

# Jeremiah's Final Words to the Judeans in Egypt

**44:1-30 and 51:64b**

**DIG:** What does Jeremiah try to explain (44:2-6)? What have the Jews in Egypt done (44:7-10)? Does this shock you in light of all Judah had suffered? Why were they honoring Ishtar or the Queen of Heaven (see Bq - Do Not Worship the Queen of Heaven)? What must their opinion of ADONAI be? What does God promise in return (44:11-14)? What is the significance of the few fugitives? What was ADONAI saying? Why do you think this story of apostasy keeps playing over and over, with only the names or places changing? What prophecy does Jeremiah make as a sign (44:29-30)? This chapter gives us the end of Jeremiah's story, as we know it. Was his forty-five years of prophecy a failure? How would you determine if a prophet was "successful?"

**REFLECT:** How can people hear God's word, see God's power and yet still miss the point of the message? When has that happened to you? What did you learn? How did you finally get the point? Would you say your ministry has been a success or a failure so far? On what basis? Looking at the shape the world is in today, would you say the LORD has been a success?

**586 BC after the fall of Yerushalayim**

**Indictment and Announcement of Judgment:** This word came to Jeremiah concerning all the Jews shortly arriving in Lower Egypt - in Migdol, Tahpanhes and Memphis - and in Upper Egypt. This is what ADONAI-Tzva'ot says: You saw the great disaster I brought on Jerusalem and on all the towns of Judah. Today they lie deserted and in ruins because of the evil they have done. They aroused My anger by burning incense to and worshiping other gods (see Eu -Idolatry in the Temple) that neither they nor you nor your ancestors ever knew (44:1-3). God understands spiritual adultery! That is why adultery is an exception in the divorce issue (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Dj - You Have Heard It Was Said: Do Not Commit Adultery**). ADONAI does not hold us to a higher standard than He Himself uses.

**Persistently** I sent My servants the prophets, over a long period of time, who said: Do not do this detestable thing that I hate! But the Israelites did not listen or pay attention; they did not turn (**shuwb**) from their wickedness or stop burning incense to other gods because they did not listen (44:4-5). They were without excuse because they *did* receive prophetic warning. The prophets said, "Do not worship these idols." Nonetheless the Israelites proved over and over and over again to be disobedient to God's messengers. Hence verses 2-6 are built around very conventional themes, arranged in chiasmic fashion:

**A** YHVH works destruction because of Isra'el's sin (verse 2)

**B** Isra'el disobeys and does evil (verse 3)

**C** YHVH sends prophets to rescue Isra'el (verse 4)

**B** Isra'el refuses to listen and does evil (verse 5)

**A** YHVH works destruction because of Isra'el's sin (verse 6)

The prophets constitute God's "second effort" to save, but to no avail. This argument in verses 2-6 is a reflection on the past. It is not an assault on Yerushalayim, but reflects on a judgment that has already been fulfilled and that was well known among the Jews in Egypt.

Hence, My fierce anger was poured out; it raged against the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem and made them the desolate ruins they are today (44:6). This is a quick review of the past. In essence, YHVH is telling them they have not changed from this horrible spiritual condition back in the land of Judah. This deprived condition brought about the judgment they were experiencing at that time. If you can't be sorry for something you did when you are actually experiencing the pain of your own actions then you'll *never* be sorry for it!

Therefore is a conclusion of the argument that was spelled out in 44:1-6. Meaning that because of their past sins, Judah and Jerusalem were devastated. It was as if ADONAI was saying, "If you recognize that it was your terrible sin that caused the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem, why would you want to continue in these very same sins now that you are in the land of Egypt suffering the consequences of your wickedness?"

Therefore, The LORD of heaven's' angelic armies, the God of Isra'el, says this: Why are you committing this great sin against yourselves? The result can only be to cut you off from Judah - men, women, children and babies - so that none of you remain (see [Ae - The Problem of Holy War in the TaNaKh](#)). Special emphasis is placed on the wives, whom Jeremiah has largely ignored until now (44:7).

**Yirmeyahu** insists that the fall of **Yerushalayim** came about because the **Israelites** worshiped other gods, and that a similar disaster will come upon those from **Y'udah** who have settled in **Egypt**. For you continue provoking Me with the [idols] products of your own hands, offering to other gods in the land of **Egypt**, where you have gone to live as aliens. It will lead only to your destruction and becoming an object of curses and reproaches among all the nation of the earth (44:7-8 CJB). The **Egyptian** community of **Jews** is indeed doing evil.

Have you forgotten the wicked deeds of your ancestors, your own wicked deeds, and the wicked deeds of your wives who instigated them to idol worship, which they committed in the land of **Judah** and in the streets of **Yerushalayim**? To this day they have not humbled themselves or shown reverence, nor have they followed My Torah and decrees I set before you and your ancestors (44:9-10 CJB). In effect, this community of **Jews** in **Egypt** had learned nothing and had refused to change, thus rejecting the Torah.

Therefore, this is the declaration of judgment: This is what the LORD of heaven's' angelic armies, the God of **Isra'el**, says: I am determined to bring disaster on you and to destroy all of **Judah** living in the land of **Egypt**. For that community there would no longer be any options, no choices, no alternatives, and no escape. I will take away the remnant of **Judah** who were determined to go to **Egypt** to settle there. They will all perish in **Egypt**; they will fall by the sword or die from famine. They left **Judah** because they were afraid of dying by the sword, but by the sword they will die. From the least to the greatest, they will die by sword or famine. They will become a curse and an object of horror, a curse and an object of reproach. I will punish those who live in **Egypt** with the sword, famine and plague, just as I punished **Jerusalem**. None of the remnant of **Judah** who has gone to live in **Egypt** will escape or survive to return to the land of **Judah**, to which they long to return and live; non will return except a few fugitives (44:11-14). There will only be a remnant of the remnant, survivors who are not of any value like figure in **Amos 3:12**.

**The People, However, Were Defiant:** **Jeremiah** used this large official gathering to deliver his final words. Then all the men who knew their wives were burning incense to other gods, along with all the women who were present - a large gathering - and all the people living in **Lower and Upper Egypt** (44:15). And like **Adam**, stood by passively as their wives lead them down the road to destruction (see the commentary on **Genesis Ba - The Woman Saw the Fruit of the Tree and Ate It**) They were entrenched, resistant, arrogant, and would rather choose death over the prophetic word of **God**.

The women said to Jeremiah, "We will not listen to the message you have spoken to us in the name of ADONAI! We will certainly do everything we said we would. Then the women made a vow: We will burn incense to the Queen of Heaven and will pour out drink offerings to her just as we and our ancestors (see Cd - [They Knead Dough and Make Cakes for the Queen of Heaven](#)), our kings and our officials did in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem. At that time we had plenty of food and were well off and suffered no harm" (44:16-17). They thought it worked for them in the past so they thought it would work for them now (this is really selective memory).

"But ever since we stopped burning incense to the Queen of Heaven and pouring out drink offerings to her we have had nothing and have been perishing by sword and famine" (44:18). They were assuming that the past material blessings before the Babylonian captivity came from the Queen of Heaven and not from God! The women said that all their problems began when they stopped worshipping her. Now they were determined to start again. The point seems irrefutable. It is the argument that every religion seeks to make, that a god is judged by the gifts that are given. The women were denying what Jeremiah was saying. Yirmeyahu said their current sad state of affairs was a direct result of their disobedience to YHVH. But they insisted that wasn't true. They knew what was right, not God's prophet! On its own terms, the argument seemed unanswerable.

The practice of the wives was in full knowledge and consent of their passed husbands. Does that sound a little like Adam and Eve? The helper leading and the leader helping (see the commentary on [Genesis Lv - I Do Not Permit a Woman to Teach or Have Authority Over a Man, She Must Be Silent](#)). This usually leads to trouble. This worship was quite popular with the women in particular and the Jewish wives made vows to her. The women added, "When we burned incense to the Queen of Heaven and poured out drink offerings to her, did not our husbands know that we were making cakes impressed with her image and pouring out drink offerings to her" (44:19)? Under the TaNaKh, husbands could release their wives from foolish vows (Numbers 30:6-16). So when the husbands heard their wives make vows to the Queen of Heaven, they had the authority to annul them. But they chose not to do it. That meant that the husbands consented to the sin and did not protect their wives.

**Jeremiah's Final Sermon:** Nevertheless, Jeremiah would answer. His answer does not engage the argument just offered, for one cannot challenge an argument made from an assumption. Instead, perhaps wisely, perhaps of necessity, the prophet ignores the assertion of the women and simply restates his own prophetic argument. Theoretically, he accepts the analysis of the women (see 44:18), but turns the argument on its head and draws an antithetical conclusion. The incense burned to the queen of heaven did indeed matter, just

as the women had said. The burned incense, however, was not the cause of their well-being. Before the fall of Jerusalem and Judah it was ADONAI in His longsuffering who was responsible for them having plenty of food, being well off and suffering no harm. The worship of this other god was the trigger that brought disaster to their doors. Consequently there was indeed a blessing and a curse; the disagreement was over which deity can bless and which deity would surely curse.<sup>369</sup>

YHVH is longsuffering, but there comes a time when He must punish. This is the very thing that the wives did not understand. Then Jeremiah clinched his argument when he said to all the people; both men and women (but primarily the women), who were answering him, "Did not ADONAI remember and call to mind the incense burned in the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem by you and your ancestors, your kings and your officials and the people of the land? Sin had been accumulating during the previous generations until the point was reached when punishment was demanded. The fact that it had not come sooner while they were actually guilty of practicing sorcery was only due to the mercy of ADONAI, not the protection of the Queen of Heaven. When the LORD could no longer endure your wicked actions and the detestable things you did, your land became a curse and a desolate waste without inhabitants, as it is today. Because you have burned incense to other gods and have sinned against ADONAI and have not obeyed Him or followed His Torah or listened to the message of His prophets, regulations and instructions . . . therefore, this disaster has come upon you, as you now see" (44:20-23).

Then Yirmeyahu sarcastically acknowledged that the resolve of the Egyptian community was unshakable when he said to all the people, especially the women, "Hear the word of ADONAI, all you people of Judah in Egypt. This is what ADONAI-Tzva'ot, the God of Isra'el says: You and your wives have done what you said you would do when you promised, "We will certainly carry out the vows we made to burn incense and pour out drink offerings to the Queen of Heaven." Go ahead then, do what you promised! Keep your vows! But hear the word of the LORD, "I swear by My great name," says Ha'Shem, "that no one from Judah living anywhere in Egypt will ever again invoke My name or swear, 'As ADONAI, God, lives' because they will perish (44:24-26). The tone of this concession by the prophet is not unlike his concession to Hañaniah, when Jeremiah finally recognized that his argument was futile (28:6). Consequently, Yirmeyahu abandoned the Egyptian community to its own deathly choice, and will protest no longer.

After Jeremiah disassociated himself from the Jewish community, YHVH determined to do the same thing. For I am watching over them for harm, not for good; the Jews in Egypt will perish by sword and famine until they are all destroyed (44:27 CJB). Then

ADONAI completely withdrew Himself from the Jews in Egypt. Thus God was not absent from that community, far worse; He was alive and attentive to work a terrible destiny for them. If they would change, He would have relented (18:8), but, alas, they would not.

Those who escape the sword and return (shuwb) to the land of Judah from Egypt will be very few. Then the whole remnant who came to live in Egypt, they will know whose word will stand - Mine or those women who make vows to the Queen of Heaven (44:28). Even though Jeremiah's argument for the worship of YHVH and not the Queen of Heaven is more compelling than his opponents, they are at a stalemate. Each side operates from premises that the other side either cannot see or cannot afford to concede. Therefore, God will provide the Egyptian Jews with a sign.

This will be the sign of authentication to you that I will punish you in this place, declares the LORD, so that you will know that my threats of harm against you will surely stand. When you see the overthrow of Pharaoh Hophra you will know that it foreshadows your own doom. This is what ADONAI says: I am going to deliver Pharaoh Hophra king of Egypt (known as Apries in the Greek writings) into the hands of his enemies who want to kill him, just as I gave Zedekiah king of Judah into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, the enemy who wanted to kill him (44:29-30).

In 588 BC Hophra dispatched a military force to Jerusalem to protect it from Babylonian forces sent by Nebuchadnezzar. His forces were quickly defeated and the Babylonians destroyed Tziyon following an eighteen-month siege in 586 BC. His unsuccessful attempt to intervene in the politics of Judah was followed by a mutiny of soldiers from the strategically important Aswan garrison, which protected access up and down the Nile.

While the mutiny was contained, Hophra later attempted to protect Libya from incursions by Greek invaders but his efforts here backfired spectacularly as the Greeks battered his forces. When the defeated army returned home, a civil war broke out between the indigenous Egyptian army troops and foreign mercenaries in the Egyptian army. At this time of crisis, the Egyptians turned in support towards a victorious general, Amasis II who had led Egyptian forces in a highly successful invasion of Nubia in 592 BC under Pharaoh Psamtik II, Hophra's father. Amasis quickly declared himself pharaoh in 570 BC and Hophra fled Egypt and sought refuge in another foreign country. When Hophra marched back to Egypt in 567 BC with the aid of a Babylonian army to reclaim the throne of Egypt, he was likely killed in battle with Amasis' forces.

Jeremiah, then, was last heard from in Egypt where he presumably died.

**The words of Jeremiah end here (51:64b).** So ends our knowledge of **Jeremiah's** earthly career. If previous calculations are correct, that **his** call came about 627 BC and that the flight to Egypt was about 581 BC, then **the prophet** could look back on more than forty years of seeming failure. **He** committed **his** cause to the future; posterity has vindicated **him**. **The Queen of Heaven** fills the pages of history books, but **she** does not live in the hearts of the faithful. And modern history-in-the-making forces upon us the grim truth that the nations of the world must live by the principles of **Jeremiah . . . or perish.**<sup>370</sup>