

The Hebrew Corner

Sometimes God asks us to do things that make no sense to us in our limited thinking, yet is the right course of action. Two examples of from the Tanach make this evident.

In Jeremiah 24, we are presented with a parable concerning two baskets of figs (Jeremiah 24:1-10):

“The LORD shewed me, and, behold, two baskets of figs were set before the temple of the LORD, after that Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon had carried away captive Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah, and the princes of Judah, with the carpenters and smiths, from Jerusalem, and had brought them to Babylon. One basket had very good figs, even like the figs that are first ripe: and the other basket had very naughty figs, which could not be eaten, they were so bad. Then said the LORD unto me, What seest thou, Jeremiah? And I said, Figs; the good figs, very good; and the evil, very evil, that cannot be eaten, they are so evil. Again the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel; Like these good figs, so will I acknowledge them that are carried away captive of Judah, whom I have sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans for their good. For I will set mine eyes upon them for good, and I will bring them again to this land: and I will build them, and not pull them down; and I will plant them, and not pluck them up. And I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the LORD: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: for they shall return unto me with their whole heart. And as the evil figs, which cannot be eaten, they are so evil; surely thus saith the LORD, So will I give Zedekiah the king of Judah, and his

princes, and the residue of Jerusalem, that remain in this land, and them that dwell in the land of Egypt: And I will deliver them to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth for their hurt, to be a reproach and a proverb, a taunt and a curse, in all places whither I shall drive them. And I will send the sword, the famine, and the pestilence, among them, till they be consumed from off the land that I gave unto them and to their fathers.”

Fig in Hebrew is t'ayna (תאנה, tuh-ay-NAH), which means either the fruit or the tree, depending on the context. Here God is speaking through Jeremiah to show the people of Judah two courses of action one that was God's way, and one that was man's way. The good figs would choose the way of God, and the bad figs the way of man. God had pronounced judgment upon Judah due to their idol worship, to be carried out by Babylon. Those who accepted his judgment and surrendered to the Babylonians followed God's way and would be under his protection. Those who did not accept his judgment and followed King Zedekiah in resisting Babylon went against God's will, and were not under God's protection. We see in the passage that God promised to set his eyes upon those who followed his will, for good. Eye in Hebrew is ayin (עין, AHY-yihn), which is also the name of the 16th letter of the Hebrew alphabet (ע), the first letter of this word (a picture of an eye was used in an ancient form of the Hebrew alphabet to represent the letter ayin). God points out here that following his way is good, and not following his way is evil. Good in Hebrew is tov (טוב, TOHV), and evil in Hebrew is ra (רע, RAH). Jeremiah's message was not popular, and few heeded his words, and in the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem lost their lives. On the other hand, some of those that went into Babylonian captivity, and many of their descendants, were able to

return to Judah at a later time, after the Persians conquered Babylon, and King Cyrus issued a decree allowing the people of Judah to return to their homeland and rebuild their temple.

The second example of how God asks us to do his will in faith comes from the book of Numbers (chapters 13 and 14). After God had led the Israelites away from bondage in Egypt, they were getting ready to occupy the land of Canaan, promised as an inheritance to Jacob. God instructed Moses that he should select one man from every tribe of Israel to search out Canaan and report on the condition of the land and the people that lived there, prior to their entry into Canaan. Moses sent out the twelve men, and after their return in forty days, they gave the following report (Numbers 13:26-33):

“And they went and came to Moses, and to Aaron, and to all the congregation of the children of Israel, unto the wilderness of Paran, to Kadesh; and brought back word unto them, and unto all the congregation, and shewed them the fruit of the land. And they told him, and said, We came unto the land whither thou sentest us, and surely it floweth with milk and honey; and this is the fruit of it. Nevertheless the people be strong that dwell in the land, and the cities are walled, and very great: and moreover we saw the children of Anak there. The Amalekites dwell in the land of the south: and the Hittites, and the Jebusites, and the Amorites, dwell in the mountains: and the Canaanites dwell by the sea, and by the coast of Jordan. And Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it. But the men that went up with him said, We be not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we. And they brought up an evil report of the land which they had searched unto the

children of Israel, saying, The land, through which we have gone to search it, is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof; and all the people that we saw in it are men of a great stature. And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight.”

From Numbers 13, we learn that only Caleb and Joshua gave a positive report, and so demonstrated their faith that God would be able to bring the Israelites into Canaan successfully. The other men were fearful of the inhabitants of the land, whom they described as giants. Their fear spread throughout the congregation, such that they planned to stone Caleb and Joshua. God, in his wrath, intended to destroy the entire congregation, but Moses intervened on their behalf. God relented, but would not allow any accept Caleb and Joshua to enter the promised land, along with the children of the rest of the congregation of Israel, after one year of wandering in the wilderness for every day that the twelve men had searched Canaan.

In both examples, we see that lack of faith in God yielded a bad result. It is an important lesson for us that we choose God's way, regardless of our own reasoning, which is limited. The stories demonstrate that fear leads us to doubt God, but that we have no reason to fear if we are doing the will of God. The book of Proverbs gives a simple statement of what God wants us to do when faced with difficult situations (Proverbs 3:5-6):

“Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.”

I pray that you exhibit this kind of faith in your own lives, because God loves you so much that he sent his son Jesus to die for you. He is well able to deliver you in time of need. May you have a blessed month, and much shalom to you.