

Text: Jer 44.1-30

“This chapter records an incident late in Jeremiah’s ministry. How much later than chapter 43 is unknown. Many commentators suppose it dates from about 580 B.C. because it would have taken some time for the Judean refugees to spread throughout Egypt, as this chapter pictures them. This chapter contains the prophet’s last known words.”¹ (The later chapters were prophecies given at earlier times.)

Do you recall either seeing a child do this or doing it yourself as a child? — fingers stuck in ears, repeating loudly, “Na, na, na, na, I can’t HEAR you?”

“Can’t” wasn’t the right word in that situation! “Won’t” is the truth.

In this chapter, that is what the remnant of Judah is doing to Jeremiah and God.

I. Jeremiah’s last message to Judah (1-14)**A. Reminding God’s people of the recent judgement (1-3)**

1. The message is addressed to a wide dispersion of Jews (1)
 - a. The message is for all the Jews in the land of Egypt, a different message to the one in the previous chapter
 - b. A number of Jews had already settled in Egypt as their home prior to the Babylonian conquest
2. They had seen God’s hand on Jerusalem (2-3)
 - a. Both the calamity: destruction (2)
 - b. And the cause: defection [idolatry] (3)

B. Reminding God’s people of his constant warnings (4-6)

1. The Lord’s prophets were sent persistently (4)

“again and again” lit. “rising early and sending”
2. They would not listen, but persisted in idolatry (5)
3. Therefore: my wrath and anger were poured out on Jerusalem and Judah (6)

¹ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Jer 43.13.

God's wrath is not sudden, nor surprising – God always warns. When God sent the flood in Noah's day, he sent Noah the message years in advance. The indication is that Noah, in addition to building the ark, preached judgment to the people for 120 years!

C. Remonstrating with God's people on the repetition of rebellion (7-10)

1. Why are you returning to the same practices? (7-8) [Note: "doing great harm to yourselves"]
2. Have you forgotten the consequences of Jerusalem's previous wickedness and your own wickedness? (9-10)

D. Proclaiming God's determination for the persistently rebellious (11-14)

1. God will set his face against them (11)
2. God will take away the refugees who sought to escape in Egypt (12)
3. God will send the sword, the famine, and the pestilence to reach them, even in Egypt (13) [They thought they had escaped it.]
4. God will not allow any of the refugees to return to the land (14)

"Even though they would 'long to return' (lit. 'lift up their *nepes* to return'), none would ever return except a few fugitives."²

You no doubt recall the "definition of insanity" – repeat the same behaviour, expect different results...

II. Judah's rebellious response (15-19)

A. The centerpiece of the chapter is the response of the Jews – we have prophetic utterances on both sides of this response

1. "All" the men = representatives of "all" the Jews in Egypt
2. We do not expect there was some kind of Jewish assembly in Egypt where Jeremiah would have the opportunity to preach directly to them.

² F. B. Huey, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, Tenn: Broadman Press, 1993), 366.

B. The response of the men (15-18)

1. We are not going to listen to you (16)
2. We are certainly going to do what we said we would (17a) “doing we will do” – intensive form
3. We will worship the queen of heaven (17b)

“The queen of heaven (mentioned elsewhere in the OT only in Jer 44:17–25) is usually identified as the Assyro-Babylonian deity Ishtar (Canaanite Astarte), goddess of love and fertility, though her exact identity remains unknown.”³

4. We prospered when we did so before, our calamity came when we left off our idolatry (17c-18) [probably a reference to Josiah’s reforms]

One of the hardest challenges we face in reaching our city is the relative prosperity of the people. They are doing well in their rebellion against God, why should they change?

- This is why I think we need to look for hurting people, “in the pigpen” of the Prodigal Son, so to speak.

C. The response of the women (19)

1. We did it with our husbands’ knowledge and consent
2. Essentially saying: Who are you to usurp our husbands’ authority?

III. Jeremiah’s final verdict (20-30)

A. Appeal again to real history (20-23)

1. Your idolatrous practices were noted by God
2. Your idolatrous practices were punished by God

B. God’s final word (24-30)

1. Go ahead, make my day (24-25)
2. Call on my name no longer: I am watching over them for harm, not for good (26-27)

³ Ibid., 108.

3. Your end will be a sign that God has spoken (28-30)

a. Few will escape the sword I am sending (28)

This was not for mercy's sake, this was to vindicate the truth of God's word and his prophet.

b. Most will be punished in this place (29)

c. Pharaoh Hophra, whom you look to for protection, will fall under my judgement just as Zedekiah did (30)

Hophra (also known as Apries) ruled Egypt from 589 to 570 b.c. He promised help for Zedekiah in his rebellion against the Babylonians (37:5). Part of his army rebelled against him and declared Amasis (also called Ahmosis II) to be king in 570. Hophra and Amasis ruled as coregents for three years; then Hophra was overthrown and executed. Amasis continued to rule alone until his death in 526. On one occasion Hophra confidently declared, 'Not even a god can move me from my throne.'⁴

"According to the Greek historian Herodotus, Hophra became the target of a *coup d'état* and Amasis, one of his generals, took his place. Hophra died later when Amasis handed him over to Egyptians who strangled him. Josephus, however, wrote that Nebuchadnezzar slew him and reigned in his place. Perhaps Nebuchadnezzar was the influential power behind Amasis' revolt and was, therefore, ultimately responsible for Hophra's death."⁵

Conclusion:

We don't know what happened to Jeremiah. The rest of the book contains prophecies uttered earlier in his ministry.

- Some think he returned to Judah after a few years in Egypt
- Some believe he went to Babylon at Nebuchadnezzar's invitation
- Some believe that the Jews stoned him to death at Tahpanhes

⁴ Ibid., 370.

⁵ Constable, *Expository Notes*, Jer 44.29.

“The abruptness with which Jeremiah’s story ends is a reminder that the word of the Lord is important, not the one who bears the word. The lone exception to this is, of course, Jesus Christ, who both brought the word and was the Word.”⁶

How will our story end? Will we be faithful to God’s word to the end?

⁶ Huey, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 370.