

Jeremiah

Chapter 44

Judgment for Idolatry

The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the Judeans who lived in the land of Egypt, at Migdol, at Tahpanhes, at Memphis, and in the land of Pathros, 2 “Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: You have seen all the disaster that I brought upon Jerusalem and upon all the cities of Judah. Behold, this day they are a desolation, and no one dwells in them, 3 because of the evil that they committed, provoking me to anger, in that they went to make offerings and serve other gods that they knew not, neither they, nor you, nor your fathers. 4 Yet I persistently sent to you all my servants the prophets, saying, ‘Oh, do not do this abomination that I hate!’ 5 But they did not listen or incline their ear, to turn from their evil and make no offerings to other gods. 6 Therefore my wrath and my anger were poured out and kindled in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem, and they became a waste and a desolation, as at this day. 7 And now thus says the LORD God of hosts, the God of Israel: Why do you commit this great evil against yourselves, to cut off from you man and woman, infant and child, from the midst of Judah, leaving you no remnant? 8 Why do you provoke me to anger with the works of your hands, making offerings to other gods in the land of Egypt where you have come to live, so that you may be cut off and become a curse and a taunt among all the nations of the earth? 9 Have you forgotten the evil of your fathers, the evil of the kings of Judah, the evil of their wives, your own evil, and the evil of your wives, which they committed in the land of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? 10 They have not humbled themselves even to this day, nor have they feared, nor walked in my law and my statutes that I set before you and before your fathers. 11 “Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Behold, I will set my face against you for harm, to cut off all Judah. 12 I will take the remnant of Judah who have set their faces to come to the land of Egypt to live, and they shall all be consumed. In the land of Egypt they shall fall; by the sword and by famine they shall be consumed. From the least to the greatest, they shall die by the sword and by famine, and they shall become an oath, a horror, a curse, and a taunt. 13 I will punish those who dwell in the land of Egypt, as I have punished Jerusalem, with the sword, with famine, and with pestilence, 14 so that none of the remnant of Judah who have come to live in the land of Egypt shall escape or survive or return to the land of Judah, to which they desire to return to dwell there. For they shall not return, except some fugitives.” 15 Then all the men who knew that their wives had made offerings to other gods, and all the women who stood by, a great assembly, all the people who lived in Pathros in the land of Egypt, answered Jeremiah: 16 “As for the word that you have spoken to us in the name of the LORD, we will not listen to you. 17 But we will do everything that we have vowed, make offerings to the queen of heaven and pour out drink offerings to her, as we did, both we and our fathers, our kings and our officials, in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem. For then we had plenty of food, and prospered, and saw no disaster. 18 But since we left off making offerings to the queen of heaven and pouring out drink offerings to her, we have lacked everything and have been consumed by the sword and by famine.” 19 And the women said, “When we made offerings to the queen of heaven and poured out drink offerings to her, was it without our husbands' approval that we made cakes for her bearing her image and poured out drink offerings to her?” 20 Then Jeremiah said to all the people, men and women, all the people who had given him this answer: 21 “As for the offerings that you offered in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem, you and your fathers, your kings and your officials, and the people of the land, did not the LORD remember them? Did it not come into his mind? 22 The LORD could no longer bear your evil deeds and the abominations that you committed. Therefore your land has become a desolation

and a waste and a curse, without inhabitant, as it is this day. 23 It is because you made offerings and because you sinned against the LORD and did not obey the voice of the LORD or walk in his law and in his statutes and in his testimonies that this disaster has happened to you, as at this day.” 24 Jeremiah said to all the people and all the women, “Hear the word of the LORD, all you of Judah who are in the land of Egypt. 25 Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: You and your wives have declared with your mouths, and have fulfilled it with your hands, saying, ‘We will surely perform our vows that we have made, to make offerings to the queen of heaven and to pour out drink offerings to her.’ Then confirm your vows and perform your vows! 26 Therefore hear the word of the LORD, all you of Judah who dwell in the land of Egypt: Behold, I have sworn by my great name, says the LORD, that my name shall no more be invoked by the mouth of any man of Judah in all the land of Egypt, saying, ‘As the Lord GOD lives.’ 27 Behold, I am watching over them for disaster and not for good. All the men of Judah who are in the land of Egypt shall be consumed by the sword and by famine, until there is an end of them. 28 And those who escape the sword shall return from the land of Egypt to the land of Judah, few in number; and all the remnant of Judah, who came to the land of Egypt to live, shall know whose word will stand, mine or theirs. 29 This shall be the sign to you, declares the LORD, that I will punish you in this place, in order that you may know that my words will surely stand against you for harm: 30 Thus says the LORD, Behold, I will give Pharaoh Hophra king of Egypt into the hand of his enemies and into the hand of those who seek his life, as I gave Zedekiah king of Judah into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, who was his enemy and sought his life.”

44:1–30 The last of Jeremiah’s recorded prophecies. (CSB)

In Egypt, Jeremiah delivers his last recorded oracle and probably suffers martyrdom because of it. The occasion is a great assembly of Judeans whose wives worship false gods (v 15). (TLSB)

44:1 *Judeans who lived in the land of 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)

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

On Egypt’s northeastern border. (TLSB)

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)

Pathros. Territory on the Upper Nile as far south as Aswan. (TLSB)

44:2 *disaster that I brought upon Jerusalem* – Most of the Jews addressed having been witnesses of the terrible catastrophe which brought destruction to the southern kingdom. (Kretzmann)

44:3 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 *persistently* – 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 abomination. 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 anger was poured out.* 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 *man and woman, infants and child.* A stock phrase meaning “everyone” (see 1Sa 15:3; 22:19). (CSB)

44:8 *work of your hands.* 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)

44:9 *evil of their wives.* The women joined their husbands in worshipping 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 walked in my law.* 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 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 *set my face.* 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)

all Judah. No one was to think that escape from God was possible, even though a few would survive and return to the land of Judah (v 28). (TLSB)

44:14 *except some fugitives* – These few would likely return with the prophecies of Jeremiah and the history of their fulfillment. (TLSB)

44:15 *wives ... women.* 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)

great 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 of the queen of heaven, an astral deity and goddess of fertility. (TLSB)

44:17 *Queen of Heaven.* 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)

for then we had plenty of food and prospered. 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 *since we left off.* As a result of King Josiah's reform movement, which began in 621 B.C. (CSB)

we have lacked everything. 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)

without our husbands. 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)

The women, who apparently played a major role in honoring the mother-goddess, had their husbands' full support. (TLSB)

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)

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 *no longer bear* – with all His long-suffering He could no longer endure it. (Kretzmann)

desolation and a waste. 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 *statutes.* Of the Lord's covenant with his people (see Dt 4:45; 6:17, 20). (CSB)

44:26 *I have sworn by my great name.* Swore by Himself as He has revealed Himself in His great and mighty acts, the most solemn oath which He could swear. (Kretzmann)

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

44:27 *watching.* 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 *few in number.* 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. (CSB)

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

who was his enemy and sought 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)

Ch 44 The Judean refugees who fled to Egypt refuse to give up their idolatry. They are convinced that worshipping false gods brings them peace and prosperity. God cannot tolerate such rebellion. As we see illustrated here, God calls sinners to repent or face His judgment. Sadly, mankind often seeks religions that promise prosperity or personal gratification. These are nothing more than self-centered substitutes for faith. True faith comes only through the faithful proclamation of God's lasting treasure—eternal life through Jesus Christ. • Father, do not let the deceitful wealth of the world tempt us away from You and our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. (TLSB)