

True story: there was once a call in show whose guests were a Bishop and a Rabbi. The caller said to them: "If science contradicts the Bible, then science is wrong because the Bible is clear and easy to understand and science isn't. Clarity is a sign that the Bible was given directly by God."

The rabbi laughed.

There was a moment of silence from both the Bishop and the Rabbi. Then the rabbi said; "God does not make the Truth easy to find. God hides the Truth from us and expects us to use our Reason to uncover it. Why God does this I do not know. But this is what the Rabbis have always taught."

The bishop nodded his head yes to the rabbi's words.

But it is true. The bible is often unclear and hard to understand. The truths confound us at times, and at other times we nod our heads in understanding. The bible may be many things to many people, but it is rarely simple.

And that's because life isn't simple. We expect one thing and get another. We don't understand. Small example:

I've been going through the process of selling my house to get one closer to my aging parents. The realtor promised this would be a simple process. "It'll sell with multiple offers, probably in less than a month. That was months ago.

What was supposed to be simple has been an ordeal and a surprise. I am constantly being confronted with what is wrong with my house. The roof is dented—my road is bumpy. The truss has been cut through for a woodstove, the washer and dryer is in the kitchen....

We expect one thing from our life, and get another. And we don't understand why life has to be so complicated. But it is.

Jeremiah had been telling the people of Israel that they were in danger. That they would be conquered and sent into exile. And it happened.

Babylon invaded, they destroyed Jerusalem and leveled the Temple. Many people were killed and the remainder: thousands upon thousands were walked from Jerusalem to Babylon. There they found themselves in an unfamiliar land with strange customs and beliefs. They were not trusted by the Babylonians, and they felt abandoned by God.

Picture this: your homeland has been conquered by a foreign army and you have been relocated to their country. You don't know the language, you miss what is familiar, and you are filled with fear and resentment. The false prophets played on that resentment. They whipped up the people, saying to not assimilate, to hold themselves aloof from the foreigners. These false prophets told the people that their future was back in Jerusalem, with the remnant who would survive.

From our perspective, that even seems like good advice.

Then Jeremiah spoke. God's will for them was this:

*"Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare."*

For Jeremiah's followers this must have been a "you have got to be kidding me" moment.

What they were probably thinking—what normal people would think—is: These people have ruined our lives. These people are the enemy. We want to call down God's curses on them and you are telling us that we have to pray for them. That's too much.

One prophet is saying one thing, and Jeremiah another. I told you the bible was confusing. This is where God expects us to use reasoning.

I had an interesting talk today with the leader of a group in Camden who is trying to help make sure Camden is a welcoming place for newcomers—

particularly refugees. She was talking to me as one rector of several interested churches who might be up for an adventure.

She related one story about a family who they had helped. This family: a mother and a father and their six children had spent 17 years in a refugee camp in the Sudan. Think of that. The children had never known any other life but a refugee camp. It was awful, but it was the only existence they had ever known.

When they arrived they had to learn a new language, new laws, learn about the cold weather and how to adapt. They helped the children get into school where they began to thrive. The husband learned to drive and he and his wife got work. But it was difficult without anyone from their country or their culture to bring some familiarity to this foreign land.

They were grateful, so grateful for all the help. But they were still lonely for home.

I imagine the Israelites felt the same way.

Sometimes God leads us into situations that make us yearn for the simpler life, the good old days. Our old friends.

But we are sometimes urged, by God, to live where we are placed. To work for the welfare of the people we are living with. To thrive. And sometimes it's easy to understand—we have clarity. And sometimes- as the Rabbi reminded us with a laugh—God does not always make what he wants-- or our path towards him-- easy to find. God expects us to use our reason to uncover it.

Why God does this I do not know.

What I do know is that life isn't simple. The world isn't simple.

Perhaps it's not just that the refugees are here to be helped by us: for them to learn our ways and learn our traditions. Perhaps God has placed them among us because they have so much they can teach us, too—if we want to learn.

God is tricky that way. Not simple.

And really—every lesson we will learn in life is a lesson of love. Love for God, and love for neighbor. No matter who they are. Amen.