us, protect us, and provide for us. I love what David said: "I have been young, and now I am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." I want the will of God.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee this day. We thank You for Your Word and Your truth. We ask, Lord, help us know Your will, do Your will, and bring our lives into conformity to

Your Word. Give us grace and mercy to serve Thee acceptably, with reverence and godly fear. In Thy name we pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 2

So, You Wish To Challenge God

Part Two of Two

Jeremiah 44, beginning with verse one: “The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the Jews which dwell in the land of Egypt, which dwell at Migdol and at Tahpanhes and Noph and in the country of Pathros, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, You have seen all the evil that I've brought upon Jerusalem and upon all the cities of Judah. And behold, this day they are a desolation and no man dwelleth therein because of their wickedness, which they have committed to provoke me to anger in that they went to burn incense and to serve other gods whom they knew not, neither they, ye, nor your fathers.

“Howbeit I sent unto you all my servants, the prophets, rising early and sending them, saying, Oh, do not this abominable thing, which I hate. But they hearkened not, nor inclined their ear to turn from their wickedness, to burn no incense unto other gods. Wherefore, my fury and mine anger was poured forth and was

kindled in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem. And they are wasted and desolate as at this day."

Introduction: The Insanity of Challenging God

There are many individuals who challenge others; some challenge themselves, and sadly a great number end up challenging God. I pointed out last week in our introduction how you have to be absolutely insane to challenge someone who is greater, stronger, more flexible, has more ability. No one in his right mind is going to challenge anyone like that, because obviously there is no hope of winning in any kind of contest.

Yet many people challenge someone who is greater, stronger, infinite, omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, eternal, immutable, and sovereign. That is, they challenge God Himself. The interesting thing is that fallen man oftentimes thinks that he is not only capable of challenging God, but that somehow, ultimately, he is going to win. Obviously, such a man is deceived.

You remember that passage in Psalm 2, where the Bible says, "The kings of the earth and the rulers have gathered themselves together, saying, Come, let us break his bands and cast his cords from us." But when you get to verse 4, the Bible says, "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh, the Lord shall have them in derision." So you have to be absolutely insane to challenge God.

Man is finite; God is infinite. Man may be powerful, but God is omnipotent. He is all-powerful. Men may have knowledge, but God is omniscient. He knows absolutely everything. You may have an end—man does have an end—but God is endless because He is eternal. Man is mutable, but God is immutable. Man can change from strong to weak, but God never changes. You are confined to space and time, but God is not confined to space and time because God is not only omnipresent, He is also transcendent. So it is absolutely impossible, in one sense of the word, for someone in a right mind to challenge God.

Whatever one's plans, moves, schemes, devices, or plan of action happens to be, everything is destined to fail. Why? Because Job

21:27 says, "Behold, I know your thoughts and the devices which you wrongfully imagine against me."

Stop and think about that: "I know your thoughts." In fact, He said in the book of Ezekiel, "I know your thoughts even before they come into your mind." In Isaiah 66:18, He says, "For I know their works and their thoughts." Proverbs 15:26 says, "The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord." God has to know them to declare them an abomination. Since God knows our thoughts—He knows your thoughts—it is impossible to trick Him, surprise Him, deceive Him, or ambush Him.

There is no way that you can slip up on God's blind side, for God does not have a blind side. In Matthew chapter 9 and verse 4, the Bible says, "And Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said unto them, Why think ye evil in your hearts?" Notice, He knew their thoughts. In Luke chapter 5 and verse 22, the Bible says that when Jesus perceived their thoughts, He answered them, "Why reason ye in your hearts?" Obviously, our Lord knows our thoughts.

God has made an absolute sovereign declaration in Isaiah 46:10: "My counsel shall stand and I will do all my pleasure." All the fighting, feuding, and fussing against God will ultimately fail. In light of this truth, there are still people who wickedly and deceitfully imagine that somehow they are going to pull the wool over God's eyes. It is just not going to happen.

Challenging God in His Worship

Review: Challenging God's Will (Jeremiah 42-43)

Last week, when we looked at Jeremiah 42 and 43, we saw how the Judahites challenged God in His will. They came to Jeremiah and said, “Pray for us. We want to know God’s will for our lives, and we are willing to do whatever God says, whether it is good or evil, whether we like it or not. We are going to obey God.”

After ten days, God told Jeremiah, “You tell them, I said, it is my will for them to stay in the land. Do not go into Egypt.” When Jeremiah told them that, they said, “You are lying. God did not say that. God did not tell you to tell us that.” They were afraid of

Nebuchadnezzar and did not want him to come and kill them for something Ishmael had done. They refused to stay, endure the famine, or go through the pestilence. Instead, they went to Egypt, kidnapping Jeremiah and Baruch and taking them with them. God sent Nebuchadnezzar into Egypt, and the very man they were running from, they ran into. There was famine and pestilence there as well. God told Jeremiah to spread stones out and said, "Nebuchadnezzar is going to come and put his throne right over these stones."

Whenever you challenge God's will, you will ultimately find that you lose. In Jeremiah 44, we see two other areas in which people challenged God seriously and greatly. Just as they did in Jeremiah's day, people are doing exactly the same today. Last week, we saw that they challenged God in His will. Today, the second point is this: They challenge God in His worship.

Challenging God in His Worship: False Gods

How does one challenge God when it comes to worship? First, one may challenge God by giving worship to a false god or an idol that is nothing more than an invention of one's imagination. God said in Isaiah 42:8, "I am the Lord, that is my name, my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images." Notice what He said: "I am the Lord, that is my name, my glory will I not give to another." It does not matter who it is. "Neither," He said, "will I give my praise to graven images."

J. A. Alexander said this: "The general doctrine of this verse," speaking of Isaiah 42:8, "is that true and false religion cannot coexist." Stop and think about this. There are three major monotheistic religions in the world: Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. What is Islam seeking to do? To destroy Judaism and Christianity. What is Judaism seeking to do? To destroy Christianity and Islam. What is Christianity's ultimate goal? To destroy Islam and Judaism and every other false religion. Why? Because the true religion, Christianity, cannot coexist with false religions. He continues: "The general doctrine of this verse is that true and false religions cannot coexist. Because, however tolerant idolatry may be,

it is essential to the worship of Jehovah to be perfectly exclusive of all gods."

Christianity is therefore an exclusive religion. That is why God said, "I am the Lord, that is my name, my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images." The worship of God must be absolutely exclusive.

When you begin to worship some false god, or anyone or anything other than the one true and living God who has revealed Himself in the Lord Jesus Christ, in essence you are challenging God. What you are saying to God is this: "You are not the true God. The God that I am worshiping, the God that I am imagining, the God that I am making is the true God, and therefore you are the false God." In that sense, you are challenging God to prove that He is indeed God.

The remnant of Judah did exactly this. In Jeremiah 44, the word came to Jeremiah concerning all the Jews dwelling in the land of Egypt, at Migdol, Tahpanhes, Noph, and in the country of Pathros. Think about the exclusivity of the worship of the one true and living God: "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, You have seen all the evil that I have brought upon Jerusalem and upon all the cities of Judah."

SCRIPTURE READING - Jeremiah 44:1-12 (KJV)

> And behold, this day they are desolate. They are a desolation and no man dwelleth therein because of their wickedness, which they have committed to provoke me to anger. In that they went to burn incense and to serve other gods, whom they knew not, neither they, ye, nor your fathers. Howbeit, I sent unto you all my servants the prophets, rising early and sending them, saying, O do not this abominable thing which I hate. But they hearkened not, nor inclined their ear to turn from their wickedness, to burn no incense unto other gods. Wherefore, my fury and mine anger was poured forth, and was kindled in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem, and they're wasted and desolate as at this day. Therefore now, thus saith the Lord, the God of hosts, the God of Israel, wherefore commit ye this great evil against your souls, to cut off from you, man and woman, child and suckling out of Judah, to leave you none to remain.

Just stop and think about that. God is saying, "Why in the world are you murdering yourself? Why are you committing suicide? Why are you doing this? I've already told you." Watch verse eight. "In that you provoke me into wrath with the works of your hands, burning incense unto other gods in the land of Egypt, whither ye be going to dwell, that you might cut yourselves off and that you might be a curse and a reproach among all the nations of the earth."

"Have you forgotten the wickedness of your fathers and the wickedness of the kings of Judah and the wickedness of their wives and your own wickednesses and the wickedness of your wives, which they have committed in the land of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? They are not humbled even in this day. Neither have they feared nor walked in my law, nor in my statutes that I set before you and before your fathers. Therefore, thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, behold, I will set my face against you for evil and to cut off all Judah. And I will take the remnant of Judah that have set their faces to go into the land of Egypt and 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 to the greatest by the sword and by the famine.

And they shall be in execration and an astonishment and a curse and a reproach." Now, God is condemning them because of their idolatry. They were worshipping a false god.

One of the false gods that they worshipped was the Queen of Heaven. Jeremiah 7:18 says, “The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead their dough to make cakes to the Queen of Heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto other gods, that they may provoke me to anger.” So these women then were making cakes to the Queen of Heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto other gods. You have to ask yourself, who was this Queen of Heaven? The Queen of Heaven was a Persian or an Assyrian deity who was supposed to symbolize a quality possessed by moonlight in giving nature its receptive power as the Sun was represented as a quickening power.

The moon therefore became the symbol of female productiveness and was worshipped at Babylon. Usually women who worshipped the Queen of Heaven were either adulteresses or prostitutes, because that is basically how they worshipped the Queen of Heaven in one sense of the word. This title, the Queen of Heaven, was given to Ishtar, the Assyrian and Babylonian goddess who is also called Ashtoreth or Astarte. You will find them mentioned in the Bible. She was thought to be the wife of Baal, another false god, who also went under the name of Molech as well. The motivation for women worshipping Ashtoreth, Astarte, or Ishtar—however you want to pronounce her name, because she is called different names in the Bible—was the fact that she was the goddess of fertility.

Back in those days, for a woman not to have a child was a disgraceful thing, very humiliating. That is why, of course, Rachel pleaded with Jacob, "Give me children, or I die." Rebecca had to pray for children herself, and even Hannah went to the temple to pray because she was childless. It was an embarrassment and a disgrace not to be able to have children.

Thus there was a worshipping of this Astarte. What the Roman Catholics did was take this title and apply it to Mary. Under Roman Catholicism, Mary is often called the Queen of Heaven. May I point something out to you, and may I be blunt? Mary is not now, never has been, and never will be the Queen of Heaven. There is no Queen of Heaven. Our Lord Himself disavowed any special recognition of Mary. Let me show you.

Hold Jeremiah 44, but look in your Bibles to Luke 11, beginning with verse 27. Our Lord was teaching, and a woman kind of broke in and said something. In Luke 11:27, "And it came to pass as he spake these things, a certain woman of the company lifted up her voice and said to him, Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked. But he said, Yea, rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it." The woman praised the mother who gave Him birth and whose breasts He had sucked, but He said, "Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it."

So Mary certainly is not the queen of heaven, never has been and never will be. There is no queen of heaven. Another title given to Mary, which she does not deserve, is the mother of God. She is not

the mother of God. In Roman Catholicism, you will hear Mary referred to as the mother of God. If you read the Scripture, especially Luke 1:35, the angel told Mary, “That holy thing which is conceived of thee.” What thing was conceived in Mary? The body. You remember in the Psalms, our Lord said, “A body hast thou prepared for me.” The same thing is said in the book of Hebrews: “Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared for me.” Mary was the mother of the body of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, who was God already, assumed that body. So she was not the mother of God, although she was the mother of the body of the Lord Jesus Christ. You see the difference. But they took this and called Mary the queen of heaven.

The queen of heaven in the Old Testament was Astarte, Ashtaroth, Ishtar. Obviously, there is no relation there whatsoever.

If you are going to worship some other god, if you are going to worship any other God other than the one true and living God who has revealed Himself in the Lord Jesus Christ, you are a thief. Why can I say that? Because you are stealing the honor and glory that goes to God and giving it to someone else. So you are not only a thief, you are an idolater; and you are not only an idolater, you are a blasphemer. You can challenge God, the one true and living God, by stealing His glory and giving it to another.

Challenging God in His Worship: Hypocritical Worship

There is a second way that you may challenge God in His worship. You may challenge God by giving Him what you and I would call hypocritical or half-hearted worship.

Isaiah chapter 1 is directed to Judah and Jerusalem. Isaiah 1:1 says, “The vision of Isaiah, the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.” It then lists the days of the kings in which he saw these truths. It applies to Judah and Jerusalem. In verse 10, he says, “Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom, Give ear to the law of our God, you people of Gomorrah.” Who are Sodom and Gomorrah in this chapter? Judah and Jerusalem. He is talking to his people, and he is calling them Sodom and Gomorrah.

Look at what he asks: "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord." Why are you sacrificing to me? "I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts, and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. When you come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand to tread my courts?"

"Bring no more vain," that is, useless and worthless, "oblations. Incense is an abomination unto me. The new moons and Sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with. It is iniquity, even the solemn meetings. Your new moons and your appointed feasts, my soul hateth. They are trouble unto me, I'm weary to bear them. And when you spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you. Yea, when you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean. Put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes. Cease to do evil."

Why is God calling these people Sodom and Gomorrah? Because they were in rebellion to Him. They continued with their offerings and sacrifices, but it was all hypocritical and in vain. They did not really care anything about God, His law, or His directives. It was nothing more than ceremony and ritual, going through the motions the way most average Christians go through church every Sunday: you are there, you sing a few songs, put something in the offering, hear a little sermon, and go home. It is just that simple.

God knows our hearts and our genuineness or our hypocrisy. We cannot deceive Him. In Amos chapter 5, beginning at verse 21, God tells them: "I hate, I despise your feast days and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. Though you offer me burnt offerings, and your meat offerings, I will not accept them, neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beast. Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs." Their singing was nothing but noise. "For I will not hear the melody of thy viols. But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream. Have you offered unto me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel?"

“But you have borne the tabernacle of your Moloch and Chiun your images, the star of your god, which you made to yourselves.

Therefore, will I cause you to go into captivity beyond Damascus, saith the Lord, whose name is the God of hosts."

Now God said, "I hate, I despise your feast days." Did not God appoint those feast days? Yes. He said, "I will not have your sacrifices." Did not God appoint the sacrifices? The answer is yes. Did not God appoint music? Yes, but God says, "I hate it. I'm not going to have it." Why? It was all hypocritical and half-hearted. God said, "I will not accept it." You want to challenge God.

Do not give Him the worship that He demands. God has appointed His own worship. He knows what is acceptable and what is unacceptable, and what He demands from you is that which He has deemed acceptable. When you say, "I don't think He deserves to be worshipped like that. I think I'll just do it my way," you are challenging God. You are saying, "He doesn't deserve what He's asking for. I will give Him what I want to give Him." Thus, you are elevating yourself above God. You are becoming an idolater because you are determining the worship of God.

Our Lord said to the woman of Samaria in John 4:23–24, "But the hour cometh and now is when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth," for "the Father seeketh such to worship him." Then He says, "God is spirit and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and truth." God's worship is bounded on one side by spirit and on the other by truth. When we worship God in spirit, it must be in the Holy Spirit and in our spirits; on the other side, it is bounded by the truth of God. Everything we give God has to be biblical because His word is truth. As we give Him what He demands in truth, we do so in the Holy Spirit and in our spirits. I cannot help but think of David's words in Psalm 103: "Bless the Lord, O my soul and all that is within me, bless his holy name."

Unless we give Him the worship He demands, in the way He demands it, we devalue Him and indicate that He is not worthy of that worship. Thus, we are challenging God to prove us wrong. In Deuteronomy 6:16, the Bible says, "You shall not tempt the Lord your God as you tempted him in Massah."

The Meaning of Tempting/Challenging God

"You shall not tempt." The Hebrew word for tempt is nasah, which literally means to test, to try, to prove, to tempt, and to challenge. When our Lord was being tempted of the devil in Matthew chapter 4, He quoted this passage: "It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." Listen to the word tempt, because it is used several times.

Another illustration is found in Acts chapter 5 and verse 9. Ananias and Sapphira had sold a certain piece of land for a certain amount of money, but they kept back part of it and pretended that they were giving all the money to the apostles to distribute to the poor. Barnabas had a certain piece of land, sold it, and gave everything to the apostles. Evidently, Barnabas was honored and recognized.

So they thought, We will do that, too, but we are not going to give it all. We will hold back some of it. When Ananias appeared before the apostle Peter and gave him the money, Peter asked, "Did you sell the land for so much?" Ananias replied that this was exactly what they had sold it for and that they were giving it all. Peter then asked, "When you had the land, was it not your own? And when you sold it, was it not your own?" In other words, you did not have to give a dime.

But Peter said, "You have not lied to man. But you lied to the Holy Ghost." Immediately, God killed Ananias. Young men came and drug him out and buried him. A little while later, Sapphira came in, not having heard what had happened to her husband. Peter asked her the same question, and she gave the same answer. Then he asked, "How is it that you have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? Behold the feet of the young men who drug out your husband, they shall bear thee out." He knew that if God had killed her husband, He was going to kill her, and she fell over dead.

The word tempt is the same word our Lord used in Matthew 4: "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." It is the Greek word peirazō, which means to test, to try, to tempt, and to challenge. When you are challenging God, when you are tempting God, it is to tempt Him maliciously, craftily, and deceitfully.

Strong explains it like this: impious or wicked conduct tests God's justice and patience, challenging Him, as it were, to give proof of His perfections. You can challenge God in His worship by refusing to render to Him the worship He demands. Here is the third way these people challenge God: they challenge God in His Word. They not only challenge God in His will and worship; they challenge God in His Word.

SCRIPTURE READING - Jeremiah 44:11-30 (KJV)

Challenging God in His Word (Jeremiah 44:11-30)

When you challenge God's will, inevitably, you're going to challenge God's worship. And when you challenge His will and His worship, it all comes down to one final thing. You will challenge His Word.

"Therefore, thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, behold, I will set my face against you for evil and to cut off all Judah. 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 in execration, and in astonishment, and in curse, and in reproach. For I will punish them that dwell in the land of Egypt, as I have punished Jerusalem by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence.

So that none of the remnant of Judah which are gone in the land of Egypt to sojourn there shall escape or remain, that they should return in the land of Egypt to which they have a desire to return to dwell there, for none shall return, but such as shall escape." That is, a few will make it back. "Then all the men which knew that their wives had burned incense unto other gods, and all the women that stood by, a great multitude, even all the people that dwelt in the land of Egypt, in Pathros, answered Jeremiah, saying, As for the word that thou

SCRIPTURE READING - Jeremiah 44:16-23 (KJV)

hast spoken unto us in the name of the Lord, we will not hearken unto thee. But we will certainly do whatsoever thing

goeth forth out of our own mouth, to burn incense unto the queen of heaven and to pour our drink offerings unto her, as we have done we and our fathers, our kings and our princes in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem. For then had we plenty of victuals and were well and saw no evil. But since we have left off to burn incense to the queen of heaven and to pour out drink offerings unto her, we have wanted all things and have been consumed by the sword and by the famine. And when we burn incense to the queen of heaven and poured our drink offerings unto her, did we make her cakes to worship her and pour out drink offerings unto her without our men?" Then Jeremiah said unto the people, and to the men and to the women and to all the people which had given him that answer, saying, "The incense that you burned in the cities of Judah and on the streets of Jerusalem, you and your fathers, your kings and your princes and the people of the land did not the Lord remember them and came it not into his mind so that the Lord could no longer bear because of the evil of your doings and because of the abominations which you have committed. Therefore, is your land a desolation, and an astonishment and a curse, without an inhabitant, as it is this day. Because you have burned incense, and because you have sinned against the Lord, and have not obeyed the voice of the Lord, nor walked in His law, nor in his statutes, nor in his testimonies, therefore this evil happened unto you, as it is this day." Moreover, Jeremiah said, "And all the people, and all the women, hear the word of the Lord, all Judah, that are in the land of Egypt.

SCRIPTURE READING - Jeremiah 44:25-30 (KJV)

Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, saying, You and your wives have both spoken with your mouth and fulfilled with your hand, saying, We will surely perform our vows that we have vowed, to burn incense to the queen of heaven, and to pour out our drink offerings unto her. You shall, you will surely accomplish your vows, and surely perform your vows.

Therefore hear ye the word of the Lord, all Judah that dwell in the land of Egypt: Behold, I have sworn by my great name, saith the Lord, that my name shall no more be named in the mouth of any man of Judah in all the land of Egypt, saying, The Lord God

> liveth. Behold, I will watch over them for evil, and not for good; and all the men of Judah that are in the land of Egypt shall be consumed by the sword and by the famine, until there be an end to them. Yet a small number that escaped the sword shall return out of the land of Egypt, and to the land of Judah.
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> All the remnant of Judah that are going to the land of Egypt to sojourn there shall know whose word shall stand, mine or theirs. And this shall be a sign unto you, saith the Lord, that I will punish you in this place, that you may know that my words shall surely stand against you for evil. Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will give Pharaoh Hophra king of Egypt into the hand of his enemies, and into the hand of them that seek his life, as I gave Zedekiah king of Judah into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, his enemy, and that sought his life.
>
> These people challenge God's word. They totally, completely misinterpret God's providence. They say, "Here's what our problem is. When we were worshipping the Queen of Heaven, we had plenty to eat, and we didn't have these problems. We only got this pestilence and this famine and this destruction when we ceased worshipping."
>
> Jeremiah said, "You're not thinking straight. You disobeyed God. You left His law, you left His commandments, and you began your idolatry. The judgment that came upon Judah and Jerusalem was because of your idolatry. You lost all of those things because of your idolatry. You think now, if you go back into idolatry, that you're going to get everything back, that you're just deceiving yourself. You're going to die."

Did these people go into Egypt? Yes. Did they die there? Yes. Did Nebuchadnezzar conquer Egypt? Yes. Did they suffer as God said? Yes. Did God's word stand? Yes. Did their word fail? Yes. God said, "We'll see whose word is going to stand. We'll see who can accomplish His counsel and His purpose and His will." You speak against God. You decry Him, discredit Him, deny Him, and blaspheme Him.

You rant and rave all you please and all you desire. Still, God said in Isaiah 46:10, "My counsel shall stand and I will do all my

pleasure." We will find out whose word will stand. When you challenge God's word, inevitably you are saying that your word is superior, greater, and more powerful, and you will be engulfed in the anger and righteous wrath of God. God's Word will stand.

Misinterpreting Providence

Matthew Henry said, "So perversely did they misconstrue providence, though God by His prophets had so often explained it to them, and the thing itself spoke the direct contrary. Since we forsook our idolatries, we have wanted all things and have been consumed by the sword, the true reason of which was because they still retained their idols in their heart and an affection to their old sins, but they would have thought it was because they had forsaken the acts of sin. Thus the afflictions which should have been for their welfare to separate them between them and their sins being misinterpreted did but confirm them in their sins. Thus, in the first ages of Christianity, when God chastised the nations by any public calamities for opposing Christians and persecuting them, they, the nations, put a contrary sense upon the calamities, as if they were sent to punish the Christians or sent to punish them for conniving at the Christians and tolerating them. And hence they cried, Christianos ad leones, that is, throw the Christians to the lions."

Yet, if it had been true that since they returned to the service of the true God, the God of Israel, they had been in want and trouble, was that a reason why they should revolt from Him again? Henry says, "That was as much to say that they served not him, but their own bellies. Those who know God and put their trust in Him will serve Him, though He starve them, though He slay them, though they never see a good day with Him in this world, being well assured that they shall not lose by Him in the end." And that's true. Do not challenge God. You cannot win. You always lose, because God is sovereign and God is omnipotent.

Applications: Progression of Sin and Love for God

Do you remember what Job said in Job chapter 13 and verse 15? This is the attitude that we must take: “Though he slay me, yet will I trust him.” You are never, ever going to lose by trusting God.

When one begins to challenge the will of God, inevitably he will end up challenging the worship of God. Most of you have been around churches long enough to know that when someone gets angry with God, usually they take it out on the preacher, and sometimes on other Christians. What do they do? They stop coming to church. Once they challenge the will, they end up challenging the worship, and the next thing you know, they end up challenging the word. There is always a progression in sin. It does not get better; it gets worse and deeper. When you challenge the will, you challenge the word as well as the worship of God.

The safest place to be is right smack dab in the middle of God's will. Do not challenge His will, His worship, or His word. Those who know me know that I hate large cities. I despise them, and I especially dislike Atlanta, Georgia. I do not want to go through it, around it, or near it. But as much as I hate and despise Atlanta, if God told me that I had to go there to pastor and minister, I would say, "Lord, I'm more than willing to go. I want to go. But You do not have to make it plain to me. This is Your will. Would You please write that in this stone over here so I would know for sure?"

The truth of the matter is that if God wanted me to go to Atlanta, He would change my heart, my mind, and my thinking. If I genuinely believed He wanted me there, I would be there before the night was over. But I am thankful that He does not want me in Atlanta; He wants me right where I am. The safest place, no matter how much you might dislike it, is still right smack dab in the middle of God's will. That is where the protection, blessings, and prosperity of God will be.

Love and Submission

Here is the second application: If we really wish to serve our Lord more, we must learn to love Him more. Outside of the plain command of God, one reason that a wife submits to her husband is that she really loves him. One reason children submit to their parents is because they love them. The more love you possess toward God, the more willing you are to submit to Him.

Spurgeon stated, "One who has been reconciled to God by the blood of his Son, Jesus Christ, finds it difficult to believe his devotion

to the Lord is adequate." Those of us who have been reconciled to God through the blood of Jesus Christ find, with great difficulty, that our devotion is adequate. In other words, we do not think that we can adequately serve Him because of the great price that He gave for us.

He also says, "The true child of God does not believe his worship of God or his love for God is pure enough." Have you ever realized that even your prayer is mixed with sin? Your worship is mixed with sin. What you understand is mixed with sin. It is difficult when someone truly wants to honor God and realizes that our devotion is not only inadequate; it is not pure enough either.

"A soul under special manifestations of love weeps that it cannot love Christ anymore. Mr. Welch, a Suffolk minister, weeping at the table and being asked the reason for it, answered it was because he could love Christ no more." He could not gather an additional love for Him. "The true lovers of Christ can never rise high enough in their love to Christ. They count a little love to be no love. A great love to be but little. Strong love to be but weak."

The highest love is infinitely below the worth of Christ—the beauty and glory of Christ, and the fullness, sweetness, and goodness of Christ. The top of their misery in this life is that they love so little, though they have been loved so much. If you want to be humbled, think of how you love the Lord Jesus Christ and compare that with His so great love that He loves you.

When you realize the vast chasm in comparisons, it should make you want more to submit to His will, give Him the worship that He demands, believe His Word, and rely upon Him. It is the love of God that constrains us, so that we may give Him the glory due unto His name.

Therefore: Do not challenge God, His will, His worship, or His word. Bow submissively, worship and honor Him, and ask Him to increase your love for Him.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow before thee. We thank you for your word and your truth. Lord, help us never, ever to attempt to challenge thee, but may we always willingly submit to

thee, love thee, understand thee, and glorify thee. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask. Amen.

Source Notes

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