

So Jeremiah says that Nebuchadnezzar will do to Egypt what he has done to Jerusalem.
He will burn the temples of Egypt – and carry the people away captive.
(Ezekiel 29 goes so far as to say that Egypt shall become a desolation and a waste –
“her cities shall be a desolation forty years”
“No foot of man shall pass through it, and no foot of beast shall pass through it;
it shall be uninhabited for 40 years.”
and “I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations” for 40 years – 29:11-13)

Here we encounter one of the skeptic’s favorite examples of what they call “failed prophecy.”
Nebuchadnezzar *did* invade Egypt in 568 B.C.
But there is no evidence for a mass deportation of Egyptians.
Egypt was *never* uninhabited for 40 years!

It appears that Nebuchadnezzar invaded Egypt,
did some damage, and then left.

So it seems pretty clear from the historical evidence
that Nebuchadnezzar did *not* turn Egypt into an uninhabited desolation for 40 years.

On the other hand, Egypt *was* weakened by its decades of war with Babylon,
and never recovered.

In the 520s, the Persians invaded Egypt –
and from that point on, Egypt would never be a world power again.

When we went through Ezekiel 29,
we saw that Ezekiel was saying that Nebuchadnezzar would do to Egypt
what he had done to Jerusalem.

And we see the same thing here in Jeremiah 42-43.

We should not expect to see a precise literal fulfillment of every biblical prophecy.
After all, think about what Peter says in Acts 2, when he quotes the prophet Joel:

“And in the last days it shall be, God declares,
that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams;
even on my male servants and female servants in those days
I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.
And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on earth below,
blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke;
the sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon to blood
before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day...”

Yes, the gospels tell us that the sun was turned into darkness when Jesus died,

but there is no account of “blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke”
or the moon being turned to blood.

The point of Joel’s prophecy was clearly fulfilled in Acts 2 – when God poured out his Spirit –
even though the details were not all present.

In the same way, the point of Jeremiah’s prophecy should be clearly seen:

You think that Egypt will protect you?
Egypt cannot even protect themselves!
Nebuchadnezzar will do to Egypt what he did to you –
and so if you are trying to escape Nebuchadnezzar,
you are running in the wrong direction!

Why do we need to hear this?

Certainly it is useful for you to realize
that not all biblical prophecies were intended literally.
You shouldn’t expect every prophecy to have a literal fulfillment.
It will be fulfilled – but sometimes in a surprising way!

But there is a more important reason why we need to hear the message of Jeremiah 42-43.

Because Jeremiah is telling us:

“It could have been different.”

Why did that event happen?
Why did God allow it?

Some people say, “Oh, it was the will of God!”

Yes, in one sense, that is true.
But it was only the will of God because of the choices that you made.

God is sovereign – yes!

But scripture never uses that doctrine to say that human choices are irrelevant!
And – as our Sunday evening study of the Confession of Faith has shown –
neither does Reformed theology!

If you willfully choose to ignore the plain direction that God gives by his Word,
and something bad happens because of it –
then it is *right* to say that you deserved it.

As Peter says in 1 Peter 2:20-21,

“For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure?
But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure,
this is a gracious thing in the sight of God.
For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you,
leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.”

And so likewise, when you suffer unjustly – when you do good and suffer for it –
this is a gracious thing.

Jeremiah's message to *you* is that you have a choice.

If you refuse to listen to God and do what he says,
then you will perish.

But if you listen to his word – and do what he says –
then you will live.

And as long as you can still hear my voice – it's not too late!

We see both in our passage tonight.

We see the rebellious remnant promised suffering for their sin.

And we see the righteous remnant – Jeremiah – endures unjust suffering.

And in so doing, Jeremiah shows us our need for Jesus.

We need the innocent suffering servant to enter this messed up world.

If the innocent can never suffer then Jesus could never suffer for us.

1. The Commanders Inquire of the LORD (42:1-6)

42 Then all the commanders of the forces, and Johanan the son of Kareah and Jezaniah the son of Hoshaiah, and all the people from the least to the greatest, came near² and said to Jeremiah the prophet, "Let our plea for mercy come before you, and pray to the LORD your God for us, for all this remnant—because we are left with but a few, as your eyes see us—³ that the LORD your God may show us the way we should go, and the thing that we should do."

Look back at 41:17 – they were already intending to go to Egypt.

But there seems to be some holdouts –

or at least some who pointed out that the prophet Jeremiah was right there...

We should inquire of the Lord!

Many have pointed out the parallels between this story and the Exodus/Wilderness narrative:

“the requests for intercession;

the promises to obey whatever God says, only to renege on the promise very quickly;

the perverse longing to go (back) to Egypt;

the persistent worship of other gods;

the judgment that they would not enter (or come back to) the promised land.”

(Wright, 396)

Indeed, the request for intercession echoes all sorts of passages in the Exodus narrative.

In Exodus 24, the people of God had promised to do all that the LORD commanded.

And their words even echo the words of Moses in Deuteronomy 10:22,

“Your fathers went down to Egypt seventy persons,

and now the LORD your God has made you as numerous as the stars of heaven.”

Once again we are now “but a few” –
so maybe it is proper to go down to Egypt again?
Is God starting over again?

And so Jeremiah promises to intercede for them:

⁴ Jeremiah the prophet said to them, “I have heard you. Behold, I will pray to the LORD your God according to your request, and whatever the LORD answers you I will tell you. I will keep nothing back from you.”

The LORD had told Jeremiah back in chapter 7, verse 16,
“do not pray for this people, or lift up a cry or prayer for them,
and do not intercede with me, for I will not hear you.”

But now all the things that the LORD had said have come to pass.
“my anger and my wrath will be poured out on this place,
upon man and beast, upon the trees of the field and the fruit of the ground;
it will burn and not be quenched.” (7:20)

And so Jeremiah is willing to pray and intercede for the people once more.
And he promises that he will tell them *everything* that the LORD says.

⁵ Then they said to Jeremiah, “May the LORD be a true and faithful witness against us if we do not act according to all the word with which the LORD your God sends you to us. ⁶ Whether it is good or bad, we will obey the voice of the LORD our God to whom we are sending you, that it may be well with us when we obey the voice of the LORD our God.”

Echoes of Ex 24, Josh 24, and 1 Sam 7 – where Israel vowed to do whatever God says

This is what Israel *should do!*
Whatever God says – that’s what we will do.

But what happened after Exodus 24?
When Moses went up the mountain – the people quickly rebelled against the LORD.
Or in Joshua 24 after the conquest –
as soon as Joshua dies, the people rebelled against the LORD.
Or in 1 Samuel 7 when Samuel leads them against the Philistines –
they then reject the LORD in 1 Samuel 8.

So we should not expect much here.
After all, the theme of Jeremiah is that the people are too much like their fathers!

In Jeremiah 31 God promised that the days are coming
“when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah,
not like the covenant that I made with their fathers

on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke..." (v31-32)

Hebrews 8 tells us that these days have arrived in *Jesus*.

Jeremiah 42 makes it clear that those days had *not yet* arrived in Jeremiah!

2. The Word of the LORD Came to Jeremiah (42:7-22)

a. If You Remain in the Land, I Will Build You Up (v7-12)

⁷ *At the end of ten days the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah.*

Ten days.

If they are worried about the Babylonian reaction to the death of Gedaliah, then ten days could feel like forever!

But God is not a genie in a bottle – sometimes you have to wait for God's answer!

We want our answer now!

You often hear people quote Romans 8:28 – that all things work together for good – but then others reply, "I don't see the good!"

God doesn't promise that you will see it.

He promises that he will *do it* –

but it may take ten days – it may take ten thousand years!

Will you trust him?

And until that day – will you do what God tells you to do?

Because that is the point of Jeremiah's prophecy.

Jeremiah gives them two options:

If you remain in the land, then God will build you up.

But if you go down to Egypt, then God will destroy you.

Jeremiah summons the commanders and all the people, and he tells them (v10).

⁸ *Then he summoned Johanan the son of Kareah and all the commanders of the forces who were with him, and all the people from the least to the greatest, ⁹ and said to them, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, to whom you sent me to present your plea for mercy before him: ¹⁰ If you will remain in this land, then I will build you up and not pull you down; I will plant you, and not pluck you up; for I relent of the disaster that I did to you.*

These are the verbs of Jeremiah 1:10 – when God called Jeremiah

"to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant."

(And we have seen the same verbs come back over and over again – e.g., Jer 18:7-10; 31:28)

And God says "I relent."

I am finished with bringing disaster on you for your sins.
Or perhaps “I am deeply grieved over the evil that I did to you.”
The word “*niham*” refers to being grieved over one’s actions.
It is often used to express repentance.
“Relent” is fine – but it is almost not strong enough.
God is saying that he does not enjoy bringing disaster (bringing bad things)
against his own people.

God does not delight in the death of the wicked.
Bringing disaster is God’s “alien work.”
Before the fall – before the entrance of sin into the world –
God did not bring disaster!
He only brings judgment upon sin
because the alternative would be for him to be false to himself.
If God never judges sin, then sin and death will win!

But God’s alien work is more strange than you might think.
Because the very agent of God’s wrath and curse upon Jerusalem
is now the agent of God’s mercy upon the remnant!

¹¹ Do not fear the king of Babylon, of whom you are afraid. Do not fear him, declares the LORD, for I am with you, to save you and to deliver you from his hand. ¹² I will grant you mercy, that he may have mercy on you and let you remain in your own land.

There is a double statement of “do not fear” Babylon.
Do not be afraid of him.
Nebuchadnezzar is not where the true power is found.
“Do not fear him...for I am with you to save you and to deliver you from his hand.”

Here we see the sovereignty of God on display!
If God has mercy on you, then Babylon’s foreign policy will show you mercy.

Don’t worry about Babylon!
Stay in the land.
I will protect you.
Do not fear him – fear the LORD!

It may appear to us today that Babylon is running roughshod over the people of God.
So, shall we go to Egypt?
Shall we put our hope in a different political power?

Jeremiah says the same thing as Paul in 2 Corinthians 6:16
“What agreement has the temple of God with idols?
For we are the temple of the living God; as God said,
‘I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them,
and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.’”

b. But If You Go to Egypt, You Shall Die by Sword, by Famine, and by Pestilence (v13-18)

¹³ *But if you say, 'We will not remain in this land,' disobeying the voice of the LORD your God*
¹⁴ *and saying, 'No, we will go to the land of Egypt, where we shall not see war or hear the sound of the trumpet or be hungry for bread, and we will dwell there,'* ¹⁵ *then hear the word of the LORD, O remnant of Judah. Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: If you set your faces to enter Egypt and go to live there,* ¹⁶ *then the sword that you fear shall overtake you there in the land of Egypt, and the famine of which you are afraid shall follow close after you to Egypt, and there you shall die.* ¹⁷ *All the men who set their faces to go to Egypt to live there shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence. They shall have no remnant or survivor from the disaster that I will bring upon them.*

If you will not listen to what God says,
then you will perish.

We know that there was a large Jewish community in Egypt from this point on.

Jeremiah is not saying that *those* Jews are cursed by God.

But Jeremiah *is* saying that this small remnant band now *knows better* than to go to Egypt.

If you go to Egypt, you will die by the three great causes of doom:

“by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence.”

War, famine, and disease will strike them down.

¹⁸ *“For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: As my anger and my wrath were poured out on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so my wrath will be poured out on you when you go to Egypt. You shall become an execration, a horror, a curse, and a taunt. You shall see this place no more.*

If you want to escape from death and destruction,
then stay in the land.

To go to Egypt is to walk out of the frying pan into the fire.

“The land, dangerous and devastated as it is, is Israel’s destiny.
Anything else will lead to death” (Brueggemann, 392)

Earlier, Jeremiah had said that God would make Jerusalem like Shiloh (ch 7)

Now, Jeremiah says that God will make the refugees like Jerusalem.

If you leave now, you will never come back.

“The present moment is the only chance for life in the land;

if that chance is forfeited, there will be no other chance.” (B 393)

Again, this message is not given to *all Jews in Egypt*.

This message is given to those who refused to remain in Jerusalem *at this time*.

In many ways, this is a typical prophetic covenantal speech –

if you obey you will receive covenant blessings;

if you disobey you will receive covenant curses.

But then comes something rather unusual for Jeremiah:

c. Jeremiah's Commentary (42:19-22)

¹⁹ The LORD has said to you, O remnant of Judah, 'Do not go to Egypt.' Know for a certainty that I have warned you this day ²⁰ that you have gone astray at the cost of your lives. For you sent me to the LORD your God, saying, 'Pray for us to the LORD our God, and whatever the LORD our God says declare to us and we will do it.' ²¹ And I have this day declared it to you, but you have not obeyed the voice of the LORD your God in anything that he sent me to tell you. ²² Now therefore know for a certainty that you shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence in the place where you desire to go to live.'

Jeremiah gives a direct rebuke.

So far he has always relied on the "thus says the LORD."

Now he adds his own weary voice to his plea.

These are the last words that Jeremiah spoke while still on Jewish soil.

Jeremiah has been a faithful watchman declaring the word of the LORD.

The people have refused to listen,

and so Jeremiah now says, in effect, "Your blood be on your own heads!"

I know that you are not going to do what I say!

You never have before!

"Therefore know for a certainty that you shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence in the place where you desire to go to live."

You can only weep for the folly of men's hearts!

3. The Response of the Commanders and All the People (43:1-7)

a. The Accusation against Baruch (v1-3)

⁴³ When Jeremiah finished speaking to all the people all these words of the LORD their God, with which the LORD their God had sent him to them, ² Azariah the son of Hoshaiiah and Johanan the son of Kareah and all the insolent men said to Jeremiah, "You are telling a lie. The LORD our God did not send you to say, 'Do not go to Egypt to live there,' ³ but Baruch the son of Neriah has set you against us, to deliver us into the hand of the Chaldeans, that they may kill us or take us into exile in Babylon."

How do they respond?

The first word out of their mouths:

"Lies!"

When they asked him to pray for them, they said, "pray to the LORD your God."

But now they say "The LORD our God did not send you..."

There are none so blind as those who will not see!

They have heard the word of the LORD from Jeremiah's lips for over 30 years.

Jeremiah has spoken truth for over 30 years – but they simply will not listen!

They accuse Jeremiah of being the pawn of Baruch the scribe.

Jeremiah and Baruch are simply Babylonian sympathizers.

They are in cahoots with Babylon.

Don't listen to that traitor!

The arrogance and insolence of these men is revealed in their refusal to listen to God's word.

When God says, "This is the way – walk in it"

Please don't say "LIAR!"

b. The Remnant Returns to Egypt (v4-7)

⁴ So Johanan the son of Kareah and all the commanders of the forces and all the people did not obey the voice of the LORD, to remain in the land of Judah. ⁵ But Johanan the son of Kareah and all the commanders of the forces took all the remnant of Judah who had returned to live in the land of Judah from all the nations to which they had been driven— ⁶ the men, the women, the children, the princesses, and every person whom Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard had left with Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, son of Shaphan; also Jeremiah the prophet and Baruch the son of Neriah. ⁷ And they came into the land of Egypt, for they did not obey the voice of the LORD. And they arrived at Tahpanhes.

And so we behold the refugees fleeing from the devastation and destruction of Jerusalem.

All the remnant of Judah –

the men, the women, the children, the princesses – all the refugees –

even Jeremiah and Baruch –

they took to Egypt.

They would escape captivity and deportation to Babylon –

and so they choose self-deportation to Egypt.

But listen to the language used:

"the commanders...took all the remnant."

The remnant had *returned* to live in the land –

but now the commanders take the people captive.

Jeremiah and Baruch – no doubt – would have preferred to stay in Judah.

But they are marched off with the rest – to a forced exile in Egypt.

The rest of chapter 43 – and all of chapter 44 –

consist of Jeremiah's final two oracles – and his interaction with the Egyptian diaspora.

For tonight we will conclude with just the first oracle – here in verses 8-13.

4. The Word of the LORD: Nebuchadnezzar Will Destroy Egypt (43:8-13)

⁸ Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah in Tahpanhes: ⁹ "Take in your hands large stones and hide them in the mortar in the pavement that is at the entrance to Pharaoh's palace in Tahpanhes, in the sight of the men of Judah, ¹⁰ and say to them, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts, the

God of Israel: Behold, I will send and take Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and I will set his throne above these stones that I have hidden, and he will spread his royal canopy over them. ¹¹ He shall come and strike the land of Egypt, giving over to the pestilence those who are doomed to the pestilence, to captivity those who are doomed to captivity, and to the sword those who are doomed to the sword. ¹² I shall kindle a fire in the temples of the gods of Egypt, and he shall burn them and carry them away captive. And he shall clean the land of Egypt as a shepherd cleans his cloak of vermin, and he shall go away from there in peace. ¹³ He shall break the obelisks of Heliopolis, which is in the land of Egypt, and the temples of the gods of Egypt he shall burn with fire.’”

Tahpanhes is in the eastern part of the Nile delta.

When Nebuchadnezzar invaded 15 years later,
this would be the region where his armies would do the most damage.
Heliopolis – mentioned in verse 13 –
is 50 miles south – at the southern end of the delta.

This oracle simply confirms the word that was given in chapter 42.

God will do to Egypt what he did to Jerusalem.

And he will do it through his servant, Nebuchadnezzar.

Nebuchadnezzar, my servant! (v10)

There are very few individuals who are called “my servant” by the LORD.

Abraham, Moses, Caleb, David, Job, Isaiah,

and Nebuchadnezzar.

Back in chapter 25, when Jeremiah had prophesied the 70 years of captivity,

God had first spoken of Nebuchadnezzar as “my servant.”

God had said that he would bring destruction upon Jerusalem because of Judah’s sin.

And he would bring judgment through his servant, Nebuchadnezzar.

Now Jeremiah says that because of Judah’s *renewed* rebellion

God will bring his judgment upon them even in Egypt

(you cannot escape from God!)

Why is Nebuchadnezzar going to come to Egypt?

It is not for anything that Egypt has done.

It is because the refugees from Jerusalem have rebelled against God.

God had told Abraham that all nations would be blessed through his seed.

Egypt will now be cursed because of the seed of Abraham!

Sure, Egypt was an idolatrous nation –

but not any more idolatrous than any other nation around them!

But they will now suffer because of Judah's continued rebellion.

Yes – sometimes *other people* suffer because of *your* sin and rebellion.

But you cannot run away from God!

Indeed, if you try to run away – you will simply bring your problems wherever you go!

God longs to do you good.

He does not enjoy bringing evil – bringing destruction on the earth.

We see this most profoundly and most clearly in the cross of his Only Begotten Son.

He will endure destruction – he will bear the curse in his own body –
the innocent suffering servant.