

Jeremiah 42:12-20 + 43:12

This Haftarah points again to the dangers of depending on Egypt/ the flesh/ the world.

In the turmoil after the destruction of Jerusalem, bands of Israelites waged a short guerrilla war against the Babylonians.

Jeremiah and the other prophets had said that God was using Babylon to punish Israel, so opposition was rebellion against God, (although it would appear to be patriotism). The holdouts, led by a leader named Ishmael, one of the royal family, managed to kill the governor that Babylon had left to rule there. Jeremiah was taken captive, but later was freed.

Finally (**Jeremiah 42:1-6**) all the holdouts came to Jeremiah to ask what they should do. They were “intending to go to Egypt because of the Chaldeans” (Jeremiah 31:16-18) but did not tell Jeremiah their plan.

They already knew that going to Egypt was not a valid option.

Isaiah 31:1 - “Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help And rely on horses, And trust in chariots because they are many And in horsemen because they are very strong, But they do not look to the Holy One of Israel, nor seek the LORD!”

God answers them first with a word of hope:

Jeremiah 42:11 - “Be not afraid of the king of Babylon, of whom ye are afraid; be not afraid of him, saith the LORD: for I am with you to save you, and to deliver you from his hand.”

But if they decide to flee to Egypt....

Jeremiah 42:16 - “Then it shall come to pass, that the sword, which ye feared, shall overtake you there in the land of Egypt, and the famine, whereof ye were afraid, shall follow close after you there in Egypt; and there ye shall die.”

The rest of the passage is an expansion on this.

Finally, God says he sees through their deceit:

Jeremiah 42:20 - “For ye dissembled in your hearts, when ye sent me unto the LORD your God, saying, Pray for us unto the LORD our God; and according unto all that the LORD our God shall say, so declare unto us, and we will do it.”

They reject Jeremiah’s prophecy, and take Jeremiah as well as any remaining Jews, including the “royal daughters” and flee to Egyptian city of Tahpanhes.

Tahpanhes was a major city on the coastal caravan route from Egypt to Palestine. Probably this was the route Joseph was taken on by the slave traders into Egypt, and the route his brothers travelled during the famine.

God tells Jeremiah to take stones and hide them in the “kiln” (really the plaza lined with paving stones) of the city.

Jeremiah 43:10 - “And say unto them, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will send and take Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and will set his throne upon these stones that I have hid; and he shall spread his royal pavilion over them.”

Ezekiel also predicts this in **Ezekiel 29:19**.

No hard evidence of Babylon’s invasion of Egypt was known until 1878, when excavations uncovered fragments of Nebuchadnezzar's annals, in which he affirms his invasion of Egypt in his 37th year (568-567 B.C.) This was probably because Egypt had given shelter to the royal daughters of King Zedekiah.

Josephus explicitly mentions that Nebuchadnezzar, when he captured Tahpanhes, carried off a Jewish contingent from that city (Ant., IX, vii).

The final verse in the Haftarah simply puts an emphasis on all this:

Jeremiah 43:12 - “And I will kindle a fire in the houses of the gods of Egypt; and he shall burn them, and carry them away captives: and he shall array himself with the land of Egypt, as a shepherd putteth on his garment; and he shall go forth from thence in peace.”

Side Issue: Did Jeremiah talk with Thales?

The city was a trading center with a permanent Greek settlement, and housed a garrison of Greek mercenaries for a about a century. Interestingly, Tahpanhes was one of few places where the Greeks, Egyptians and Hebrews could met freely during this century.

The philosopher Thales probably resided in Egypt - possibly Tahpanhes - around this time, studying - according to tradition - with an Egyptian priest learning astronomy, land surveying, geometry, engineering and the Egyptian “mysteries.” Could Thales have heard of Jeremiah’s monotheistic ideas and skeptical view of idols? Thales was the first Greek thinker to break from mythology - i.e. attributing natural phenomenon to the gods - to explain the world and the universe by theories and hypotheses instead.

Eudemus, who was one of Aristotle's students, believed that Thales had travelled to Egypt (Eudemus ap. Proclus, 65.7). A number of ancient sources support that opinion, including Pamphila who held that he spent time with the Egyptian priests (D.L. I.24),

Hieronymus from whose report we learn that Thales measured the height of the pyramids by the shadow they cast (D.L. I.27), and Plutarch (De Is. et Os. 131). Thales gave an explanation for the inundation of the Nile (D.L. I.37). He may have devised this explanation after witnessing the phenomena, which Herodotus later described (Hdt. II. 97).

Josephus (Contra Apionem I.2) wrote that Thales was a disciple of the Egyptians and the Chaldeans, which suggests that he also visited the Near-East.

Plato in the Timaeus says that Greek aspirants to wisdom visited Egypt for initiation, and that the priests of Sais (near Tahpanhes) used to refer to them as children in the Mysteries.