

Are We Depending on God or the Government?

Like almost every rabbi or pastor in the United States over the past few weeks, I have been watching the vast changes taking place in our nation and doing my best to keep my feet on steady ground as nearly everything has shifted.

We have had to restructure almost every part of our ministry practices. We went from service and studies with people attending in the building to livestreaming those same services. The people working in every ministry from our prison ministry to our nursery have had to totally change how they function in order to continue to serve. Some of these changes actually increased our effectiveness and the number of people we are reaching with the message of Messiah.

While we don't like to talk about it, the truth is, that in the back of our minds, every leader is at least thinking, "How is this going to affect our finances?" We all have bills to pay, salaries to meet, missions to complete and commitments we have made.

So it is only natural that we would see a drastic change and begin to think about how this will affect things. I know at our synagogue, as soon as this began, we started looking at our budget and making cuts in areas that we could without reducing our ability to meet the needs of our congregation.

As we were making these plans and changes and watching our spending and donations closely, the news came out that the federal government was going to offer loans to businesses and churches to tide them over during the next few months. Not only were they going to make the loans available, but if you followed the guidelines, much of these loans would be forgiven. In other words, the government would be giving money

to synagogues and churches to help pay the salaries of those working for those ministries.

My first thoughts were like the first thoughts of most of my friends who serve as rabbis and pastors. *Wow! Isn't it wonderful that the government is going to help support our ministries during this tough time?*

Now, let me say right here that when the government made this offer and leaders started to rejoice in the possibility that the government would become a benefactor to churches and synagogues around the country, none of us had any idea if we would even see a drop in donations to our ministries. At that moment, the government was an answer to a problem that didn't yet exist. But, that didn't stop us (I am including myself and my synagogue) from gathering the documentation together to file for a loan, filling out government application forms three times because they changed the form three times within the first week the applications came out.

But, I have to be honest. Over the past week since we began to fill out forms and gather documentation together, I began to think deeper and pray more about this loan and what it means. As I continue to be transparent, our synagogue receiving free money from the government seems like a wonderful thing.

But then I remember there is no such thing as free money. I have always been a fiscal conservative. I am against "free college," "free housing," "Basic Universal Income (being paid for doing nothing)" and "free medical care" because I know none of these things are free.

When the government provides "free stuff" to some people, it is because it is taking money from other people to pay for it. This loan money amounts to the government taking money from people who may not even believe in G-D and giving that money to our synagogues and churches. So much for giving with a willing or cheerful heart.

For years, I have said that the breakup of the family in the United States is largely the result of the government stepping into the role of the father of the home. In many of these homes, the government provides the food, the housing, the clothing, medical care and education. There is no need for a father to work and provide for his family because the government is paying all of the bills.

This is the biggest reason I am hesitant to apply for these loans. I don't want the government to become the father in our synagogue; we already have a Father: our heavenly Father.

I know many of us are looking out at empty congregations as we share our messages on livestream and are looking in our mailboxes and bank accounts daily as we wonder whether we will have enough money to pay the bills.

But I was reminded as I read my Bible: We don't depend on the faithfulness of our congregants for our finances; we depend on the faithfulness of G-D, our Father. When Yeshua needed money to pay a bill, He went fishing (which is still allowed as long as we are social distancing).

I am not writing this to condemn anyone who is applying for a government loan to bridge the gap over the next few months. I am just sharing my personal struggle with you as I prayerfully make the decision for my congregation in hopes that it will help you as you prayerfully make the decision for your congregation. {eo}

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