

# CHAPTER 44

In this chapter we have,

**I.** An awakening sermon which Jeremiah preaches to the Jews in Egypt, to reprove them for their idolatry, notwithstanding the warnings given them both by the word and the rod of God and to threaten the judgments of God against them for it (v. 1-14).

**II.** The impudent and impious contempt which the people put upon this admonition, and their declared resolution to persist in their idolatries notwithstanding, in despite of God and Jeremiah (v. 15-19).

**III.** The sentence passed upon them for their obstinacy, that they should all be cut off and perish in Egypt except a very small number; and, as a sign or earnest of it, the king of Egypt should shortly fall into the hands of the king of Babylon and be unable any longer to protect them (v. 20-30).

## 240 JEREMIAH 44:1-14

### JEREMIAH'S REMONSTRANCE

The Jews in Egypt were now dispersed into various parts of the country, into *Migdol*, and *Noph*, and other places, and Jeremiah was sent on an errand from God to them, which he delivered either when he had the most of them together *in Pathros* (v. 15) or going about from place to place preaching to this purport. He delivered this message in the name of *the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel*, and in it,

**I.** God puts them in mind of the desolations of Judah and Jerusalem, which, though the captives *by the rivers of Babylon* were daily mindful of (~~Psalm~~ Psalm 137:1), the fugitives in the cities of Egypt seem to have forgotten and needed to be put in mind of, though, one would have thought, they had not been so long out of sight as to become out of mind (v. 2): *You have seen* what a deplorable condition Judah and Jerusalem are brought into; now will you consider whence those desolations came? From the wrath of God; it was his fury and his anger that kindled the fire which

made Jerusalem and *the cities of Judah waste and desolate* (v. 6); whoever were the instruments of the destruction, they were but instruments: it was a destruction from the Almighty.

**II.** He puts them in mind of the sins that brought those desolations upon Judah and Jerusalem. It was for *their wickedness*. It was this that *provoked God to anger*, and especially their idolatry, their *serving other gods* (v. 3) and giving that honour to counterfeit deities, the creatures of their own fancy and the work of their own hands, which should have been given to the true God only. They forsook the God who was known among them, and whose name was great, for gods that they knew not, upstart deities, whose original was obscure and not worth taking notice of: “*Neither they nor you, nor your fathers, could give any rational account why the God of Israel was exchanged for such impostors.*” They knew not that they were gods; nay, they could not but know that they were no gods.

**III.** He puts them in mind of the frequent and fair warnings he had given them by his word not to serve other gods, the contempt of which warnings was a great aggravation of their idolatry, v. 4. *The prophets* were sent with a great deal of care to call to them, saying, *Oh! do not this abominable thing that I hate*. It becomes us to speak of sin with the utmost dread and detestation as an abominable thing; it is certainly so, for it is that which God hates, and we are sure that *hid judgment is according to truth*. Call it grievous, call it odious, that we may by all means possible put ourselves and others out of love with it. It becomes us to give warning of the danger of sin, and the fatal consequences of it, with all seriousness and earnestness: “*Oh! do not do it. If you love God, do not, for it is provoking to him; if you love your own souls do not, for it is destructive to them.*” Let conscience do this for us in an hour of temptation, when we are ready to yield. O take heed! *do not this abominable thing* which the Lord hates; for, if God hates it, though shouldst hate it. But did they regard what God said to them? No: “*They hearkened not, nor inclined their ear* (v. 5); they still persisted in their idolatries; and you see what came of it, therefore *God's anger was poured out upon them, as at this day*. Now this was intended for warning to you, who have not only heard the judgments of God's mouth, as they did, but have likewise seen the judgments of his hand, by which you should be startled and awakened, for they were inflicted *in terrorem*, that others might hear and fear and do no more as they did, lest they should fare as they fared.”

**IV.** He reproves them for, and upbraids them with, their continued idolatries, now that they had come into Egypt (v. 8): *You burn incense to other gods in the land of Egypt. Therefore God forbade them to go into Egypt, because he knew it would be a snare to them. Those whom God sent into the land of the Chaldeans, though that was an idolatrous country, were there, by the power of God's grace, weaned from idolatry; but those who went against God's mind into the land of the Egyptians were there, by the power of their own corruptions, more wedded than ever to their idolatries; for, when we thrust ourselves without cause or call into places of temptation, it is just with God to leave us to ourselves. In doing this,*

**1.** They did a great deal of injury to themselves and their families: *“You commit this great evil against your souls (v. 7), you wrong them, you deceive them with that which is false, you destroy them, for it will be fatal to them.”* Note, In sinning against God we sin *against our own souls*. *“It is the ready way to cut yourselves off from all comfort and hope (v. 8), to cut off your name and honour; so that you will, both by your sin and by your misery, become a curse and a reproach among all nations. It will become a proverb, As wretched as a Jew. It is the ready way to cut off from you all your relations, all that you have joy of and have your families built up in, man and woman, child and suckling, so that Judah shall be a land lost for want of heirs.”*

**1**They filled up the measure of the iniquity of their fathers, and, as if that had been too little for them, added to it (v. 9): *“Have you forgotten the wickedness of those who are gone before you, that you are not humbled for it as you ought to be, and afraid of the consequences of it?” Have you forgotten the punishments of your fathers?* so some read it. *“Do you not know how dear their idolatry cost them? And yet dare you continue in that vain conversation received by tradition from you fathers, though you received the curse with it?”* He reminds them of the sins and punishments *of the kings of Judah*, who, great as they were, escaped not the judgments of God for their idolatry; yea, and they should have taken warning by *the wickedness of their wives*, who had seduced them to idolatry. In the original it is, *And of his wives*, which, Dr. Lightfoot thinks, tacitly reflects upon Solomon's wives, particularly his Egyptian wives, to whom the idolatry of the kings of Judah owed its original. *“Have you forgotten this, and what came of it, that you dare venture upon the same wicked courses?”* See <sup>4138</sup>Nehemiah 13:18, 26. *“Nay, to come to your own times, Have you forgotten your own wickedness and the wickedness of your*

wives, when you lived in prosperity in Jerusalem, and what ruin it brought upon you? But, alas! to what purpose do I speak to them?" (says God to the prophet, v. 10) "*they are not humbled unto this day, by all the humbling providences that they have been under. They have not feared, nor walked in my law.*" Note, Those that walk not in the law of God do thereby show that they are destitute of the fear of God.

**V.** He threatens their utter ruin for their persisting in their idolatry now that they were in Egypt. Judgment is given against them, as before (<sup>2422</sup>Jeremiah 42:22), that they shall perish in Egypt; the decree has gone forth, and shall not be called back. They *set their faces to go into the land of Egypt* (v. 12), were resolute in their purpose against God, and now God is resolute in his purpose against them: *I will set my face to cut off all Judah*, v. 11. Those that think not only to affront, but to confront, God Almighty, will find themselves outfaced; for *the face of the Lord is against those that do evil*, <sup>2316</sup>Psalms 34:16. It is here threatened concerning these idolatrous Jews in Egypt,

**1.** That *they shall all be consumed*, without exception; no degree nor order among them shall escape: *They shall fall, from the least to the greatest* (v. 12), *high and low, rich and poor*.

**2.** That *they shall be consumed by the very same judgments which God made use of for the punishment of Jerusalem, the sword, famine, and pestilence*, v. 12, 13. They shall not be wasted by natural deaths, as Israel in the wilderness, but by these sore judgments, which, by flying into Egypt, they thought to get out of the reach of.

**3.** That none (except a very few that will narrowly escape) shall ever *return to the land of Judah* again, v. 14. They thought, being nearer, that they stood fairer for a return to their own land than those that were carried to Babylon; yet those shall return, and these shall not; for the way in which God has promised us any comfort is much surer than that in which we have projected it for ourselves. Observe, Those that are fretful and discontented will be uneasy and fond of change wherever they are. The Israelites, when they were in the land of Judah, desired to go into Egypt (<sup>2422</sup>Jeremiah 42:22), but when they were in Egypt they desired to *return to the land of Judah* again; they *lifted up their soul* to it (so it is in the margin), which denotes an earnest desire. But, because they would not dwell there when God commanded it, they shall not dwell they were they

desire it. If we walk contrary to God, he will walk contrary to us. How can those expect to be well off who would not know when they were so, though God himself told them?

## ~~2445~~ JEREMIAH 44:15-19

### THE PEOPLE'S INSOLENT REPLY

We have here the people's obstinate refusal to submit to the power of the word of God in the mouth of Jeremiah. We have scarcely such an instance of downright daring contradiction to God himself as this, or such an avowed rebellion of the carnal mind. Observe,

**I.** The persons who thus set God and his judgments at defiance; it was not some one that was thus obstinate, but the generality of the Jews; and they were such as knew either themselves or their wives to be guilty of the idolatry Jeremiah had reproved, v. 15. We find,

**1.** That the women had been more guilty of idolatry and superstition than the men, not because the men stuck closer to the true God and the true religion than the women, but, I fear, because they were generally atheists, and were for no God and no religion at all, and therefore could easily allow their wives to be of a false religion, and to worship false gods.

**2.** That it was consciousness of guilt that made them impatient of reproof: *They knew that their wives had burnt incense to other gods*, and that they had countenanced them in it, *and the women that stood by* knew that they had joined with them in their idolatrous usages; so that what Jeremiah said touched them in a sore place, which made them *kick against the pricks*, as *children of Belial*, that will not *bear the yoke*.

**II.** The reply which these persons made to Jeremiah, and in him to God himself; it is in effect the same with theirs who had the impudence to say to the Almighty, *Depart from us; we desire not the knowledge of thy ways*.

**1.** They declare their resolution not to do as God commanded them, but what they themselves had a mind to do; that is, they would go on to worship the moon, here called *the queen of heaven*; yet some understand it of the sun, which was much worshipped in Egypt (~~2463~~ Jeremiah 43:13) and had been so at Jerusalem (~~1291~~ 2 Kings 23:11), and they say that the Hebrew

word for the sun being feminine it may not unfitly be called *the queen of heaven*. And others understand it of all *the host of heaven*, or *the frame of heaven*, the whole machine, <sup><217B></sup>Jeremiah 7:18. These daring sinners do not now go about to make excuses for their refusal to obey, nor suggest that Jeremiah spoke from himself and not from God (as before, <sup><244B></sup>Jeremiah 43:2), but they own that he spoke to them *in the name of the Lord*, and yet tell him flatly, in so many words, “*We will not hearken unto thee; we will do that which is forbidden and run the hazard of that which is threatened.*” Note, Those that live in disobedience to God commonly grow worse and worse, and the heart is more and more hardened by *the deceitfulness of sin*. Here is the genuine language of the rebellious heart: *We will certainly do whatsoever thing goes forth out of our own mouth*, let God and his prophets say what they please to the contrary. What they said many think who yet have not arrived at such a degree of impudence as to speak it out. It is that which the young man would be at *in the days of his youth*; he would *walk in the way of his heart and the sight of his eyes*, and would have and do every thing he has a mind to, <sup><211B></sup>Ecclesiastes 11:9.

**2.** They give some sort of reasons for their resolution; for the most absurd and unreasonably wicked men will have something to say for themselves, till the day comes when *every mouth shall be stopped*.

**(1.)** They plead many of those things which the advocates for Rome make the marks of a true church, and not only justify but magnify themselves with; and these Jews have as much right to them as the Romanists have.

**[1.]** They plead antiquity: We are resolved *to burn incense to the queen of heaven*, for *our fathers* did so; it is a practice that pleads prescription; and why should we pretend to be wiser than our fathers?

**[2.]** They plead authority. Those that had power practised it themselves and prescribed it to others: *Our kings and our princes* did it, whom God set over us, and who were of the seed of David.

**[3.]** They plead unity. It was not here and there one that did it, but *we*, we all with one consent, we that are *a great multitude* (v. 15), we did it.

**[4.]** They plead universality. It was not done here and there, but *in the cities of Judah*.

**[5.]** They plead visibility. It was not done in a corner, in dark and shady groves only, but *in the streets*, openly and publicly.

[6.] They plead that it was the practice of the mother-church, the holy see; it was not now learned first in Egypt, but it had been done in *Jerusalem*.

[7.] They plead prosperity: *They had we plenty of bread, and of all good things; we were well and saw no evil*. All the former pleas, I fear, were too true in fact; God's witnesses against their idolatry were few and hid; Elijah though that he was left alone: and this last might perhaps be true as to some particular persons, but, as to their nation, they were still under rebukes for their rebellions, and there was *no peace to those that went out or came in*, <sup><485></sup>2 Chronicles 15:5. But, supposing all to be true, yet this does not at all excuse them from idolatry; it is the law of God that we must be ruled and judged by, not the practice of men.

(2.) They suggest that the judgments they had of late been under were brought upon them for *leaving off to burn incense to the queen of heaven*, v. 18. So perversely did they misconstrue providence, though God, by his prophets, had so often explained it to them, and the thing itself spoke the direct contrary. *Since we forsook our idolatries we have wanted all things, and have been consumed by the sword*, the true reason of which was because they still retained their idols in their heart and an affection to their old sins; but they would have it thought that it was because they had forsaken the acts of sin. Thus the afflictions which should have been for their welfare, to separate between them and their sins, being misinterpreted did but confirm them in their sins. Thus, in the first ages of Christianity, when God chastised the nations by any public calamities for opposing the Christians and persecuting them, they put a contrary sense upon the calamities, as if they were sent to punish them for conniving at the Christians and tolerating them, and cried, *Christianos ad leones — Throw the Christians to the lions*. Yet, if it had been true, as they said here, that since they returned to the service of the true God, the God of Israel, they had been in want and trouble, was that a reason why they should revolt from him again? That was as much as to say that they served not him, but their own bellies. Those who know God, and put their trust in him, will serve him, though he starve them, though he slay them, though they never see a good day with him in this world, being well assured that they shall not lose by him in the end.

(3.) They plead that, though the women were most forward and active in their idolatries, yet they did it with the consent and approbation of their husbands; the women were busy to *make cakes* for meat-offerings to the

*queen of heaven* and to prepare and pour out the drink-offerings, v. 19. We found, before, that this was their work, <sup><2478></sup>Jeremiah 7:18. “But *did we* do it *without our husbands*, privately and unknown to them, so as to give them occasion to be jealous of us? No; the fathers kindled the fire while the women kneaded the dough; the men that were our heads, whom we were bound to learn of and to be obedient to, taught us to do it by their example.” Note, It is sad when those who are in the nearest relation to each other, who should quicken each other to that which is good and so help one another to heaven, harden each other in sin and so ripen one another for hell. Some understand this as spoken by the husbands (v. 15), who plead that they did not do it *without their men*, that is, without their elders and rulers, their great men, and men in authority; but, because the making of the *cakes* and the pouring out of the *drink-offerings* are expressly spoken of as the women's work (<sup><2478></sup>Jeremiah 7:18), it seems rather to be understood as their plea: but it was a frivolous plea. What would it avail them to be able to say that it was according to their husbands' mind, when they knew that it was contrary to their God's mind?

## <sup><2440></sup>JEREMIAH 44:20-30

### JEREMIAH'S CONTINUED REMONSTRANCE

Daring sinners may speak many a bold word and many a big word, but, after all, God will have the last word; for he will be justified when he speaks, and all flesh, even the proudest, shall be silent before him. Prophets may be run down, but God cannot; nay, here the prophet would not.

**I.** Jeremiah has something to say to them from himself, which he could say without a spirit of prophecy, and that was to rectify their mistake (a wilful mistake it was) concerning the calamities they had been under and the true intent and meaning of them. They said that these miseries came upon them because they had now *left off burning incense to the queen of heaven*. “No,” says he, “it was because you had formerly done it, not because you had now left it off.” When they gave him that answer, he immediately replied (v. 20) that the incense which they and their fathers had burnt to other gods did indeed go unpunished a great while, for God was long-suffering towards them, and during the day of his patience it was



perhaps, as they said, *well with them, and they saw no evil*; but at length they grew so provoking *that the Lord could no longer bear* (v. 22), but began a controversy with them, whereupon some of them did a little reform; their sins left them, for so it might be said, rather than that they left their sins. But their old guilt being still upon the score, and their corrupt inclinations still the same, God remembered against them the idolatries of *their fathers, their kings, and their princes, in the streets of Jerusalem*, which they, instead of being ashamed of, gloried in as a justification of them in their idolatries; they *all came into his mind* (v. 21), all the *abominations which they had committed* (v. 22) and all their disobedience to *the voice of the Lord* (v. 23), all were brought to account; and *therefore*, to punish them for these, *is their land a desolation and a curse, as at this day* (v. 22); *therefore*, not for their late reformation, but for their old transgressions, has all *this evil happened to them, as at this day*, v. 23. Note, The right understanding of the cause of our troubles, one would think, should go far towards the cure of our sins. Whatever *evil comes upon us*, it is *because we have sinned against the Lord*, and should therefore *stand in awe and sin not*.

**II.** Jeremiah has something to say to them, *to the women* particularly, from *the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel*, They have given their answer; now let them hear God's reply, v. 24. *Judah, that dwells in the land of Egypt*, has God speaking to them, even there; that is their privilege. Let them observe what he says; that is their duty, v. 26. Now God, in his reply, tells them plainly,

**1.** That, since they were fully determined to persist in their idolatry, he was fully determined to proceed in his controversy with them; if they would go on to provoke him, he would go on to punish them, and see which would get the better at last. God repeats what they had said (v. 25): "*You and your wives are agreed in this obstinacy; you have spoken with your mouths and fulfilled with your hands; you have said it, and you stand to it, have said it and go on to do accordingly, We will surely perform our vows that we have vowed, to burn incense to the queen of heaven,*" as if, though it were a sin, yet their having vowed to do it were sufficient to justify them in the doing of it; whereas no man can by his vow make that lawful to himself, much less duty, which God has already made sin. "Well" (says God), "*you will accomplish, you will perform, your wicked vows: now hear what is my vow, what I have sworn by my great name;*" and, if *the*

*Lord hath sworn, he will not repent, since they have sworn and will not repent. With the froward he will show himself froward,* <sup><3836></sup> Psalm 18:26.

**(1.)** He had sworn that what little remains of religion there were among them should be lost, v. 26. Though they joined with the Egyptians in their idolatries, yet they continued upon many occasions to make mention of the name of Jehovah, particularly in their solemn oaths; they said, *Jehovah liveth, he is the living God*, so they owned him to be, though they worshipped dead idols; they swear, *The Lord liveth* (<sup><248D></sup>Jeremiah 5:2), but I fear they retained this form of swearing more in honour of their nation than of their God. But God declares that *his name shall no more be thus named by any man of Judah in all the land of Egypt*; that is, there shall be no Jews remaining to use this dialect of their country, or, if there be, they shall have forgotten it and shall learn to swear, as the Egyptians do, *by the life of Pharaoh*, not of Jehovah. Note, Those are very miserable whom God has so far left to themselves that they have quite forgotten their religion and lost all the remains of their good education. Or this may intimate that God would take it as an affront to him and would resent it accordingly, if they did make mention of his name and profess any relation to him.

**(2.)** He hath sworn that what little remnant of people there was there should all be consumed (v. 27): *I will watch over them for evil*; no opportunity shall be let slip to bring some judgment upon them, *until there be an end of them* and they be rooted out. Note, To those whom God finds impenitent sinners he will be found an implacable Judge. And, when it comes to this, they *shall know* (v. 28) *whose word shall stand, mind or theirs*. They said that they should recover themselves when they returned to worship *the queen of heaven*; God said they should ruin themselves; and now the event will show which was in the right. The contest between God and sinners is whose word shall stand, whose will shall be done, and who shall get the better. Sinners say that they shall have peace though they go on; God says they shall have no peace. But *when God judges he will overcome*; God's word shall stand, and not the sinner's.

**2.** He tells them that a very few of them should *escape the sword*, and in process of time *return into the land of Judah, a small number* (v. 28), next to none, in comparison with the great numbers that should return out of the land of the Chaldeans. This seems designed to upbraid those who boasted of their numbers that concurred in sin; there were none to speak of

that did not join in idolatry: “Well,” says God, “and there shall be as few that shall *escape the sword and famine.*”

**3.** He gives them a sign that all these threatenings shall be accomplished in their season, that they shall be consumed here in Egypt and shall quite perish: *Pharaoh-hophra*, the present *king of Egypt*, shall be delivered *into the hand of his enemies that seek his life* — of his own rebellious subjects (so some) under Amasis, who usurped his throne — of *Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon* (so others), who invaded his kingdom; the former is related by Herodotus, the latter by Josephus. It is likely that this Pharaoh had tempted the Jews to idolatry by promises of his favour; however, they depended upon him for his protection, and it would be more than a presage of their ruin, it would be a step towards it, if he were gone. They expected more from him than from Zedekiah king of Judah; he was a more potent and politic prince. “But,” says God, “*I will give him into the hand of his enemies*, as I gave Zedekiah.” Note, Those creature-comforts and confidences that we promise ourselves most from may fail us as soon as those that we promise ourselves least from, for they are all what God makes them, not what we fancy them.

The sacred history records not the accomplishment of this prophecy, but its silence is sufficient; we hear no more of these Jews in Egypt, and therefore conclude them, according to this prediction, lost there; for no word of God shall fall to the ground.