

JEREMIAH 44

A SERMON AGAINST IDOLATRY

It seems that the Jews were probably received with kindness in Egypt; for before very long, they had settled down in different towns – extending from Migdol, the most northerly one in the country, to the land of Pathros, in southern Egypt. Noph, or Memphis – one of the most famous cities of Egypt, which was situated upon the western bank of the Nile River – had attractions for some of them; while others remained at Tahpanhes, the town in which they had first arrived. And not only did they quickly spread out across the land of Egypt, but they also speedily plunged into the idolatry of the Egyptians. Notwithstanding all the bitter experiences which had befallen them because of their turning aside after other gods, they continued to repeat the abominations which had brought such great disaster and suffering upon their nation.

In this chapter, it is likely that Jeremiah took advantage of a great assembly of Jews at some idolatrous festival, to warn them of the inevitable fate which would surely overtake them in Egypt – just as it had befallen them in Jerusalem. He reminded them of the evil that they had brought upon their own city; he remonstrated with them concerning their shameful idolatry; and he predicted that none of them would escape to return to the land of Judah, with the exception of a small number of individual fugitives. In the conduct of the Jewish people of Jeremiah's day, we have a mirror of the stubborn heart of mankind in general. For centuries, they were unceasingly warned by the Lord's prophets. At last, when longsuffering love could not permit their rebellion any longer, the judgment of just love was executed. Nevertheless, in the wretched remnant that had escaped all the plagues that had been sent up to this point, the old root of unbelief and disobedience still remained unbroken.

A severe altercation ensued after Jeremiah had delivered his message. Considerable numbers of both men and women listened to these words from the prophet's lips; and it seems that the latter had been the leaders in this idolatrous worship, albeit with the knowledge and consent of the former. The reply of these men (verses 16-18) was a most insolent one; for they told the prophet that they would not listen to him, but they would pursue their own course – whatever the consequences might be. They pretended that the worship of the moon-goddess – here referred to as “the queen of heaven” – had brought them comfort and prosperity, while the neglect of it had plunged them into trouble and misfortune. But Jeremiah did not hesitate to insist – in the name of the God Whom he served so faithfully – that the sufferings of the people were not due to their

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ Jeremiah preaches a message to the Jewish remnant in Egypt against their continued rebellion in idolatry – verses 1-14
- ❖ The people blatantly declare that they would not listen – verses 15-19
- ❖ The prophet promises greater judgments that were yet to come – verses 20-30

discontinuance of idolatry, but to their persistence in it. And to the arguments of the men, their wives added another (verse 19). In self-vindication, these women affirmed that they had performed these idolatrous services with the approval of their husbands, and so the personal responsibility was not theirs. Why, then, did their consciences accuse them? If they had truly done nothing wrong, why did they feel it necessary to endeavor to justify their behavior? This is what usually happens when people are convicted in their hearts that they are guilty, but they do not want to admit it; they try to find excuses for their conduct, or they attempt to lay the blame of it upon someone else.

But Jeremiah was not at all daunted by the insolence of this rebellious people; he fearlessly declared that it was their own idolatry that had proved to be their ruin (verses 20-23). And more terrible punishments were yet to come. They had resolved to keep their vows of serving idols, and now they would be given up to the perversity of their own will. With the exception of a tiny remnant, none of them would ever return to their homeland of Judah. And as a sign that the Divine word would truly come to pass, Jehovah would give Pharaoh Hophra into the hands of his enemies (verses 26-30) – just as the prophet had already foretold. As certainly as that event would come to pass, it was just as certain that the Jews who were in Egypt would be exterminated by war and famine. And so it came to pass! Hophra was conquered by King Nebuchadnezzar around 570 BC, despite the fact that he had presumptuously boasted that not even a god could cast him down from his lofty throne. And Nebuchadnezzar also carried away that remnant of Jews who had fled to Egypt for refuge, against Jeremiah's advice. Thus the prophet's word was confirmed; for although they had fled to Egypt because they feared the revenge of the Babylonians, yet that king followed them there and took them away into captivity also.

With these sad words, the Prophet of Sorrow closed his earthly ministry, or at least as much of it as is recorded in the pages of Scripture. The next several chapters contain prophecies against foreign nations, but these were uttered earlier in his life. And the last chapter contains a review of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. The Bible says nothing about Jeremiah's death. But how gladly did he close his eyes upon the wreck that sin had brought upon his fellow-countrymen, and open them upon the land where neither sin nor death nor war shall ever break the perfect rest! During all of the dark and painful experiences that the prophet endured throughout his life on earth, he knew that God would not cast off His people forever; for although He caused grief, yet He would have compassion and mercy upon them. If these words reach someone whose life has been like Jeremiah's, through the valley of sorrow and shadows; let them rest assured that the Lord never stoops so closely as to those who are broken by afflictions. Never doubt His love!

Lord, we pray that You would work in our hearts by Your grace, so that we may seek after You instead of rebelling against You! Amen.

