Jeremiah

Chapter 44

*Disaster Because of Idolatry*

**This word came to Jeremiah concerning all the Jews living in Lower Egypt—in Migdol, Tahpanhes and Memphis—and in Upper Egypt:  2 “This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: You saw the great disaster I brought on Jerusalem and on all the towns of Judah. Today they lie deserted and in ruins  3 because of the evil they have done. They provoked me to anger by burning incense and by worshiping other gods that neither they nor you nor your fathers ever knew.  4 Again and again I sent my servants the prophets, who said, ‘Do not do this detestable thing that I hate!’  5 But they did not listen or pay attention; they did not turn from their wickedness or stop burning incense to other gods.  6 Therefore, 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. 7 “Now this is what the LORD God Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Why bring such great disaster on yourselves by cutting off from Judah the men and women, the children and infants, and so leave yourselves without a remnant?  8 Why provoke me to anger with what your hands have made, burning incense to other gods in Egypt, where you have come to live? You will destroy yourselves and make yourselves an object of cursing and reproach among all the nations on earth.  9 Have you forgotten the wickedness committed by your fathers and by the kings and queens of Judah and the wickedness committed by you and your wives in the land of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem?  10 To this day they have not humbled themselves or shown reverence, nor have they followed my law and the decrees I set before you and your fathers. 11 “Therefore, this is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: I am determined to bring disaster on you and to destroy all Judah.  12 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. From the least to the greatest, they will die by sword or famine. They will become an object of cursing and horror, of condemnation and reproach.  13 I will punish those who live in Egypt with the sword, famine and plague, as I punished Jerusalem.  14 None of the remnant of Judah who have gone to live in Egypt will escape or survive to return to the land of Judah, to which they long to return and live; none will return except a few fugitives.” 15 Then all the men who knew that their wives were burning incense to other gods, along with all the women who were present—a large assembly—and all the people living in Lower and Upper Egypt, said to Jeremiah,  16 “We will not listen to the message you have spoken to us in the name of the LORD!  17 We will certainly do everything we said we would: We will burn incense to the Queen of Heaven and will pour out drink offerings to her just as we and our fathers, 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.  18 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.” 19 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 like her image and pouring out drink offerings to her?” 20 Then Jeremiah said to all the people, both men and women, who were answering him,  21 “Did not the LORD remember and think about the incense burned in the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem by you and your fathers, your kings and your officials and the people of the land?  22 When the LORD could no longer endure your wicked actions and the detestable things you did, your land became an object of cursing and a desolate waste without inhabitants, as it is today.  23 Because you have burned incense and have sinned against the LORD and have not obeyed him or followed his law or his decrees or his stipulations, this disaster has come upon you, as you now see.” 24 Then Jeremiah said to all the people, including the women, “Hear the word of the LORD, all you people of Judah in Egypt.  25 This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: You and your wives have shown by your actions what you promised when you said, ‘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!  26 But hear the word of the LORD, all Jews living in Egypt: ‘I swear by my great name,’ says the LORD, ‘that no one from Judah living anywhere in Egypt will ever again invoke my name or swear, “As surely as the Sovereign LORD lives.”  27 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.  28 Those who escape the sword and return to the land of Judah from Egypt will be very few. Then the whole remnant of Judah who came to live in Egypt will know whose word will stand—mine or theirs. 29 ”‘This will be the sign 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.’  30 This is what the LORD says: ‘I am going to hand Pharaoh Hophra king of Egypt over to his enemies who seek his life, just as I handed Zedekiah king of Judah over to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, the enemy who was seeking his life.’”**

**44:1–30** The last of Jeremiah’s recorded prophecies (see note on 40:1–44:30). (CSB)

**44:1** *Jews living in … Egypt.* As a result of previous deportations (see, e.g., 2Ki 23:34) and/or the Jews mentioned in 43:5–7. In either case, some time must have elapsed between chs. 43 and 44 to bring about the gathering mentioned in v. 15. (CSB)

 *Lower Egypt … Upper Egypt.* See note on Isa 11:11 - *Lower Egypt.* The delta region of the Nile, in the north. *Upper Egypt.* Southern Egypt, upstream from the delta.) (CSB)

 *Migdol.* Location uncertain; probably in northern Egypt (see 46:14). The name means “watchtower.” (CSB)

 *Tahpanhes and Memphis.* See notes on 2:16; Isa 19:13. (CSB)

**Migdol,** on the northeastern boundary of Egypt, **and at Tahpanhes,** in the delta of the Nile, **and at Noph,** or Memphis, the capital of Lower Egypt, **and in the country of Pathros,** that is, Upper Egypt, - for in the intervening years the Jews had selected different parts of Egypt for temporary homes, but Jeremiah was still the faithful messenger of God and here addressed them in a large assembly, possibly upon the occasion of some great festival. (Kretzmann)

**44:2** GREAT DISASTER I BROUGHT – Most of the Jews addressed having been witnesses of the terrible catastrophe which brought destruction to the southern kingdom. (Kretzmann)

 DESERTED AND IN RUINS – The entire land, formerly so rich, fruitful, and populous, had become an uninhabited desert,

**44:3** See note on 1:16; see also 11:17; 19:4; 32:32. (CSB)

Leaving the path of right and duty set before them by the Word of God they worship foreign idols was the first cause of the calamity which came upon Jerusalem. (Kretzmann)

**44:4** See note on 7:25. (CSB)

 AGAIN AND AGAIN – Jeremiah was not the first prophet to warn the people of the judgment to come (7;25; 25:4; 26:5). (TLSB)

 *Do not do this detestable thing.* See Jdg 19:24. (CSB)

Burning incense to idols filled the Lord with loathing. (Kretzmann)

**44:5** DID NOT LISTEN – They paid not the slightest attention to Jehovah's admonitions and warnings. (Kretzmann)

**44:6** *my fierce anger was poured out.* See 7:20; 42:18. (CSB)

His anger was like an overturned vessel spilling all its contents at once, the fire of destruction was a manifestation of the divine anger. Their ruin was entirely the fault of the stubbornness of the rebellious Jews, and the consequences were still evident. (Kretzmann)

**44:7** *bring … disaster on yourselves.* See 26:19. (CSB)

 *men and women, the children and infants.* A stock phrase meaning “everyone” (see 1Sa 15:3; 22:19). (CSB)

**44:8** *what your hands have made.* Idols (see 1:16 and note). (CSB)

The nation of Egypt worshiped numerous gods and goddesses. Worship of these false gods enticed Israel away from following the Lord God of Israel. (TLSB)

 *object of cursing and reproach.* See 42:18; see also notes on 24:9; 25:18. (CSB)

**44:9** *wickedness committed by … queens … and your wives.* The women joined their husbands in worshiping the “Queen of Heaven” (v. 19; see v. 15). (CSB)

The queens of Judah, together with the women throughout the country, had been the chief promoters of idolatry; for just as women may be the chief upholders of virtue, they may also be the chief agents for the spreading of wickedness. (Kretzmann)

**44:10** *nor … followed my law.* See 9:13; 26:4; see also 7:9 and note. (CSB)

They had deliberately ignored the norm and rule which the Lord had given them to follow, and the Lord speaks of them partly in the third person to give expression to the supreme disgust which filled His heart at their behavior. (Kretzmann)

**44:11–14** See 42:17–18 and notes. (CSB)

Since the Lord was speaking in general terms. He pictured the destruction as so universal that practically no one would escape, and the heaping of similar expressions heightens the impression of grim determination on His part. He is a jealous God, who visits the iniquity of sinners upon them with all the sternness which His justice demands. (Kretzmann)

**44:11** *am determined.* Lit. “set my face” (see 21:10). (CSB)

This was directed at those who had gone to Egypt against His will. The Lord was absolutely determined to carry out His plans in this instance, to exterminate the rebels who had been so flagrantly disobedient to His will. (Kretzmann)

The same language is used of Jesus in Luke 9:51 when he, “resolutely set out for Jerusalem.” (CSB)

**44:14** EXCEPT A FEW FUGITIVES – These few would likely return with the prophecies of Jeremiah and the history of their fulfillment. (TLSB)

**44:15** *wives … women.* See v. 19; see also note on v. 9. (CSB)

The female contingent apparently being in the majority, from which many have concluded that the festival was one in honor of the Queen of Heaven herself, in whose service the women were very zealous. (Kretzmann)

 LARGE ASSEMBLY – Normally, a gathering of God’s people at the temple or tabernacle. However, the purpose of this assembly was to observe a pagan festival in honor or the queen of heaven, an astral deity and goddess of fertility. (TLSB)

 *Lower and Upper Egypt.* See v. 1; see also note on Isa 11:11. (CSB)

**44:17** *Queen of Heaven.* See note on 7:18 – (A Babylonian title for Ishtar, an important goddess in the Babylonian pantheon (see 44:17–19, 25). (CSB)

Female (fertility) goddess Ashtoreth, or Astarte, the counterpart of the male idol Baal, in whose honor the cakes, made of honey, fine flour, and other ingredients, bore a round, flat surface to resemble the disk of the moon. (Kretzmann)

 *At that time we … were well off.* Judah had been relatively prosperous during King Manasseh’s lengthy reign. (CSB)

Israel once “had plenty,” and King Manasseh promoted “the despicable practices of the nations” (2 Ki 21:1-9). After his grandson Josiah abolished idolatry (2 Ki 23:4-20), everything went wrong, they claimed. This is an example of a worldview that does not reckon with the Lord of history. (TLSB)

They enjoyed good fortune and happiness, as they believed. Fools attribute what they consider prosperity to the fact that God connives at their sin, so that they finally deny His very existence. (Kretzmann)

**44:18** *ever since we stopped.* As a result of King Josiah’s reform movement, which began in 621 b.c. (CSB)

 *we have had nothing.* Beginning with Josiah’s death in 609, a series of disasters, including invasion and exile, had struck Judah. The people understandably (though mistakenly) attributed their misfortune to their failure to worship the Queen of Heaven. (CSB)

**44:19** *women.* Since Ishtar (the “Queen of Heaven”) was a Babylonian goddess of fertility, women played a major role in her worship. (CSB)

 *did not our husbands know … ?* To have validity, a religious vow made by a married woman (see v. 25) had to be confirmed by her husband (see Nu 30:10–15). (CSB)

So the women, who made up the majority of the assembly, boldly stated that their husbands had not only connived at their idolatry, cf. Num. 30, 9ff., but had even become guilty with them. The reference seems to be to the custom of giving their sacrificial cakes the form of a half-moon or even of the full moon, after the manner of other heathen cults. In this manner the demands of the Lord were met by a flat refusal on the part of the Jews. (Kretzmann)

 *we were making cakes like her image.* See 7:18 and note. (CSB)

**44:21** DID NOT THE LORD REMEMBER – Did not the present desolation of their homeland testify to the fact that the Lord was very well aware of their wickedness, and that He had repaid their evil-doing. (Kretzmann)

**44:22** COULD NO LONGER ENDURE – with all His long-suffering He could no longer endure it. (Kretzmann)

 *object of cursing.* See v. 12. (CSB)

 *desolate waste.* See v. 6. (CSB)

The evidences of His wrath upon the Land of Promise were still evident, and all on account of their idolatry, as the prophet now repeats once more, for the sake of emphasis. (Kretzmann)

**44:23** *stipulations.* Of the Lord’s covenant with his people (see Dt 4:45; 6:17, 20). (CSB)

**44:25** *Go ahead then.* Spoken in irony (see 7:21 and note). (CSB)

Here is a bit of holy irony; for, as Jeremiah states, no one could accuse them of unsteadiness in keeping their idolatrous promises. If they had only been as steadfast toward Jehovah, the God of the covenant! (Kretzmann)

**44:26** *I swear by my great name.* See notes on 22:5; Ge 22:15. (CSB)

Swore by Himself as He has revealed Himself in His great and mighty acts, the most solemn oath which He could swear. (Kretzmann)

 *As surely as the Sovereign Lord lives.* See note on Ge 42:16. (CSB)

Since they had rejected Him, He would also reject them, He would bring about their destruction. (Kretzmann)

**44:27** *watching.* See note on 1:12; see also 31:28. (CSB)

The same God whose tender solicitude watches over His children to do them good would in this instance just as solicitously bring evil upon the rebellious Jews. (Kretzmann)

**44:28** *very few.* See v. 14. (CSB)

A band readily counted on account of its smallness, whereas the entire contingent had planned to return to their former homeland. (Kretzmann)

 WHOSE WORD WILL STAND – Literally, "the word from Me or that from them," that by which the Lord had predicted ruin to them or that by which they had predicted good fortune to themselves. (Kretzmann)

**44:30** *Hophra.* Ruled Egypt 589–570 b.c. (see 37:5 and note). (CSB)

Mentiioned by name only here, this pharaoh tried to come to Jerusalem’s aid during Nebuchadnezzar’s seign of the city (37:5). (TLSB)

 *his enemies who seek his life.* Hophra was killed by his Egyptian rivals during a power struggle. (CSB)

Pharaoh-hophra lost his life in consequence of a revolt of the Egyptians, who caused him to be executed by strangulation about 570 B. C. If people persist in their opposition to God, He gives them up to the powers of evil to their complete destruction. (Kretzmann)

 *I handed Zedekiah … over to Nebuchadnezzar.* See 39:5–7. (CSB)