

## Jeremiah Chapters 42-44 John Karmelich

1. My title is the word "Backsliding". Christians will use to describe someone who's committed their life to Jesus and have walked away from it. One of the issues I'll discuss in this lesson is whether or not such a person is saved. It also returns us to the classic question of, "Now that I'm a believer in Jesus, how much can I sin and get away with it?" The other classic line is, "Can't I just go ahead sin now? Since God tells us to confess our sins and He'll forgive us for what we've done". That is the underlying lesson behind these chapters. Even if you're thinking, "I'm good right now, that is not an issue I'm facing at the moment, all of us slip at times and at the least it's important to have a good discussion about what to do when faced with backsliding, be it us or someone else."
  - a) With that said, let me explain how it applies to these chapters.
  - b) The short version is the Israelites still living in Israel are nervous. After all, the last chapter had the assassination of the Babylonian governor there. The Israelites must be thinking, "I think we should make a run for it before that big bad Babylonian army that already wiped this place out is aware of it and comes back to finish us off!" Therefore, the Israelites left in that land decide it's time to make a run for Egypt and to look for them for protection.
  - c) The locals consult Jeremiah who by now is well established as a prophet. He came back 10 days later and says that God says in effect, "Hang around here, and subject yourself to the Babylonian Empire. I promise things will be good and you will prosper."
  - d) Then Jeremiah predicts that if you return to Egypt, I (God) will destroy it just to prove I'm God and if I say the Babylonians are in charge here and there, deal with it".
  - e) As usual the Israelites didn't listen and off to Egypt all of them went. Jeremiah appears to have been taken there by force.
  - f) In Egypt God spoke to him with the horrid message, that there will be no survival for the Jewish people who fled there. What's also implied is that Babylon will conquer Egypt, as well as kill the Israelites there for their all their disobedience to Babylon.
  - g) The moral of the story is in effect we can't run away from God's will and the consequences are too great. It's the idea that once we're called to be witness for Jesus whether we like it or not, God won't "leave us alone" as He expects us to use our lives as a witness for Him.
2. So is that it, the Israelites left in the land run to Egypt and everybody suffers? Hardly! Jeremiah's spending a good amount of time in these chapters explaining why. After all if people are going to die for turning from God (i.e., "backsliding") it's essential to understand why.
  - a) It leads back to the issue of are we "Once saved, always saved?" Let me hit that one while I'm in the neighborhood. My view is more "middle ground" on it. It's essentially the idea that once we commit our lives to serving Jesus, as long as we've believing Jesus did die for our sins, He is God and He is Lord of our lives, we can't sin enough to mess that up! What if we truly turn from that, but then turn back later in life? If that's true we've wasted time. However, I'm positive God will judge us fairly when we die based on that criteria. I never argue one can sin enough to lose it, but I'll argue that if we truly turn from that belief then we're in big trouble. I should also add I believe God judges the naïve fairly based on what they do know or in a lot of cases, what they could have known.
  - b) Now that I got that speech out of my system (I tend to do that a lot), the key issue through the second half of this lesson is what are the Israelites guilty of? Jeremiah goes over much of the ground that we've read through the book, which keys on idolatry. It's the idea that if we truly trust God we should be putting our time, effort and resources where our mind is, so to speak. Turning to worship other things, was so rampant the Babylonian captivity was necessary in the sense that empire had so many idols, the overexposure to it, is what it took to cure the Israelites of their sins. The question for you and me in effect is what is it that's keeping us from drawing closer to God and what'll He do to change that? As we read these, it should scare us to realize God will go to great lengths to draw us to Him!

3. Anyway, this story of this chapter involves, Jeremiah, fellow Israelites deported to Egypt, a bit of mentions about the Babylonian officials. It's mainly a dialogue between Jeremiah and other of the Israelites still in that land. The key point is they asked Jeremiah to seek God's will about going to Egypt. After checking with God, the answer was no or you're in really big trouble, but the group went anyway, taking Jeremiah prisoner along with them. The last part of the chapter states about the punishment that awaits those Israelites who made the journey to Egypt thinking they'd avoid war and suffering by going there. God effectively said, "What you fear you'll get since you refuse to do My will".
  - a) Bottom line, this is a story of knowing what's the right thing to do, being warned what's the right thing to do, ignoring God because "we think we know what's best", things seem ok for awhile, then when things get horrible, people realize, "You know what, Jeremiah is right after all, we really blew it".
  - b) It's a nice story, with an underlying message of turning from His will after it is too late to be a witness for Him. Again, the key issue isn't so much salvation but wasting chances to use our lives as a witness for Jesus. These three chapters tell that idea well.
  - c) As usual the details are full of life lessons and there's always more than what I'm teaching here in the summary. With that said, I'm going cut my summary a little short this week as I'm covering three chapters here. With that said, let's begin.
4. Chapter 42, Verse 1: Then all the army officers, including Johanan son of Kareah and Jezaniah son of Hoshaiah, and all the people from the least to the greatest approached <sup>2</sup> Jeremiah the prophet and said to him, "Please hear our petition and pray to the LORD your God for this entire remnant. For as you now see, though we were once many, now only a few are left. <sup>3</sup> Pray that the LORD your God will tell us where we should go and what we should do."
  - a) To set the scene, we have to remember where we left off. The last two chapters focused on a conspiracy to commit murder and a bunch of people were killed including a Babylonian appointed by the empire to oversee the deportation of Israel and those who remained still in that land. Apparently among those left after all that was a few Israel officers.
  - b) One thing not stated in the last chapter was where was Jeremiah while all of that killing is taking place. My guess is because he was so pro-Babylonian captivity and because the guy doing the killing was anti-Babylon Jeremiah was in hiding. Here in Chapter 42, that whole incident is over. I suspect the army officers were left there in the land to organize those in the land still but that's a guess. Anyway, since the "killer" ran for the hills (ok, he ran over the Jordan River, outside of Israel territory), Jeremiah must have known he was gone. He is back with the other Israelites still there. I'm sure Jeremiah believed he'd be a witness to encourage the Israelites there in the land. Anyway, God is throwing Jeremiah a "soft ball" as these leaders are asking Jeremiah, "OK we're here, we're stuck, what now?"
  - c) It's amazing to consider Jeremiah has been preaching "surrender to Babylon" for probably a bunch of decades now. Yet here were these Israel officers probably secretly hoping he'd say something else. It's one thing to say with an open heart, "God we will do whatever it is you want us to do". It's another to say, "Hey God, here's our plan so please ask the Holy Spirit to work the way we want Him to work."
  - d) Were the Israelites scared at this point? Of course. They've watched the Babylonians wipe out their nation leaving only a few people there. The governor they appointed got killed a "chapter ago". Bottom line, hanging around "here" had to be a scary proposition. I'd bet it was already the desire of these guys to go to Egypt. They knew Jeremiah was a prophet of God so they figured, "hey let's check with the big guy before we head down to Egypt".
5. Verse 4: "I have heard you," replied Jeremiah the prophet. "I will certainly pray to the LORD your God as you have requested; I will tell you everything the LORD says and will keep nothing back from you.
  - a) Remember that Jeremiah had to be thinking his main job was done as the Babylonians did wipe out that place as he predicted for years. He must have felt useful as they asked this!

- b) Keep in mind that being a prophet of God is not like having an on and off switch. He had to wait for God to speak to him. Sure he could ask God, but he must wait on His timing to get some sort of response.
  - c) Here's a question to ponder, if God didn't want these guys to go to Egypt, why didn't God just tell them Himself? After all if He's God He can speak when He wants, to whoever He wants. Given the desire of these men to leave town, I suspect that even if a booming voice spoke in "King James English", they'd still go because they have their heart set on it.
  - d) That leads me back to the topic of backsliding. To be honest, if we want to turn from God we'll find a way even if we're positive God told us not to! Now think of all the people who know the word of God says "this", but they still do "that", because of a strong desire to do whatever one feels like doing. Yes the characters mentioned in the first few verses will not end up doing what Jeremiah says even though they're convinced he's a prophet of God? It is because the desire to do things "our way" is a strong temptation to overcome. It's in the situations like this where we've got to remind ourselves in effect, "God knows better than us, so why are we arguing here?"
    - i) Obviously many situations are not biblical. That's when we pray for wisdom and we make the best decision we can based on what's in front of us.
    - ii) With that said, I'm jumping ahead of the story. Let's keep going.
6. Verse 5: Then they said to Jeremiah, "May the LORD be a true and faithful witness against us if we do not act in accordance with everything the LORD your God sends you to tell us. <sup>6</sup> Whether it is favorable or unfavorable, we will obey the LORD our God, to whom we are sending you, so that it will go well with us, for we will obey the LORD our God."
- a) Here is a group of man citing off God's most holy name a bunch of times. They promise to do His will whatever it is. The question is, if they were so certain it was God saying it is My word, do it, why turn away from it? Again, it's because we get this false sense that we're in control of our lives and not God. Let's be honest, being a good witness for God is hard work at times. It's always tempting to take the easy way out. That's in effect what's the choice that will be made. Still, even before we get there, notice how sincere they were as far as claiming they will obey God. This is all a good reminder that actions speak a lot louder than words.
  - b) As you can see I'm being a "Debbie Downer" setting the stage for something horrid. That's because I've read ahead. In the meantime, let's get back to the story at hand.
7. Verse 7: Ten days later the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah. <sup>8</sup> So he called together Johanan son of Kareah and all the army officers who were with him and all the people from the least to the greatest.
- a) Two questions popped in my head as I read these verses. The first is, why didn't God just speak to the other men since they're the ones inquiring. I'd argue it's because they believe in Jeremiah as a prophet of God, so He's working through Jeremiah.
  - b) The second is why 10 days? Did Jeremiah not pray hard enough on day one? I suspect it's simply because God wanted the other Israelites to be "nervous". Let's face it, the Israelites did kill the Babylonian governor there. The longer Jeremiah delayed, the greater the odds of the Babylonians coming back for another round of punishment. In other words, this is God's way of saying, "Do you trust Me, now, even though the danger is increasing?" Most of us who've been a Christian a good while no what the "Do you trust Me now" feeling is like as we feel like we're always in trouble and don't know how God is going to respond.
  - c) Anyway, word got back to the Israelites that God spoke to Jeremiah so a "pow wow" got put together to hear the response.
8. Verse 9: He said to them, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, to whom you sent me to present your petition, says:
- a) Before we get into the actual response, I'm always fascinated how one can tell if God's the one speaking to us. Other than not violating His word, only time can tell if it was right!

9. Verse 10: `If you stay in this land, I will build you up and not tear you down; I will plant you and not uproot you, for I am grieved over the disaster I have inflicted on you.<sup>11</sup> Do not be afraid of the king of Babylon, whom you now fear. Do not be afraid of him, declares the LORD, for I am with you and will save you and deliver you from his hands.<sup>12</sup> I will show you compassion so that he will have compassion on you and restore you to your land.'
- a) Here's the classic, "Do you want the good news first or the bad news?" God chose to give the good news first (since He knew it'd be rejected, of course). The short version is God is pleading with the Israelites to "hang around here". Why? Because God wanted to have a remnant in the land to "work it" until the 70 years were completed. The reason Jeremiah's telling all of this to us, is so we understand that God's plan was to have a remnant there as a witness to the Babylonians in the area. It's the idea that God always wants us to live as a witness for Him. So if they choose to go to Egypt (next set of verses), why couldn't they be a witness for God down there? Because Egypt represents life before God. Way back when Deuteronomy was written, God told Moses that the Israelites may not return to Egypt. It's because to return is symbolic of not trusting God and "going back to a life they had before God took over". (Deuteronomy 17:16 makes it clear they're not to return to Egypt.)
  - b) Bottom line is God promises to bless them if they stick it out. Next we're going to read He will make them suffer if they refuse to do His will.
10. Verse 13: "However, if you say, `We will not stay in this land,' and so disobey the LORD your God,<sup>14</sup> and if you say, `No, we will go and live in Egypt, where we will not see war or hear the trumpet or be hungry for bread,'<sup>15</sup> then hear the word of the LORD, O remnant of Judah. This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: `If you are determined to go to Egypt and you do go to settle there,<sup>16</sup> then the sword you fear will overtake you there, and the famine you dread will follow you into Egypt, and there you will die.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, all who are determined to go to Egypt to settle there will die by the sword, famine and plague; not one of them will survive or escape the disaster I will bring on them.'<sup>18</sup> This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: `As my anger and wrath have been poured out on those who lived in Jerusalem, so will my wrath be poured out on you when you go to Egypt. You will be an object of cursing and horror, of condemnation and reproach; you will never see this place again.'
- a) I don't know about you, but if God made it really clear to me not to go "there", I'd do what He says! It kind of makes you wonder how "thick headed" anyone is if they're doubting a man who they already believed is God's prophet.
  - b) Grant it, I could see how they were scared. I can see how they feared a Babylonian return so God's speaking through Jeremiah of horrible things that'll occur if they go.
  - c) The Israelites think they can avoid war (and all the horrible things that go with it) if they'd go to Egypt. Jeremiah makes it very clear they'll suffer far worse if they go than if they just stay put. By the way, notice the text doesn't say the Babylonians themselves will kill them. History records show that the Egyptians had a war with Libya at that time and they did a lot of damage to Egypt through war, but that's a separate story.
  - d) The bottom line here is God's saying, "Hey you want me to get angry, go to Egypt? If you want me to be loving toward you, hang around here!"
  - e) While I'm in the neighborhood, let me explain God and "emotions". The God we worship is 100% loving all the time, 100% angry at sin all the time, 100% wants us to do His will as a witness for Him, etc. From our perspective, when we see the consequences of sin act out that's when we see from our perspective God's wrath come out. The idea is He allows all of that ultimately to draw people close to Him. He even allows death and destruction as it is ultimately for His glory when horrid things happen. How is that? Fear of such things is what draws others close to Him. Not wanting to suffer the same fate, makes people go to seek Him. That's the simple point here. Meanwhile Jeremiah's saying, "Hey you want to avoid all of that? I suggest you plant your feet right where you're at!"

- f) Anyway, as these verses make pretty clear, God doesn't want the Israelite to go back to Egypt. What God told Moses 1,000 years earlier pretty much still stands. So what about Jewish people today, can they go to Egypt? Even if politics wasn't an issue (which it is, I wouldn't recommend it.) There is an island on the Nile River with a Jewish colony that's been there since the 5<sup>th</sup> Century AD. The fact they've been there for 1,500 years shows us that God's speaking specifically to Israelites "In His land" at that time not going there.
11. Verse 19: "O remnant of Judah, the LORD has told you, 'Do not go to Egypt.' Be sure of this: I warn you today <sup>20</sup> that you made a fatal mistake when you sent me to the LORD your God and said, 'Pray to the LORD our God for us; tell us everything he says and we will do it.'<sup>21</sup> I have told you today, but you still have not obeyed the LORD your God in all he sent me to tell you. <sup>22</sup> So now, be sure of this: You will die by the sword, famine and plague in the place where you want to go to settle."
- a) If the warnings from the last set of verses wasn't strong enough, these pound the point to a level of saying, "Hey guys, you want to die horribly, go ahead and go!"
- b) As we'll read in the next chapter, the Israelites decide to go anyway, despite all Jeremiah's pleading in this chapter. So why is this text here, if this is true? Why does God want us to know all of the "They didn't listen" text here? To show us that when people make up their mind to turn against God, even if we get preached out by true God fearing people often it is not enough for people to return. Let's face it, many people truly need to hit rock bottom before turning their lives over to Jesus. Because Egypt seemed like a "reasonable option" it meant ignoring God completely.
- c) Jeremiah's reminding them that they asked him to ask God what to do. They don't like the answer God gave and now they're hearing the consequences of ignoring God.
- d) OK John, we don't have a prophet to run to for God's answers of what to do next. How do we know what to do next? The obvious answer is to pray for wisdom. God not only cares about your salvation, but about your life as He wants us to be a witness for Him. I always preach it's a matter of praying and then doing what's logical given whatever option we've got to choose from. We don't have or need our own Jeremiah's as we have a direct way to communicate with God Himself, who loves to guide us His own way.
- e) Meanwhile the Israelites are still in big trouble. Let's continue:
12. Chapter 43, Verse 1: When Jeremiah finished telling the people all the words of the LORD their God--everything the LORD had sent him to tell them-- <sup>2</sup> Azariah son of Hoshaiah and Johanan son of Kareah and all the arrogant men said to Jeremiah, "You are lying! The LORD our God has not sent you to say, 'You must not go to Egypt to settle there.'<sup>3</sup> But Baruch son of Neriah is inciting you against us to hand us over to the Babylonians, so they may kill us or carry us into exile to Babylon."
- a) Here were the leading Israelites still in that land, accusing Jeremiah of lying. They're also bringing up Baruch who was a friend of Jeremiah and delivered messages for Him. I am guessing that because both of them have been "Pro-Babylon" through all of the preaching, it's logical they're accusing Jeremiah of lying.
- b) I've believed for years the opposite of faith is not a lack of faith, but fear. When our fears take over, that's when we lose faith in God. These Israelites naturally feared Babylon. The land of Israel was destroyed by them and the governor placed in charge was killed. It had to be a scary thought to consider what would happen to them if they stayed. Jeremiah did not say what they wanted to hear, but their fears of "what could happen" was greater now than their faith in what God is capable of doing. That's my point about not letting fears be in charge our minds.
- c) So what do we do when our fears take over? First, stop and consider what you're grateful for. Focusing on the positive things helps to alleviate fears. Then realize that God asks us to pray for His help. What do you think, "Give us this day our daily bread" is all about? I am just saying God has our backs even when our fears are taking over!

- d) Also notice how the Israelites are putting the blame on Baruch. It makes we wonder how it is he became the center of blame. I suspect they're looking for excuses as they know he is a prophet of God and they did ask him to pray for them. Therefore, Baruch became an excuse to find a reason to say Jeremiah is wrong.
13. Verse 4: So Johanan son of Kareah and all the army officers and all the people disobeyed the LORD's command to stay in the land of Judah. <sup>5</sup> Instead, Johanan son of Kareah and all the army officers led away all the remnant of Judah who had come back to live in the land of Judah from all the nations where they had been scattered. <sup>6</sup> They also led away all the men, women and children and the king's daughters whom Nebuzaradan commander of the imperial guard had left with Gedaliah son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, and Jeremiah the prophet and Baruch son of Neriah. <sup>7</sup> So they entered Egypt in disobedience to the LORD and went as far as Tahpanhes.
- a) Bottom line they disobeyed God. It wasn't just a matter of going to Egypt themselves, it is a matter of leading all the Israelites still in the land there. The text says all the people who were still in that land were led there including the king's daughters. You may recall from an earlier part of this book that the last Jewish king watched his sons killed in front of him and then he was made blind and taken to Babylon. My point here is simply to say that he also had daughters who were left in Israel "after all that" and they were taken to Egypt as well as everyone else.
- b) The text also mentions that Jeremiah himself and Baruch were taken there. Given the fact that Jeremiah predicted death for everyone who went, I sort of picture them being put in a cage of some sort and then driven off by horses or mules in the caravan to Egypt. In other words, you're going whether you like it or not.
- c) That brings up the issue, what if we're doing something because we're forced to do it? Let us say we know what the right thing to do is but "at gunpoint" we're forced to make a bad decision? First God understands. As we'll read in the next set of verses, God still spoke to Jeremiah in Egypt despite the fact he was forced to go there against His will. He will still guide us even when "forced" to make a bad decision. Even if we willfully chose the wrong thing to do, God always offers repentance if we choose to turn back to Him. When we do acknowledge God is right and we were wrong in any situation and make an effort to turn from it, He promises to be there with us through bad choices and those things beyond our control in life.
- d) As for the Israelites who willfully made the decision to go to Egypt in spite of the warning let's just say the consequences are coming. As always we can always repent, but that may not exempt us from the suffering from not doing His will in the first place. We'll get to see that play out through the rest of this lesson. Let's continue:
14. Verse 8: In Tahpanhes the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: <sup>9</sup> "While the Jews are watching, take some large stones with you and bury them in clay in the brick pavement at the entrance to Pharaoh's palace in Tahpanhes. <sup>10</sup> Then say to them, 'This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: I will send for my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and I will set his throne over these stones I have buried here; he will spread his royal canopy above them. <sup>11</sup> He will come and attack Egypt, bringing death to those destined for death, captivity to those destined for captivity, and the sword to those destined for the sword. <sup>12</sup> He will set fire to the temples of the gods of Egypt; he will burn their temples and take their gods captive. As a shepherd wraps his garment around him, so will he wrap Egypt around himself and depart from there unscathed. <sup>13</sup> There in the temple of the sun in Egypt he will demolish the sacred pillars and will burn down the temples of the gods of Egypt.' "
- a) OK the saga continues now in Egypt. God spoke to Jeremiah here. If nothing else it shows that God speaks to prophets when they're not in the land and even after they're forced to do what they don't want to do. God still wanted to give a message to the Israelites of how they were about to suffer for disobedience. Why? To prove Jeremiah was a true prophet. It's also to show how they'll suffer as they refused to listen to God.

- b) Time to get all "Egyptian" on you. I mentioned earlier there was a war between Libya and Egypt shortly after that. Historically what happened, is while Egypt was weak militarily, the Babylonians came and wiped out Egypt "once and for all". Obviously Egypt still exists today as an entity. At that time they were subject to the Babylonian Empire.
  - i) What was custom in the Middle East back then was when a place was conquered, the statues to the local gods were taken away captive into the victor's trophy case so to speak. It was to show that "our god is better than your god". In this case the Babylonians took the Egyptian god statues back to Babylon.
  - ii) Anyway, Jeremiah buried some stones in the ground to show where the emperor of Babylon will lay his path as the ruler over Egypt. For what it's worth, the place where the Israelites were is not the government headquarters. It was a major city. Jeremiah could get into Pharaoh's palace in that city without being arrested, so the stones were probably buried a short distance away. The point is the spot where the stones were laid is where Nebuchadnezzar will "set up shop" to wipe out Egypt as he takes away prisoners and breaks things!
- c) It's sort of amazing to think about this historically. For millenniums, Egypt ruled over the Middle East. Their style was to go conquer, take things and then return to Egypt. They're a force that had to be dealt with again for millenniums. Yet, God in a sense allowed them to fall apart around this time. They effectively became part of the Babylonian Empire, and then the Persian one, then the Greek, then the Romans. There was always an Egypt during all of that but essentially they didn't rule over their own people until long after the Roman Empire fell apart. Back in Jeremiah's day they were considered a force to be reckoned with so the Israelites thought fleeing there would be their safety net. Since God is in control of things essentially he said to Egypt, "Nice run guys, but times up!" Jeremiah correctly told of the fall of Egypt after all of those millenniums in these verses. It is an amazing thing to predict given their history. However, God revealed that aspect of history to Jeremiah so it was told as it did occur in the future. If you want the gory details, reread the verses! Time to move on.

15. Chapter 44, Verse 1: This word came to Jeremiah concerning all the Jews living in Lower Egypt--in Migdol, Tahpanhes and Memphis--and in Upper Egypt: <sup>2</sup> "This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: You saw the great disaster I brought on Jerusalem and on all the towns of Judah. Today they lie deserted and in ruins <sup>3</sup> because of the evil they have done. They provoked me to anger by burning incense and by worshiping other gods that neither they nor you nor your fathers ever knew. <sup>4</sup> Again and again I sent my servants the prophets, who said, 'Do not do this detestable thing that I hate!' <sup>5</sup> But they did not listen or pay attention; they did not turn from their wickedness or stop burning incense to other gods. <sup>6</sup> Therefore, my fierce anger was poured out; it raged against the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem and made them the desolate ruins they are today.
- a) Notice the message isn't just to the Jewish people who took Jeremiah captive along with a number of other Jewish people still there. This message is to all the Jewish people through the Egyptian territory. For those who don't know "Upper Egypt" is the southern part and what we consider parts of Ethiopia today. It's upper due to it's heights, as the water that feeds the Nile comes from this area, and flows north into the Mediterranean.
  - b) So why pick on all the Jewish people all over Egypt? It comes back to what God called the Israelites to be, a witness for Him in His land. I stated earlier in this lesson one verse that Moses gave stating in effect the Israelites are not to return to Egypt. (Deuteronomy 17:16). The point is God's laws were still in effect and the fact that many Israelites are now living in Egypt isn't exactly what God desired. Therefore, through Jeremiah's preaching word is about to get out all over the various Jewish communities there that "in effect all of you are backsliding, God's aware of it, and Egypt is about to be judged horribly in effect for all of the Jewish people who shouldn't be there right now.

- c) This leads to a number of questions: Why should the Egyptians suffer if the Israelites are the one's who messed up? The answer is God wanted Nebuchadnezzar to rule over all of the Middle East. If you study the book of Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar made proclamations he posted all over his territory honoring the Israelite God as "God of gods". My point is God is not above letting people suffer for the greater purpose of leading more to Him. If there is no eternity, it would not be fair. If there is an eternity, we must remember it's His world and He decides how long each of us will live here whether we like it or not!
- i) The other question is what about the Israelites who were already there? They were violating God's direct commandment not to return to Egypt. So much for them!
  - ii) So is it wrong for Jewish people to live in Egypt today, or say in the United States? Of course not. Since the Romans destroyed Israel and they were forced to scatter, God calls on His people to be a witness for Him wherever they are. Yes, Jesus will return one day to rule the world from Israel and at that time He'll demand a return of His people there. In the meantime, they're to be a witness where they are.
  - iii) As I mentioned earlier, there is a Jewish community on an island on the Nile that's been there (if memory is correct) since the 5<sup>th</sup> Century AD. Again, the Israelites are now scattered and since Jesus isn't ruling in Israel yet, I don't have a problem with them living in Egypt, assuming the Egyptian government allows it as well.
- d) Enough of that, back to the verses. Meanwhile Jeremiah is starting to "lay it on thick" as to why God's ticked off. The main crime is the Israelites have turned to other gods. To use a fairly recent illustration, Jeremiah's now preaching about the recent destruction of the fall of Jerusalem and that kingdom as an example of "This will also happen to you, unless you turn back to Me!"
- i) That of course leads me to the issue of "backsliding". In effect, God's saying to the Israelites, "You should know better. You've turned from what you knew was how I (God) desire you to live." Unless you acknowledge your mistakes and turn from it, you're about to suffer the same way that they did!
  - ii) Let me ask that question from the perspective of those of us who are not suffering that way, but know people who were raised with Christianity but turned from it. What do we do? For starters, pray for their salvation. Only God can open up their hearts to Him. Yes we're to be good witness to them by our lifestyles and by what we say. God may use us or not use us to lead people back to Him. That's why it'll be up to Him whether or not such people return. However, that doesn't mean we should not try to be a witness to them, as Jeremiah is doing here!
  - iii) Anyway the last few verses were gruesome and it's about to get worse.
16. Verse 7: "Now this is what the LORD God Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Why bring such great disaster on yourselves by cutting off from Judah the men and women, the children and infants, and so leave yourselves without a remnant? <sup>8</sup> Why provoke me to anger with what your hands have made, burning incense to other gods in Egypt, where you have come to live? You will destroy yourselves and make yourselves an object of cursing and reproach among all the nations on earth. <sup>9</sup> Have you forgotten the wickedness committed by your fathers and by the kings and queens of Judah and the wickedness committed by you and your wives in the land of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem? <sup>10</sup> To this day they have not humbled themselves or shown reverence, nor have they followed my law and the decrees I set before you and your fathers.
- a) Stop and consider what God desired of the Israelites back then. First He desired that all of them live as a witness for Him. He desired that they didn't turn to other gods. When the habit of worshipping other gods was beyond fixing, God decided to have the Babylonians destroy that place to cure the Israelites of their love of idols. Even after all of that is done, God still wanted to have some Israelites living in that land as a witness for Him. The fact that the one's who were left decided to "make a run for Egypt" isn't what God desired as a witness for Him, so now it's time to dish out more punishment.



- b) The sum of Jeremiah's argument is in effect, "Whose fault is it anyway? You knew what I required of you. You've turned from me and now you'll be wondering why you'll have to suffer so much." That's why Jeremiah uses recent history as an example. It's as if he wants to say in effect, "What makes you think you're exempt from punishment just because you are not in the land of Israel at the moment?"
  - i) So why doesn't God punish us when we backslide? In effect he does. I always did like the quote of a famous late pastor in my area who said, "Sometimes God makes the adulterer suffer by making them live with the person they had an affair with!" The underlying point is if we really have a heart for God, we'll be miserable when or if we turn from Him. In effect that's the real test of the backslider. If they know in their hearts what's the right thing to do, they'll be miserable turning from God.
  - ii) I hate to stop when I'm a roll, but Jeremiah is on a bigger role. The other key point to notice is he says in effect the Jewish people living in Egypt will be an object that people will curse at! In other words it'll be obvious to everyone around you of the fact that the Israelite God is singling you out for punishment.
  - iii) Now that I made that point, back to Jeremiah:
- 17. Verse 11: "Therefore, this is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: I am determined to bring disaster on you and to destroy all Judah. <sup>12</sup> I will take away the remnant of Judah who were determined to go to Egypt to settle there. They will all perish in Egypt; they will fall by the sword or die from famine. From the least to the greatest, they will die by sword or famine. They will become an object of cursing and horror, of condemnation and reproach. <sup>13</sup> I will punish those who live in Egypt with the sword, famine and plague, as I punished Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup> None of the remnant of Judah who have gone to live in Egypt will escape or survive to return to the land of Judah, to which they long to return and live; none will return except a few fugitives."
  - a) The first thing that popped in my head here is Jeremiah had to be thinking, "does all this include me as well?" God is saying effect, since you (Israelites) were determined to go to Egypt after I warned you not to and it was forbidden in the laws of Moses, do you think you'll be exempt from the punishment I already dished out on the land of Israel? Do you think you can escape judgment just because you ran away from the land of Israel?
    - i) Anyway, Jeremiah had to be thinking, well if I didn't die so far from the Israelites who tried to kill me, if I didn't die from the Babylonian invasion, I'm pushing my luck here by being in Egypt when God says "No Jewish people will survive this!"
    - ii) I'll just say that since there are eight more chapters to go in Jeremiah plus he wrote the book of Lamentations; this isn't it for Jeremiah himself. As to the Israelites who are in Egypt at that time, let's just say God's just tied them to the whipping post!
  - b) Now notice how the punishment will come. Through "sword, famine and plague". If that sounds familiar, it's because Jeremiah predicted the exact same method of death for those in Jerusalem once the Babylonians surrounded the city. As I stated the Egyptians fought a war with Libya and then the Babylonians wiped them out. I'm sure Israelites in Egypt did suffer exactly as Jeremiah predicted.
    - i) So let me ask the question some of you might be thinking. How do we know that Jeremiah didn't write all of this "after the fact"? For starters he was accepted as a prophet by the Israelites there, let alone Ezekiel and Daniel in Babylon. Even if all that doesn't convince you the accuracy of the seventy-year prediction is still one of the most amazing things in the bible to grasp. Jeremiah was definitely alive when all of this took place and couldn't have been alive 70 years later. His book that he put together near the end of his life was accepted immediately as being the word of God because of it's accurate predictions. It was studied among the Israelites as they were in captivity in Babylon and obviously long after that.
  - c) Meanwhile I left Jeremiah busy cursing out the Israelites who were in Egypt. I don't know how word got around Egypt about this, but if God wanted it spread, it got spread!

- d) Finally the text mentions a few fugitives who'll survive. Why is that? So someone could tell the tale of what happened. It validates God's word as well, "God's word". Does that refer to Jeremiah's survival? There is Jewish speculation on how Jeremiah died, but it is not stated anywhere in the book itself. Jewish tradition is his fellow Israelites stoned him to death in Egypt, but again, it's speculation as to when, where and how.
- e) Anyway, this is all bad news. We're only half way through Chapter 44, so let's keep going.
18. Verse 15: Then all the men who knew that their wives were burning incense to other gods, along with all the women who were present--a large assembly--and all the people living in Lower and Upper Egypt, said to Jeremiah, <sup>16</sup> "We will not listen to the message you have spoken to us in the name of the LORD! <sup>17</sup> We will certainly do everything we said we would: We will burn incense to the Queen of Heaven and will pour out drink offerings to her just as we and our fathers, our kings and our officials did in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem. At that time we had plenty of food and were well off and suffered no harm. <sup>18</sup> But ever since we stopped burning incense to the Queen of Heaven and pouring out drink offerings to her, we have had nothing and have been perishing by sword and famine."
- a) Here we get into the specifics of the charges against the Israelites. Much of the rest of this chapter will focus on a famous female deity called "The Queen of Heaven". She's known also as "Inanna, Anat, Isis, Astarte, and possibly Asherah" (Wikipedia). By the time of the Roman Empire, "she" was still around. She was known as "Hera" and "Juno" in that era.
- i) Ok so what? She was considered the female goddess of fertility for a long time. In a few Christian churches she was associated with "Mary worship! All I'm saying is female deities have been a part of history for a long time and became an issue that the Roman Catholic church has to deal with. Anyway, back in Jeremiah's day she was a deity that Jewish women made cakes with her image on, to honor her!
- b) Remember earlier I pondered how did Jeremiah's words get heard all over Egypt? It's still a mystery. We know he accomplished that mission because here in these verses, we've got a contingency from "lower and upper Egypt" to tell Jeremiah in effect, "No way Jose". The specifics are that they don't care what Jeremiah preaches. They're still going to continue to continue to do what they're used to doing, honoring this female deity.
- i) If nothing else, it shows again that old habits die hard, especially if we're thinking that those rituals make a difference. The contingency pointed out that when they were active doing this ritual "everything was ok", and when they stopped doing it, the blessings stopped. Obviously God allowed that to test them. I've always said, it's easy to be a Christian when times are good. It's when things get rough when it is our faith on the line.
- ii) Notice the text says they've been suffering to the "sword and famine". Of course it is what Jeremiah predicted. So instead of turning to God they want to "kill the one who brought the bad news". They wanted to continue things just as they were and not "rock the boat" as Jeremiah proposed. For what it's worth I've heard stories of a few people who wanted to "kill the messenger" versus do the right things. It is just another example of people who are caught up in their backsliding and don't want to "rock the boat" as things were fine before people preached God to them!
- iii) The other thing to notice is this isn't a new thing! They were doing this back when they lived in Israel and continued that practice when they moved to Egypt. I have to admit this is a great illustration of how we're accountable to God based on what we know or should know about Him. Here were Israelites who were raised on the teachings of the books of the bible "to date". They knew going to Egypt was wrong or at the least knew worshipping other deities were forbidden, but they stuck to it, as they thought, "this stuff we're doing is working".
- iv) Now that things are going wrong, they don't look to God for help, but blame Him for how life is turning out at the moment.

- c) Bottom line is Jeremiah is getting rejected hard. The backsliding is bad and no one wants to really repent of their sins despite the fact God made it clear what's going on and why it is happening at this moment. Yes these chapters are a tragedy. In fact most of Jeremiah is a tragedy to read, but it's still a necessary book to teach us the danger of turning from God with our lives. We're almost through with the three chapters and over 80% done with the book, so let's keep plowing since we've gone this far.
19. Verse 19: The women added, "When we burned incense to the Queen of Heaven and poured out drink offerings to her, did not our husbands know that we were making cakes like her image and pouring out drink offerings to her?"
- a) The Jewish women understand the fact that they were still in subordination to the men in their lives. They wanted to make the point that their husbands knew what they did. Their husbands didn't make any to stop them, so effectively they were trying to pass the buck to the men in their lives, as they know the "pecking order" in that society.
- b) Bottom line is the women did this and their husbands knew about it. What is missing is a sense of guilt. It's more like they did, they miss doing it and regretted stop doing it. All of it shows how far people go when they willfully turn their backs on God.
- c) Anyway, it's time for Jeremiah heard all of this and it's time for him to fight back:
20. Verse 20: Then Jeremiah said to all the people, both men and women, who were answering him, <sup>21</sup> "Did not the LORD remember and think about the incense burned in the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem by you and your fathers, your kings and your officials and the people of the land? <sup>22</sup> When the LORD could no longer endure your wicked actions and the detestable things you did, your land became an object of cursing and a desolate waste without inhabitants, as it is today. <sup>23</sup> Because you have burned incense and have sinned against the LORD and have not obeyed him or followed his law or his decrees or his stipulations, this disaster has come upon you, as you now see."
- a) Jeremiah is saying, "Hey everyone, don't you think God's aware of all those offerings you made to false gods back before the Babylonians destroyed that place? Why do you want to keep doing that here when our nation was destroyed for turning from Him back then? Haven't you all learned anything yet? You are blaming the fact you stopped the offerings to the "Queen of Heaven". The truth is you're suffering because you've turned your backs on the God who set you apart from the world around you to be a witness to Him?"
- b) The shorter version: "You've backslid badly, can't you see that?!"
21. Verse 24: Then Jeremiah said to all the people, including the women, "Hear the word of the LORD, all you people of Judah in Egypt. <sup>25</sup> This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: You and your wives have shown by your actions what you promised when you said, 'We will certainly carry out the vows we made to burn incense and pour out drink offerings to the Queen of Heaven.'
- a) My loose translation: Don't blame God for what happens to you. You've brought all this on yourself by your actions. You continue to worship what you knew you weren't called to worship and now you're paying the price.
- b) As you can tell, Jeremiah's pouring it on thick as he finishes this section. To continue:
22. Verse 25 (cont): "Go ahead then, do what you promised! Keep your vows! <sup>26</sup> But hear the word of the LORD, all Jews living in Egypt: 'I swear by my great name,' says the LORD, 'that no one from Judah living anywhere in Egypt will ever again invoke my name or swear, "As surely as the Sovereign LORD lives." <sup>27</sup> For I am watching over them for harm, not for good; the Jews in Egypt will perish by sword and famine until they are all destroyed. <sup>28</sup> Those who escape the sword and return to the land of Judah from Egypt will be very few. Then the whole remnant of Judah who came to live in Egypt will know whose word will stand--mine or theirs.
- a) This is Jeremiah asking, "You want to stand up to God? You're arms aren't long enough to box with Him so to speak! God's going to make an example out of you to prove what He says goes and to teach future generations the true cost of turning against God."

- b) The more literal promise is that because all these Israelites refuse to repent, God's going to punish them hard as He announced he did earlier in the chapter to Jeremiah. God's saying in effect, "You want to see who's really in power, Me or the "Queen of Heaven", watch and see for yourselves." Yes it was a threat and it's coming down hard.
  - c) OK John this is horrid. Remember you're speaking to a bunch of devout Christians that at the moment are not backsliding in anyway. Yes we know it's always a danger and we all know people this could apply to. Why write this to us? First so we know that when we do mess up, we can repent as we still consider Jesus the Lord of our lives. It's also to show us the true cost of backsliding. Let's be honest if God's this tough on His chosen people back then, what makes us think He'd be any less tough on us. Yes it's a lecture to stick to what God called us to do. Not that we have to work hard to earn our salvation. But, if we fail to be a witness for Him we will suffer and that's the underlying point of this story.
  - d) With that said, I notice there are still two verses left to go:
23. Verse 29: " `This will be the sign to you that I will punish you in this place,' declares the LORD, `so that you will know that my threats of harm against you will surely stand.' <sup>30</sup> This is what the LORD says: `I am going to hand Pharaoh Hophra king of Egypt over to his enemies who seek his life, just as I handed Zedekiah king of Judah over to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, the enemy who was seeking his life.' "
- a) Jeremiah ends this whole section with a "let me give you a prediction you can watch play out"". He promises that just as the last king in Israel was given over to Nebuchadnezzar, so the leader of Egypt will be given over to his enemies. Notice the text doesn't say he'll be given over to the Babylonians. For the record he died fighting what we call Libya. The point being that the people who oppose God will lose in the end. That's been the case all through history as it is today.
  - b) OK John, you're preaching to the choir again. We all get the danger of backsliding as you have pounded it in our heads for this whole long lesson. So what's the secret of staying on God's good side? So glad you asked. The answer is prayer for His guidance and wisdom to make the best decisions we can as we use our lives for His glory. That idea is in effect my closing prayer so I'll use that and not repeat it. So as we ask for His wisdom to guide our lives, we'll close by saying, in Jesus name, Amen.