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Nebuchadnezzar Will Burn Down the Temples of the gods of Egypt Jeremiah's Tenth Symbolic Action 43: 1-13

Nebuchadnezzar will burn down the Temples of the gods of Egypt DIG: Why do you think the remnant did not listen to Jeremiah even after he had proved himself as a true prophet for over forty years? Were their actions surprising after all their seemingly sincere promises? Or could you tell that their minds were already made up? How so? Why would they accuse Baruch of manipulating Jeremiah? What do they think the Babylonians will do to them? Why might they suspect Yirmeyahu and Baruch are not afraid? What do you think Jeremiah's and Baruch's attitude was when Johanan took them captive on his faithless journey to Egypt? What was Egypt's relationship with Babylon (Jeremiah 37:5; Second Kings 24:7)? How would Nebuchadnezzar interpret a flight to Egypt? What message did God give Jeremiah at the Egyptian border and why?

REFLECT: When in doubt about someone's intentions, do you assume the best or the worst? Are you naturally trusting or skeptical? Has anyone ever doubted your integrity, as they did Jeremiah's? Why? Do you prefer to "call the shots" in work situations? What do you find objectionable about "submitting" to someone? When was the last time you deliberately surrendered control? What happened? Have you ever obeyed ADONAI at a time when all your gut instincts said, "No?" What happened as a result of your obedience? Have you ever felt beyond God's reach? Did YHVH reach out to you after all? How so? Do you know anyone who feels "out of touch" with God? How can you help?

Fulfilled 571 BC fifteen years after the fall of Yerushalayim

The one main point to the tenth symbolic action (what might be called a parable in action) is that those Jews who had hoped to escape from Nebuchadnezzar would find him right in the very city where they had chosen to settle.

The rejection: When Jeremiah had finished telling the people all the words of ADONAI their God - everything the LORD had sent Him to tell them - Azariah son of Hoshaiah and Johanan son of Kareah and all the other arrogant men said to Yirmeyahu, “You are lying! They didn’t even discuss it! Weren’t they listening? What did they think God’s prophet was going to say? Like the saying goes, “Denial is not a river in Egypt!” The LORD our God has not sent you to say, ‘You must not go to Egypt to settle there.’ But Baruch son of Neriah is inciting you against us to hand us over to the Babylonians, so they may kill us or carry us into exile to Babylon” (43:1-3). Since Jeremiah was by now an old man, they accused him of falling under Baruch’s influence and expressing his views as a message from YHVH. To this charge Yirmeyahu did not even reply. It was no use. They were determined to follow their own evil desires and dissent was futile.

The journey into Egypt: Nearly two months had passed between the fall of Jerusalem and the assassination of Gedaliah. So Johanan and the army officers and all the people actively disobeyed the LORD’s command to stay in the land of Judah. Instead, Johanan and all the army officers lead away all the remnant of Judah who had come back (**shuwb**) to live in the land of Judah from all the nations where they had been scattered. They also led away all those whom Nebuzaradan, commander of the imperial guard, had left with Gedaliah - the men, the women, the children and Zedekiah’s daughters (38:23 and 41:10). They all went willingly except for Jeremiah and Baruch. And they took Jeremiah the prophet and Baruch son of Neriah along with them. Then the Ruach ha-Kodesh inspired the human author Yirmeyahu to write a summary statement. So they entered Egypt in disobedience (*shama*) to ADONAI (Deuteronomy 42:7-22) and went as far as Tachpanches (43:4-7).

And now, at the end, even as Jeremiah was vindicated by the outcome of the events in Zion, he is once more abused, rejected, dishonored and powerless. Oy Vey! There can be no doubt that in the failure to listen to the prophet, the remnant failed to listen to the One who sent him. In the pursuit of life they had chosen death. They ended up where the story of Isra’el had begun, back in Egypt, back in bondage they misread as freedom.

Johanan had refused the LORD’s lifeline. The rescue that began with Moshe ended up in exhaustion, failure, defeat and despair. Yirmeyahu at the end, like Moses at the beginning, had labored mightily to preserve his people. For all his faithfulness, however, Jeremiah was ultimately defeated by delusional thinking of the remnant that he could not overcome. In the final analysis, not listening meant death.³⁶⁶



Jeremiah's tenth, and last, symbolic action: In Tachpanches, where they had been forced to settle, the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah. He was still God's prophet, and He said: While the Jews are watching, take some large stones with you and bury them in clay in the brick pavement at the entrance to Pharaoh's palace in Tachpanches. This was not the royal palace, but a government building, or perhaps his own private residence when he visited Tachpanches in southern Egypt (43:8-9).

This was to be performed in the sight of the Jewish remnant. Then say to them, "This is what ADONAI-Tzva'ot, the God of Isra'el, says: I will send for My servant Nebuchadnezzar. I do believe he did eventually become a believer in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Dani'el 3:23-20 and 4:28-37). Once again the king of Babylon is called My servant (27:6) because he carried out the LORD's will and decree. Here the imperial might of Babylon and the resolve of YHVH converge. And I will set his throne over these stones I have buried here; he will spread his royal canopy over and above them. He will come and attack Egypt (43:10-11a).

It is a daring thing to mention the name of Nebuchadnezzar in the throne room of Pharaoh. The mere utterance of this awesome name already minimizes the king of Egypt, for there is now another, more powerful name in the presence of which Pharaoh must account (see the commentary on Exodus Bc - Pharaoh as God and Upholder of Ma'at). Those stones represent Babylon's future attack. The hidden stones, now brought into public display, will be the base of Nebuchadnezzar's future throne in Egypt.

Those destined for death - to death!

Those destined for captivity - to captivity!

Those destined for the sword - to the sword!

Nebuchadnezzar, acting as **God's** agent, **will set fire to the temples of the gods of Egypt; he will burn their temples and take their gods captive.** **Tachpanches** had a **temple** dedicated to Ra, the chief **sun god** of **the Egyptian** pantheon (**43:12a**). The gods of **Egypt** will be confiscated, not merely shown to be vulnerable, but ultimately powerless. **The king of Babylon** will possess **the Egyptian gods** and govern with authority.

As a shepherd picks his coat clean of lice, so he will pick Egypt clean and depart (43:12b). A **shepherd**, living very close to **the sheep**, may get **fleas** and **bugs** and therefore must be shaken out. In the same way, **the king** will shake out the vermin of **Egypt**.

There, in the temple of the sun in Egypt he will demolish the sacred pillars and will burn down the temples of the gods of Egypt (43:13). If the pro-**Egypt** group thought **they** could escape the long arm of **Nebuchadnezzar** they were completely wrong. **He** would merely conquer **Egypt** and control **them** from their new home. Flavius Josephus, the Jew turned Roman historian, tells us the rest of the story. "In the 23rd year of **Nebuchadnezzar** (581 BC), **he** fell upon **Egypt** to overthrow it and **he** slew pharaoh that reigned and set up another. **He** took those **Jews** who were captive there and led **them** to **Babylon**, and such was the end of the nation of the Hebrews."³⁶⁷ **Jeremiah's** prophecies were fulfilled to the letter.

It is worth noting that nowhere in the prophecy are the Jewish fugitives mentioned. The larger threat against **Egypt**, however, does indeed touch the Jewish community in **Egypt**. On the one hand, this prophecy tells us that **Egypt** is no safe place to run to. It is a place of extreme danger, and **the Judeans** with **Johanan** went from the frying pan into the fire (**Amos 5:19**). On the other hand, **Jeremiah** prophesies that there is no place from which to hide from **Babylon** and **Nebuchadnezzar, God's servant**. Because **YHVH** governs the universe, the fleeing **remnant** must live in a **Babylonian** world. The mistake **the Egyptian** community of **Jews** makes is that **they** thought **they** could have **God** without **Babylon**. **The fugitives** had completely miscalculated. **They** stood under the threat made against **the Egyptians**, for it is with **Egypt** that **they** had placed **their** misinformed trust.³⁶⁸