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Jeremiah's Final Words to the Judeans in Egypt

44:1-30 and 51:64b

Jeremiah's final words to the Judeans in Egypt 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? 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 (to see link click [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'hudah** 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.³⁶⁹

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.³⁷⁰