

The Remnant's Wickedness and God's Warnings

Jeremiah 44-45

Jeremiah 44:1-14 - *"The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the Jews who dwell in the land of Egypt, who dwell at Migdol, at Tahpanhes, at Noph, and in the country of Pathros, saying, ² "Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: 'You have seen all the calamity that I have brought on Jerusalem and on all the cities of Judah; and behold, this day they are a desolation, and no one dwells in them, ³ because of their wickedness which they have committed to provoke Me to anger, in that they went to burn incense and to serve other gods whom they did not know, they nor you nor your fathers. ⁴ However I have sent to you all My servants the prophets, rising early and sending them, saying, "Oh, do not do this abominable thing that I hate!" ⁵ But they did not listen or incline their ear to turn from their wickedness, to burn no incense to other gods. ⁶ So My fury and My anger were poured out and kindled in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem; and they are wasted and desolate, as it is this day.'*

⁷ "Now therefore, thus says the Lord, the God of hosts, the God of Israel: 'Why do you commit this great evil against yourselves, to cut off from you man and woman, child and infant, out of Judah, leaving none to remain, ⁸ in that you provoke Me to wrath with the works of your hands, burning incense to other gods in the land of Egypt where you have gone to dwell, that you may cut yourselves off and be a curse and a reproach among all the nations of the earth? ⁹ Have you forgotten the wickedness of your fathers, the wickedness of the kings of Judah, the wickedness of their wives, your own wickedness, and the wickedness of your wives, which they committed in the land of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? ¹⁰ They have not been humbled, to this day, nor have they feared; they have not walked in My law or in My statutes that I set before you and your fathers.'

¹¹ "Therefore thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: 'Behold, I will set My face against you for catastrophe and for cutting off all Judah. ¹² And I will take the remnant of Judah who have set their faces to go into the land of Egypt to dwell there, and they shall all be consumed and fall in the land of Egypt. They shall be consumed by the sword and by famine. They shall die, from the least to the greatest, by the sword and by famine; and they shall be an oath, an astonishment, a curse and a reproach! ¹³ For I will punish those who dwell in the land of Egypt, as I have punished Jerusalem, by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence, ¹⁴ so that none of the remnant of Judah who have gone into the land of Egypt to dwell there shall escape or survive, lest they return to the land of Judah, to which they desire to return and dwell. For none shall return except those who escape.'"

Background Notes

Through Jeremiah, the Lord told the people of Judah who were not taken as captives to Babylon to stay in Jerusalem (Jeremiah 42). Instead they disobeyed and fled to Egypt, taking Jeremiah with them. They settled in Tahpanhes, in the northeast delta area of Egypt (43:7). By chapter 44:1, the Jewish refugees had spread out in Egypt, even to the area of

Pathros in Upper (southern) Egypt. The events and the writing of this chapter probably took place in about 580 BC, at least five years after Jerusalem fell and the refugees of Judah fled to Egypt.

Wouldn't you think that these refugees would have learned their lesson from God's judgment on Jerusalem? Wouldn't you think that they would have stopped worshiping idols, and turned back to the Lord in repentance? But no. In spite of God's warnings through His prophets in the past (v4), and in spite of Jeremiah's warnings in Egypt, the people continued to provoke the Lord to anger by sacrificing to foreign gods, and to idols that they had made with their own hands (v8)!

Doctrinal Points

1. God's warnings will surely precede His unfailing judgment.

Jeremiah 44:15-19 – *“Then all the men who knew that their wives had burned incense to other gods, with all the women who stood by, a great multitude, and all the people who dwelt in the land of Egypt, in Pathros, answered Jeremiah, saying: 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 certainly do whatever has gone out of our own mouth, to burn incense to the queen of heaven and pour out drink offerings to her, as we have done, we and our fathers, our kings and our princes, in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem. For then we had plenty of food, were well-off, and saw no trouble. ¹⁸ But since we stopped burning incense 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 *The women also said, “And when we burned incense to the queen of heaven and poured out drink offerings to her, did we make cakes for her, to worship her, and pour out drink offerings to her without our husbands' permission?”*

Even though, in His grace, God continued to send the people warnings, and even though they knew the message was from the Lord, still they had the audacity to tell Jeremiah that they were not going to listen. In fact, they said that calamity had happened because they had stopped their idolatrous sacrifices to the so-called “queen of heaven” - the female deity Astarte, goddess of fertility (v18-19). They had probably stopped sacrificing to false gods during Josiah's short-lived revival in 621 BC, before the fall of Jerusalem.

But that was not the true reason why the people had been “*consumed by the sword and by famine.*” The true cause of their disaster was that they had failed to heed the continuous warnings and the predictions of coming judgment from the Lord, spoken through His servants, the prophets. Didn't they realize that they were only bringing even greater harm on themselves, their children and their descendants (v7)? Had they forgotten how God had been forced to judge the wickedness of their forefathers and the kings of Judah (v9)? God's judgment was sure to follow their continued defiance and rebellion. Only a few refugees would ever return to Judah, and the rest would die in Egypt (v14). But they could never say that God had failed to send them a warning!

God's judgment for sin is unfailing - but He always gives plenty of warnings. Hebrews 9:27 says, *"And it is appointed for man to die once, but after this, the judgment."* Judgment will surely come upon the unsaved, but no one will be able to say that God did not send many warnings. God's warning will surely precede His unfailing judgment.

2. God's judgment will surely follow His unheeded warning.

Jeremiah 44:20-30 - *"Then Jeremiah spoke to all the people—the men, the women, and all the people who had given him that answer—saying: ²¹ 'The incense that you burned in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem, you and your fathers, your kings and your princes, and the people of the land, did not the Lord remember them, and did it not come into His mind? ²² So the Lord could no longer bear it, because of the evil of your doings and because of the abominations that you committed. Therefore, your land is a desolation, an astonishment, a curse, and without an inhabitant, as it is this day. ²³ Because you have burned incense and because you have sinned against the Lord, and have not obeyed the voice of the Lord or walked in His law, in His statutes or in His testimonies, therefore this calamity has happened to you, as at this day.'*

²⁴ Moreover Jeremiah said to all the people and to all the women, *"Hear the word of the Lord, all Judah who are in the land of Egypt! ²⁵ Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, saying: 'You and your wives have spoken with your mouths and fulfilled with your hands, saying, "We will surely keep our vows that we have made, to burn incense to the queen of heaven and pour out drink offerings to her." You will surely keep your vows and perform your vows!'*

²⁶ Therefore hear the word of the Lord, all 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 named in the mouth of any man of Judah in all the land of Egypt, saying, "The Lord God lives." ²⁷ Behold, I will watch over them for adversity and not for good. And 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 to them. ²⁸ Yet a small number who escape the sword shall return from the land of Egypt to the land of Judah; and all the remnant of Judah, who have gone to the land of Egypt to dwell there, shall know whose words will stand, Mine or theirs. ²⁹ And this shall be a sign to you,' says the Lord, 'that I will punish you in this place, that you may know that My words will surely stand against you for adversity.'*

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, his enemy who sought his life.'"*

A more clear warning could hardly have been given to these Jewish refugees than what God gave them through Jeremiah the prophet. Even though they tried, they could not deny that all of this ruin and calamity that had come upon them and their Land because they had not obeyed the Lord. Because they refused to follow His law, and turned a deaf ear to God's warning, they would be judged and punished in Egypt.

These predictions of judgment did indeed take place. Pharaoh Hophra, in whom these refugees had placed their hopes, was killed in a revolt, and eventually Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian armies invaded and defeated Egypt. Only a handful of surviving Jewish refugees were able to return to Judah. Then the people knew the word of God's judgment was sure, and that their unrepentant wishful thinking was folly (v28).

Is it possible that you are not heeding God's warning about His coming judgment on those who refuse to come to Him in repentance? God's judgment will surely follow His unheeded warning.

Practical Application

Don't seek great things for yourself!

Jeremiah 45 - *"The word that Jeremiah the prophet spoke to Baruch the son of Neriah, when he had written these words in a book at the instruction of Jeremiah, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, saying, ²"Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, to you, O Baruch: ³You said, 'Woe is me now! For the Lord has added grief to my sorrow. I fainted in my sighing, and I find no rest.'*

⁴Thus you shall say to him, 'Thus says the Lord: 'Behold, what I have built I will break down, and what I have planted I will pluck up, that is, this whole land. ⁵And do you seek great things for yourself? Do not seek them; for behold, I will bring adversity on all flesh," says the Lord. "But I will give your life to you as a prize in all places, wherever you go."

Notice the change of date in Jeremiah 45. The time line reverted back to the fourth year of King Jehoiakim, and to events recorded in chapter 36, when Baruch, Jeremiah's scribe, had written down Jeremiah's words. Apparently Baruch was feeling sorry for himself. After he had written down all Jeremiah's prophecies of coming judgment, the king had cut and burned the scroll! Perhaps Baruch had been hoping he'd have a life of ease and comfort, and be regarded with some distinction as an educated scribe with official connections. But the Lord's word to Baruch was, "***Do you seek great things for yourself? Don't do it!*** Just be thankful that you won't be killed in the coming disaster."

The Lord's word to Baruch speaks loudly to us today: "***Do you seek great things for yourself? Do not seek them.***" Are we seeking great things for ourselves? Are we trying to make a name for ourselves? Are we trying to create a place of distinction for ourselves in our church, or seeking fame in wider Christian circles? In Mark 9:35 the greatest One of all said, "*So you want first place? Then take the last place. Be the servant of all.*"

Listen to the word of the Lord! Let's be thankful for the many blessings the Lord has sent our way. Let's not seek great things for ourselves! Let's be content with the role and the spiritual gifts that God has given us. Let's take the humble place and serve others.

Don't seek great things for yourself!