

Class 11: Jeremiah 43-44

In Egypt

June 14, 2017

The Jewish relationship with Egypt had existed since the time of Abraham, who sojourned there, until the time of Jesus. Yet Egypt was always considered a snare to them by God (Lev. 18:3); God forbid Isaac from going there (Gen. 26:2). After the Israelites left Egypt in Exodus, God forbid them to return to Egypt, and forbid their kings from turning to Egypt for aid (Deut. 17:16, Isa. 31:1). Yet Israel constantly sought the strength of Egypt over Jehovah (Isa. 30:1-3).

As a historical note, it is known that in the south of Egypt a large Jewish community existed on the Nile river island of Elephantine as far back as the time of King Manasseh. In fact, the only other existing temple to Jehovah was built there, with priests and sacrifices regularly offered, and when the Persians sacked the temples of Egypt, it was the only one not destroyed. However, it fell into decline and was absorbed into nearby pagan temples. Later, during the Maccabean period another temple would be built in the north (the land of Onias), which would outlast the temple in Jerusalem (70AD).

Johanan's Rebellion: In chapter 42 God's word came through Jeremiah to the band of people under the army captain Johanan. Specifically, God said that they needed to remain in Judah, and that if they fled to Egypt, they would perish. In this message God called Johanan a hypocrite, as he had already decided what he was going to do, and did not truly want the Word of the Lord.

Johanan and Azariah (called the "proud men") confront Jeremiah. They claim that he has lied of the message, and strangely claim that Baruch has set him up to do this. We do not know why Baruch is called the architect of this scheme, but both are implicated as false prophets. They then take their entire party on the road, and settle in the town of Tahpanhes, which lies along the north east portion of Egypt. Tahpanhes was at that time settled by Greek mercenaries, who were removed about 15 years after Jeremiah's arrival, and the town slowly came to ruin.

First Prophecy in Egypt: While in Tahpanhes, God has Jeremiah place stones into the pavement in front of the royal palace in Tahpanhes. His message is that the royal emblem of Babylon will cover this pavement, and those who thought they escaped the sword in Judah will suffer it here. There is a promise that the city of Heliopolis will be desecrated, along with the temples of Egypt.

There is some confusion as to the occurrence of this prophecy, and the parallel prophecies in Ezekiel 32. It is recorded in history that Nebuchadnezzar invaded Egypt in 568 BC. There are few records for this event, but it appears that the former ruler (Hophra) went to the Babylonian side, and was defeated in 566BC. There is little information about a Babylonian conquest at this time. There are several considerations to be made here. First, the absence of records does not prove that the invasion and destruction took place; the invasion is simply not well recorded. Second, it is not impossible that God relented on Egypt (as He did with Tyre, Ezekiel 26 with 29:18). Third, God did not say that Babylon would physically take over Egypt, but militarily defeat it and be paid by it. Fourth, a later king of Babylon is credited by the Egyptians as having destroyed their temples in just such a fashion; as God delayed the destruction of Tyre by Nebuchadnezzar until Alexander, so too may this destruction have been delayed until the time of Persian dominance.

Second Egyptian Prophecy: God's word comes again in a more generic prophecy to the Jews in Egypt. Once more it points to the calamity of Judah as having been forecasted by God. It reminds them that their

destruction was brought about by disobedience. God had warned them by the prophets. Now those in Egypt feel that they, having left Judah, are far apart from God's wrath. They commit the same transgressions as in Judah (worshipping false gods). Yet by leaving Judah, they have sinned even more, and God intends to set His face against them, and that those in Egypt will be consumed and die by sword and famine.

Those Jews in the south of Egypt (*Pathros* means "south") gathered together and in a shockingly bold proclamation declare that they will not hear his words. They claim that they did cease serving these gods, and yet their lives only got worse. In particular, the wives seem upset that they are singled out here, when their husbands knew their actions.

Jeremiah replies to this astonishing rebellion. First, God does not forget idolatry. It may be that the punishment of the people was not the second they sinned, but in the eyes of God the cause and effect are clear. Second, God intends to leave the people of Judah in Egypt to their own means. He will no more be named by them, and will intentionally bring destruction to them. Finally, God makes a promise regarding Pharaoh Hophra – his end will parallel that of Zedekiah, to be delivered to his enemies. This occurred in 566BC.

Making Applications:

1. Why would God punish the Gentile nations?
2. The Jews in Egypt claim that they did quite serving the pagan gods, and that things only got worse for them. What should we make of this claim?
3. Why is it significant that it is pointed out that the husbands knew that their wives were burning incense to the queen of heaven?