

In the Alexandrian manuscript of Jeremiah,
this is the end of the book of Jeremiah.

(the oracles to the nations in chapters 46-52 were inserted back in chapter 25).

And as we’ll see in a few weeks, the Babylonian manuscript ends with God’s word to Seraiah –
Baruch’s brother, who was sent to Babylon with the Babylonian manuscript!

But the Alexandrian manuscript ends with God’s word to Baruch.

Chapter 44 takes place in 586 or 585 B.C. -

after Jeremiah and Baruch are taken forcibly to Egypt.

Chapter 45 takes place 20 years earlier – in 605 B.C. – during the reign of Jehoiakim.

And as 45:1 tells us, this happened around the same time as chapter 36,
when Jehoiakim burned the scroll that Baruch wrote of Jeremiah’s words.

In this way chapters 36-45 all fit together as the story of Baruch and Jeremiah.

Why is this important?

Just think about what would happen if the book ended at chapter 44.

“You’re all going to die!”

What happens by adding chapter 45?

There is a way to survive the coming catastrophe on the exiles.

Baruch has been faithful to the LORD.

Therefore Baruch, like Joshua and Caleb in the wilderness,
provides a ray of hope.

God is bringing disaster on all flesh – but he will have mercy on those who fear him.

Chapter 44 is Jeremiah’s final speech to the exiles in Egypt.

God has sent the prophets as a gracious gift to Israel.

But Israel has refused to listen.

But all these things are written down for *us*.

You are called to repent – to turn away from your idolatries.

Will you listen?

Will you obey?

1. The Word That Came to Jeremiah Concerning the Judeans in Egypt (44:1-14)

a. Thus Says the LORD of Hosts: Remember My Wrath Against Jerusalem (v1-6)

44 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,

Migdol and Tahpanhes are in the eastern part of the Nile Delta.

Memphis (near the great pyramids) are at the southern end of the delta.

And the land of Pathros is upper Egypt – further up the Nile.

In other words, Jeremiah is now speaking to the whole of the Jewish community in Egypt.

And there are three parts to the word that came to Jeremiah.

You see in the three times that Jeremiah says “thus says the LORD of hosts”
(verse 2, verse 7, and verse 11).

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.

And Jeremiah says that disaster and desolation came upon Jerusalem
because of Judah’s rebellion –
and primarily because Judah worshiped other gods.

And the LORD says, “I persistently sent to you all my servants the prophets,
saying, ‘Oh, do not do this abomination that I hate!’”

The prophets were God’s servants –
they were sent by God to warn his people and call them to repentance.

And repentance would be very clear:
“to turn from their evil and make no offerings to other gods.”

Repentance requires that you *turn from evil*.
It’s not enough to say “I’m sorry.”
You also need to turn away from the evil and stop doing it!

It’s not that you’ll never sin again – but it does mean that you will turn away from the sin!
Repentance that bears no fruit is not true repentance!

And Jerusalem’s repentance in the days of Josiah bore no fruit.
Because in the days of Josiah’s sons – Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, and Zedekiah –
Jerusalem returned to their sin and rebellion.

And so God brought upon Jerusalem all the destruction that he had promised.

So now what?
What will Judah do in exile?
And so a second time, Jeremiah says
“thus says the LORD God of hosts, the God of Israel.”

b. Thus Says the LORD God of Hosts: Why Do You Continue to Provoke Me with Idolatry? (v7-10)

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^[a] 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.

Notice the first point:

“Why do you commit this great evil against yourselves...”

After all, the LORD has promised to *bless* those who listen to him and do what he says. Therefore, all you have to do is believe his promises and live accordingly!

And yet, you insist on worshiping other gods.

You refuse to worship the LORD only!

Why do you provoke me to anger with the works of your hands?

Why do you make offerings to other gods in the land of Egypt?

Why do you want to become a curse *again*?

Do you not remember what *just happened* in Jerusalem?

And so for a third time, “Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel” (v11):

c. Thus Says the LORD of Hosts: I Will Punish the Remnant in Egypt as I Punished Jerusalem (v11-14)

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.”

When they lived in the land,

Jeremiah had said of them:

“From the least to the greatest, all are greedy for gain.” (Jer 6:13 and 8:10)

When the people came to inquire of the LORD in chapter 42,

they came “from the least to the greatest.”

And Jeremiah had promised in chapter 31, that in the new covenant
“from the least to the greatest” they shall all know the LORD.

But now we hear that nothing has changed.

The remnant of Judah is no different from their fathers.

They have continued in their idolatry – and so they shall all be consumed.

“by the sword and by famine” –

“they shall become an oath, a horror, a curse, and a taunt.”

“They shall not return, except some fugitives.”

Isn't it enough?

They have lost their homes, their families, their city!

They are refugees trying to make a new life for themselves!

Why does God continue to pursue them with vengeance?

If you rebel against the Lord –

if you refuse to live the way that he *created you* to live! –

then you will find yourself perpetuating the disaster that you are trying to escape.

I've seen this – *I've done this!* –

if you live in rebellion, then you will experience the fruit of rebellion.

Usually when the prophet spoke,

the people would at least pay lip service to repentance.

But verses 15-19 give us insight into the heart of rebellion.

2. Whose Word? Whose Vow? (44:15-30)

a. The Response of the People: Josiah's Reforms Didn't Work – So We're Going Back to the Old Ways (44:15-19)

It's important to pay attention to the context in verse 15.

This is a great assembly of “all the people who lived in Pathros.”

Pathros is *Upper Egypt* – the southern part of Egypt – further down the Nile.

It would appear that Jeremiah traveled up and down the Nile

giving his warning to the people.

Either that, or else the Jews from the Upper Nile

came down to Tahpanhes for some reason...

But this response leaves open the question of how the Jews in the Nile Delta responded.

Indeed, the Alexandrian text of Jeremiah would appear to have its origin in that region.

Your brothers further south have rejected the word of the LORD.

What will you do?

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,^[b] “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?”

And they insist that they will continue in their idolatry.

They will continue in making offerings to the queen of heaven,
pouring 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.”

Jeremiah had said that your fathers did *not* know these strange gods.

But the men of Judah in Pathros insist – “Oh yes they did!”

Remember the high places?

All throughout Israel and Judah the people of God had worshiped at the high places.

At first they had worshiped Yahweh there –

but all sorts of strange practices popped up over the centuries –

mixing together the worship of Yahweh with various other gods.

We see evidence of this folk religion in the archeology of Judah.

One inscription says “to Yahweh and his Asherah” –

Asherah was a feminine deity – the goddess of war and agriculture.

She was often paired with Baal –

but apparently the people of Israel wanted a feminine deity,

so they borrowed Asherah – or, in this case, the Queen of Heaven.

So, as a matter of history, it is true –

they and their fathers, their kings and their priests,

had all worshiped the Queen of Heaven *along with* Yahweh.

And, if you simply look at the order of events,

it would appear that Josiah reformation didn’t work!

Josiah destroyed the high places, reformed worship, and restored Yahweh-only worship.

Thirty years later, the temple was destroyed and the people of God were exiled.

Sorry, Jeremiah, we tried what you said.

It didn’t work.

So we’re going back to the old ways – the ways of our fathers.

Do you see what is happening?

Everyone agrees on the facts:

Jerusalem was destroyed.
We've been exiled.
But the interpretation of the facts varies widely!

And so your liturgical practice will depend on your theological interpretation of history.
The Jews of Pathros are convinced that Josiah's reforms failed.
What's the point of trying to please Yahweh
when all he does is destroy his own people!
I try to do what God says, and he just kicks me when I'm down!

And now you're telling us to shape up, or he'll kick us again!
Well, Jeremiah, you know what you can do with that?

We have vowed to the Queen of Heaven – and we will keep our vows!

And then before declaring the word of the LORD,
Jeremiah once again inserts his own commentary –
his own theological interpretation of history!

b. The Word of Jeremiah – You Have Missed the Whole Point! (v20-23)

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.”

The reason for the exile – the reason for the devastation of Jerusalem –
is precisely what you are doing right now!

Sure, it's true, Jeremiah says –
your fathers and your kings, and all the people of the land
did what you are now doing.
But this is the reason for God's judgment and curse against Jerusalem!

c. The Word of the LORD – Go Ahead, Fulfill Your Vows to the Queen of Heaven – Because the LORD Will Fulfill His Oath to Bring Disaster on You (v24-30)

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!

There are two words from the Lord in verses 24-30.

The first is in verses 24-25.

God says, Okay, fine.

Go ahead and fulfill your vows – perform your vows –
and make your offerings to the queen of heaven.

You do what you have promised, and I will do what I have promised,
and we'll see how it all works out!

Because in verse 26, the LORD says:

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."

You have vowed to continue offering to the queen of heaven.

I have sworn by my great name that I will bring disaster on the men of Judah in Egypt.
Those who escape the sword and famine will be few.

And as a sign of this,

I will give Pharaoh Hophra into the hand of his enemies.

Pharaoh Hophra (Apries) was killed during a civil war in 570 B.C.

So Jeremiah's final message to the people of Judah in Egypt
is that God is against them and is seeking to destroy them.

What are we supposed to do with this?

Well, that's why chapter 45 is *here*.

3. P.S., Baruch, Do Not Seek Great Things – When God Is Bringing Disaster on All Flesh, Be Content to Be a Disciple (45:1-5)

What do you do when God is bringing disaster on all flesh?

You can see by the time stamp that we are out of chronological order here!

The fourth year of Jehoikim was 605 B.C. (20 years before the fall of Jerusalem).

This was at the same time that Baruch wrote down the prophecies of Jeremiah,

and Jehoiakim cut them off with a knife and burned them.
In this way, chapters 36 and 45 bookend the whole story of the last days of Jerusalem.

But it belongs here because Jeremiah wants to say something to his readers.
Given the warning that he just gave to the people of Judah in Egypt,
it is worth asking, is there any point in being faithful?
If God is going to destroy us – if God is bringing disaster on all flesh –
then what's the point?
(read verse 3)

45 The word that Jeremiah the prophet spoke to Baruch the son of Neriah, when he wrote these words in a book at the dictation of Jeremiah, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah: ² “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, to you, O Baruch: ³ You said, ‘Woe is me! For the LORD has added sorrow to my pain. I am weary with my groaning, and I find no rest.’

Baruch was part of the pro-Babylon faction in Jerusalem.
He seems to have come from a middling-sort of family.
But now Baruch has become Jeremiah's secretary.
(remember that chapter 45 took place
back at the *beginning* of Baruch's association with Jeremiah).
But as Baruch writes down all the words of Jeremiah,
he enters into the sorrow and pain of Jeremiah's ministry.

But chapter 45 is given to *us* at the end of Jeremiah's ministry.
Indeed, it comes to the exiles as they reflect on *their* misery and pain.

Baruch's woe is precisely where the *faithful* remnant finds themselves!
“The LORD has added sorrow to my pain.
I am weary with my groaning, and I find no rest.”

Has the Lord ever added sorrow to your pain?
The first trial wasn't enough – he had to add more!

Why do all these bad things keep happening?!
Sure, sometimes it has to do with sin.
But sometimes it is *someone else's sin!*
What did Baruch do to deserve the destruction of Jerusalem?
The faithful *were faithful!*
Why did they get punished too?

As Jesus said, why did the Tower of Siloam crush those 18 people?
Were they the worst 18 people in Jerusalem?
No, as Jesus says in Luke 13:5,
“but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”

Natural disasters, disease, famine, war –
all of these things happen as a part of God’s “common wrath” –
and sometimes they happen as a part of God’s particular wrath –
for particular reasons.

God is bringing disaster on all flesh.
God’s wrath and curse is against the whole of humanity for our sin.
And so God says to Baruch:

⁴ Thus shall you say to him, Thus says the LORD: Behold, what I have built I am breaking down, and what I have planted I am plucking up—that is, the whole land. ⁵ And do you seek great things for yourself? Seek them not, for behold, I am bringing disaster upon all flesh, declares the LORD. But I will give you your life as a prize of war in all places to which you may go.”

Now it’s true that in one sense, this is a particular word to a particular man.
Certainly no one else in Judah can claim God’s promise
that they will survive all disasters!

But when God is bringing disaster on all flesh
do not seek great things for yourself.

Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

When all the world is crashing down around you –
remember that God’s purpose for history is to *build* and to *plant*.
The uprooting and the breaking down must happen –
God must bring judgment against sin –
but that is not the end of the story.

Many have noticed that here in chapters 36-45
there are two key figures who are promised their lives:
Ebed-melech in chapter 39 and Baruch in chapter 45.
God tells Ebed-melech in 39:18,
“you shall have your life as a prize of war, because you have put your trust in me”
and now he tells Baruch in 45:5,
“I will give you your life as a prize of war in all places to which you may go.”

When Israel came into the land,
the whole of the wilderness generation died under God’s curse –
except for two – Caleb and Joshua.

Now as Israel goes back out of the land,
the whole of the exilic generation comes under God’s curse –
except for two – Ebed-melech and Baruch.

One more connection:
Ebed-melech was an Ethiopian eunuch – a Gentile.

Caleb was a Kenizite – a Gentile.

God has a strange habit of including Jew and Gentile together in his blessings!

In the cross of Jesus, God's final judgment – his wrath and curse against sin –
was poured out on his own son.

Jesus endured the destruction of Jerusalem – the judgment that Israel deserved –
the judgment that we deserved!

Yes, Jesus has received the name that is above every name.

But how did he get there?

He humbled himself.

He endured the cross – scorning the shame.

He waited on the Lord – and his Father exalted him in due time.

And he calls us now to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow him.

Do not seek great things for yourself.

Do not try to make a great name for yourself.

If you try to make a great name for yourself,

you will be tempted to make your peace with Egypt –
to share in the idolatries of our culture.

Rather, consider Baruch.

He obeyed the LORD.

He did not seek great things for himself.

He sought first the kingdom of God and his righteousness –
and so he wound up in exile together with Jeremiah!

It might not sound like a great life –

but “better is the little that the righteous have,
than the wealth of many wicked.” (Psalm 37:16)