This morning I want to read chapters 42 to 44---not a short reading, but it all belongs together---and then we're going to study it. Going to begin reading in chapter 41, verse 16, just to pick up the story from last week for those of you who were not here. Verse 16 of chapter 41.

*Then Johanan the son of Kareah and all the leaders of the forces with him took all the rest of the people whom Ishmael the son of Nethaniah had carried away captive from Mizpah after he had slain Gedaliah the son of Ahikam—soldiers, women, children, and eunuchs, whom Johanan brought back from Gibeon. And they went and stayed at Geruth Chimham near Bethlehem, intending to go to Egypt because of the Chaldeans; for they were afraid of them, because Ishmael the son of Nethaniah had slain Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, whom the king of Babylon had made governor over the land.*

*Then all the commanders of the forces, and Johanan the son of Kareah and Azariah the son of Hoshaiah, and all the people from the least to the greatest, came near and said to Jeremiah the prophet, “Let our supplication come before you, and pray to the Lord your God for us, for all this remnant (for we are left but a few of many, as your eyes see us), that the Lord your God may show us the way we should go, and the thing that we should do.” Jeremiah the prophet said to them, “I have heard you; behold, I will pray to the Lord your God according to your request, and whatever the Lord answers you I will tell you; I will keep nothing back from you.” Then they said to Jeremiah,* ***“May the Lord be a true and faithful witness against us if we do not act according to all the word with which the Lord your God sends you to us. Whether it is good or evil, we will obey the voice of the Lord our God to whom we are sending you, that it may be well with us when we obey the voice of the Lord our God.”***

*At the end of ten days the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah. Then he summoned Johanan the son of Kareah and all the commanders of the forces who were with him, and all the people from the least to the greatest, and said to them, “Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, to whom you sent me to present your supplication before him:****If you will remain in this land, then I will build you up and not pull you down; I will plant you, and not pluck you up;*** *for I repent of the evil which I did to you. Do not fear the king of Babylon, of whom you are afraid; do not fear him, says the Lord, for I am with you, to save you and to deliver you from his hand. I will grant you mercy, that he may have mercy on you and let you remain in your own land. But if you say, ‘We will not remain in this land,’ disobeying the voice of the Lord your God and saying, ‘No, we will go to the land of Egypt, where we shall not see war, or hear the sound of the trumpet, or be hungry for bread, and we will dwell there,’ then hear the word of the Lord, O remnant of Judah. Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel:* ***If you set your faces to enter Egypt and go to live there, then the sword which you fear shall overtake you there in the land of Egypt; and the famine of which you are afraid shall follow hard after you to Egypt; and there you shall die.****All the men who set their faces to go to Egypt to live there shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence; they shall have no remnant or survivor from the evil which I will bring upon them.*

*“For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: As my anger and my wrath were poured out on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so my wrath will be poured out on you when you go to Egypt. You shall become an execration, a horror, a curse, and a taunt. You shall see this place no more. The Lord has said to you, O remnant of Judah, ‘Do not go to Egypt.’ Know for a certainty that I have warned you this day that you have gone astray at the cost of your lives. For you sent me to the Lord your God, saying, ‘Pray for us to the Lord our God, and whatever the Lord our God says declare to us and we will do it.’ And I have this day declared it to you,* ***but you have not obeyed the voice of the Lord your God in anything that he sent me to tell you. Now therefore know for a certainty that you shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence in the place where you desire to go to live.”***

*When Jeremiah finished speaking to all the people all these words of the Lord their God, with which the Lord their God had sent him to them, Azariah the son of Hoshaiah and Johanan the son of Kareah and all the insolent men said to Jeremiah, “You are telling a lie. The Lord our God did not send you to say, ‘Do not go to Egypt to live there’; but Baruch the son of Neriah has set you against us, to deliver us into the hand of the Chaldeans, that they may kill us or take us into exile in Babylon.”****So, Johanan the son of Kareah and all the commanders of the forces and all the people did not obey the voice of the Lord, to remain in the land of Judah.****But Johanan the son of Kareah and all the commanders of the forces took all the remnant of Judah who had returned to live in the land of Judah from all the nations to which they had been driven— the men, the women, the children, the princesses, and every person whom Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard had left with Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, son of Shaphan; also Jeremiah the prophet and Baruch the son of Neriah. And they came into the land of Egypt, for they did not obey the voice of the Lord. And they arrived at Tahpanhes.*

*Then the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah in Tahpanhes:****“Take in your hands large stones, and hide them in the mortar in the pavement which is at the entrance to Pharaoh’s palace in Tahpanhes, in the sight of the men of Judah, and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Behold, I will send and take Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and he will set his throne above these stones which I have hid, and he will spread his royal canopy over them.****He shall come and smite the land of Egypt, giving to the pestilence those who are doomed to the pestilence, to captivity those who are doomed to captivity, and to the sword those who are doomed to the sword. He shall kindle a fire in the temples of the gods of Egypt; and he shall burn them and carry them away captive; and he shall clean the land of Egypt, as a shepherd cleans his cloak of vermin; and he shall go away from there in peace. He shall break the obelisks of Heliopolis which is in the land of Egypt; and the temples of the gods of Egypt he shall burn with fire.’”*

*The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the Jews that dwelt in the land of Egypt, at Migdol, at Tahpanhes, at Memphis, and in the land of Pathros, “Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: You have seen all the evil 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, because of the wickedness which they committed, provoking me to anger, in that they went to burn incense and serve other gods that they knew not, neither they, nor you, nor your fathers. Yet I persistently sent to you all my servants the prophets, saying, ‘Oh, do not do this abominable thing that I hate!’ But they did not listen or incline their ear, to turn from their wickedness and burn no incense to other gods. Therefore, my wrath and my anger were poured forth 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 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?****Why do you provoke me to anger with the works of your hands, burning incense to other gods in the land of Egypt where you have come to live, that you may be cut off and become a curse and a taunt among all the nations of the earth?****Have you forgotten the wickedness of your fathers, the wickedness of the kings of Judah, the wickedness of their wives, your own wickedness, and the wickedness of your wives, which they committed in the land of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? They have not humbled themselves even to this day, nor have they feared, nor walked in my law and my statutes which I set before you and before your fathers.*

*“Therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel:* ***Behold, I will set my face against you for evil, to cut off all Judah. 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 execration, a horror, a curse, and a taunt****. I will punish those who dwell in the land of Egypt, as I have punished Jerusalem, with the sword, with famine, and with pestilence, 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.”*

*Then all the men who knew that their wives had offered incense to other gods, and all the women who stood by, a great assembly, all the people who dwelt in Pathros in the land of Egypt, answered Jeremiah: “As for the word which you have spoken to us in the name of the Lord,* ***we will not listen to you****. But we will do everything that we have vowed, burn incense to the queen of heaven and pour out libations to her, as we did, both we and our fathers, our kings and our princes, in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem; for then we had plenty of food, and prospered, and saw no evil. But since we left off burning incense to the queen of heaven and pouring out libations to her, we have lacked everything and have been consumed by the sword and by famine.” And the women said, “When we burned incense to the queen of heaven and poured out libations to her, was it without our husbands’ approval that we made cakes for her bearing her image and poured out libations to her?”*

*Then Jeremiah said to all the people, men, and women, all the people who had given him this answer: “As for the incense that you burned in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem, you and your fathers, your kings and your princes, and the people of the land, did not the Lord remember it? Did it not come into his mind? The Lord could no longer bear your evil doings and the abominations which you committed; therefore, your land has become a desolation and a waste and a curse, without inhabitant, as it is this day.****It is because you burned incense, 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 evil has befallen you, as at this day.”***

*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, 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 burn incense to the queen of heaven and to pour out libations to her.’ Then confirm your vows and perform your vows! 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.’ Behold, I am watching over them for evil 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. 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.****This shall be the sign to you****, says 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 evil: 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 Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon, who was his enemy and sought his life.”***

***A Solemn Message***

It's a very ***SOLEMN*** passage. We'll look at it in a moment. As we begin to read, the situation could hardly have got worse. A once proud nation, a once proud empire, has dwindled and crumbled to a handful of people who are seriously considering abandoning their land and becoming refugees. ***SUCH IS THE NATION THAT LOSES GOD***. And after 900 years of independence, of prosperity, of a land they could call their own, a handful of people have gathered in ***FEAR*** near Bethlehem. They have moved from Mizpah after the assassination of Gedaliah, the appointed governor by Babylon. They've moved south of Jerusalem to Bethlehem on the road to Egypt. And there, they're considering ... "*Should we run?"*

Now, one of the reasons they were afraid of reprisal from Babylon was that they'd been unable to apprehend the assassin Ishmael. And they ***FEARED*** that Nebuchadnezzar would come and say, *"So you assassinated my governor and you let the murder go free? Then I will come and kill the lot of you. You're not to be trusted."* That's what they were ***AFRAID*** of, and human instinct wanted to ***RUN***. When you are afraid of men, then your instincts take over and you ***PANIC***. And you generally think of doing the ***WRONG*** thing.

Away up in the Shetland Islands, there was a village where there were many more women than men, and nearly all the women dressed in black from head to foot. And I once asked "Why, what lay behind this strange thing?" And I was told that one night, 13 ships set out from that village to fish for herring. And a storm came of tremendous ferocity. And 12 ships were lost from one village... most of the men of the village. One ship got back. And do you know why one ship was saved? Because 12 ships ran from the storm, and one ship turned and ***FACED*** it. And it came through it and got back home.

***INSTINCT*** says, "***RUN***... panic when you're in a situation of threat and danger. Get out of it... get away from it." But as we shall see, ***GOD*** says, *"****STAY RIGHT WHERE YOU ARE****. I'm with you. What more could you ask? You're safe where I am, and I'm staying."*

Well now, it's an extraordinary thing for this little motley crew---this little surviving remnant of the once proud nation---to consider going to Egypt. ***FIRST***, they would have to go ***DOWN*** to Egypt. Have you noticed that little word *'down'* whenever Egypt is referred to? *"Let's go* ***DOWN*** *to Egypt."* Egypt is ***DOWN***. Living up in the Judean Hills you can see that the road to Egypt goes ***DOWNHILL***, and you go ***DOWN*** from healthy hills to a disease-ridden swamp. There may be food there, but there's disease there as well. And when God had brought them out of Egypt, he brought them into a ***'HOLY'*** land. And the word ***'HOLY'*** means ***'HEALTHY'***. He brought them into a ***HEALTHY*** land, and he promised them that none of the diseases of Egypt would follow them up the hills. And so, they were going to go ***DOWN*** from health to disease. They were going to go ***DOWN*** from cool fresh mountain air into that swampy, sultry swamp of the Nile delta.

Not only were they going to go ***DOWN*** to Egypt, but to go to Egypt was to go ***BACK*** to Egypt. 900 years previously God had got them out of that place, and now they're considering going ***BACK*** to it. It is incredible that human nature can behave as if the whole history of redemption has never occurred and can go ***BACK*** to where they started from... As indeed, this British empire of ours is almost ***BACK*** to where it started: a group of unknown offshore islands. And history comes full cycle; and nations, as well as individuals can finish up right ***BACK*** where they started, as if nothing had happened in between.

And to go to Egypt was not only to go ***DOWN*** but to go ***BACK*** and to undo all that God had done for them in 900 years. Think of the trouble God had taken to get them out. Think of the 40 years struggle he had to get them to ***KEEP*** coming out. And then think of all that God had done to get them into their own land. And now they said, *"Let's go* ***BACK*** *to Egypt. There's peace there and there's plenty there."* The ***CHOICE*** was utterly simple, and it is a ***CHOICE*** that may well face us today. It is the ***CHOICE*** between ***SECURITY*** and ***SPIRITUALITY***. It's the ***CHOICE*** between ***MATERIAL*** ***PROSPERITY*** and ***MORAL PURITY***. And alas, we often make the ***WRONG*** choice. On what grounds did you ***CHOOSE*** the house where you live at the moment? Ask yourself that question absolutely, honestly before the Lord. On what grounds did you ***CHOOSE***: because that's where the Lord was---because that's where HE wanted you to be, or was it for ***OTHER*** reasons? And I think if many of us are absolutely honest, we would say it was for ***OTHER*** reasons we ***CHOSE*** to go and live where we did. And we may not be living in the house God intended us to live in. Maybe as the result of this morning's service you'll go away and honestly ask the Lord, "Where do you want me to be living?" And you may find yourself moving house as a result of coming to this church this morning.

***The Two Main Subjects of This Session***

Now there are ***TWO MAIN SUBJECTS*** this morning. Chapters 42 and 43 describe 1) the stage of ***DISOBEDIENCE***, when God told them what to do, and they ***DISOBEY***. And it isn't long before a person in the state of disobedience moves into 2) a phase two of ***DEFIANCE***, where he not only disobeys God but is, in fact, insularly ***DEFIANT*** of God, because you're fighting against the truth. And so, you not only become ***DISOBEDIENT***, you become ***DEFIANT***. And we shall see how even the ***WOMEN*** became so degraded that they insolently defied the word of the Lord. And when the ***WOMEN*** do that, a nation is ***FINISHED***. It's one thing for ***MEN*** to do it, but when their ***WOMEN*** folk---when their mothers and wives and daughters--- defiantly refuse the word of God, then you can say that nation is ***FINISHED***.

***1) The Disobedience of the Remnant***

Let's look ***FIRST*** at ***DISOBEDIENCE***. They came to Jeremiah, this little remnant at Bethlehem, and they said to Jeremiah, "*Will you pray for us and ask the Lord to show us the way we should go?"* Now that sounds as if they had a change of heart, but I'm afraid it's deceptive. It sounds as if at last they were going to ask ***GOD*** what to do. It sounds as if at last they'd learned their lesson and were actually going to seek the will of ***GOD***. But Jeremiah wasn't fooled, not for one minute. As verse 21 of chapter 42 states, quite clearly Jeremiah says, *"You have not been obedient in one single thing I told you. I can't believe that you're gonna start now."* And so, he made a ***PROMISE*** to them, and they made a ***PROMISE*** to him in return. His ***PROMISE*** to them was, *"Alright, I've heard you. I will pray to the Lord. But I* ***PROMISE*** *you this: I will tell you everything he says, and exactly what he says."* And they said, *"That's fine. And we make a* ***PROMISE*** *in return: whatever he* ***SAYS****, we will* ***DO****."*

You've sung that hymn, haven't you?... "Trust and Obey, for There's no Other Way." We'll sing it later in the service. "Where he sends, I will go... What He says I will do." Are you gonna mean it at the end of the service, if he tells you to move house? Well, they said it; and they said, *"God, bear witness against us if we don't do what you say."* So, Jeremiah went away to pray.

***Praying 'Loaded' Prayers***

Now, in fact, their request was ***LOADED***. And so often, the requests for prayer we bring are ***LOADED***. We have already made up our minds. We are simply asking God to ***RUBBER STAMP OUR PLANS***. And this comes out in ***TWO WAYS*** in this chapter. 1) They said, *"Pray to the Lord for* ***THE WAY WE SHOULD GO****."* Now do you notice the way the prayer is ***LOADED*** in wording? It is not, *"Pray to the Lord as to whether we should* ***GO*** *or* ***REMAIN****,"* but, *"****WHERE*** *we should go."* Have you noticed that? They are not contemplating that the answer might be, *"****STAY*** *where you are."* And I have noticed this both in my own life and other people's. Someone comes and says, "I am seeking guidance as to what I should be doing." And I say, "Well what are you doing now?" "Well, I --- I'm here, but I am unsettled. I am not very happy in my job, so I am seeking guidance." And the way they phrase the question, "Seeking guidance..." shows that they are ***NOT OPEN*** to the possibility that God says, "***STAY*** right where you are in that job, and go on serving me there ---because that's where I am."

I think of one girl who came to me and she said, "I have been converted a few months. I am the only Christian in the office, and I am unhappy. And they're getting at me. And I've had the offer of a job in a Christian firm, where everybody's a Christian." She wasn't the first to make the mistake that that sounded like the 'promised land.' And, so she said, "I am seeking guidance. I am praying that the Lord will tell me whether it is ***THIS JOB*** or not." But you know, the Lord wanted her to ***STAY*** where she was. Alas, she didn't ***STAY***. She moved, and she found out the new place wasn't *'the promised land*.' Working with just Christians isn't necessarily all fun and fellowship. And God had called her in the office where there was ***NO WITNESS***, and God wanted a ***WITNESS*** in that office. And God was wanting to say, "***STAY*** where you are." But she said, "Will you pray that God will show me whether to go to this place or not?" And so, we ***LOAD*** the question.

***Praying With Your Mind Already Made Up***

And 2) ***THE OTHER WAY IT WAS LOADED*** came out later, when Jeremiah gave them the answer. Their minds were ***ALREADY MADE UP***. They were simply seeking God's confirmation of what they had decided to do. More of that in a moment. But Jeremiah wasn't fooled for one bit. But he said, *"I'll go and pray."* And he prayed for 10 days before he got the answer. I found that very comforting. Even great saints like Jeremiah don't always get an immediate telegram back. And it's as if God gives us ***TIME***. The best test of guidance is **TIME**. The devil loves us to rush, because he knows that if we rush into a thing, we don't give the ***TIME*** to discern between satanic ***IMPULSES***, our own ***IMPULSES*** of the flesh, and the ***IMPULSES*** of the Spirit. And therefore, *'sleeping on it'* is jolly good, and *'sleeping on it'* 10 days is even ***BETTER***. And in fact, if you get an ***IMPULSE*** and you think the Lord is telling you to do something, give it the test of ***TIME***.

When I felt called to the ministry, I went to see my minister. I told him, "I want to be a minister. Can you sort of tell me how I set about it?" He said, "Right. Go away for 18 months and come back and see me in 18 months’ time." And I did just that. I came back in 18 months. I said, "Look, I've got to be a minister." He said, "Right. I will help you now." If a thing is of God, TIME increases the sense of call--- until you feel you are going to be disobedient if you don't obey. Whereas impulses of the ***FLESH*** die quite quickly. And impulses of ***SATAN*** vanish fairly quickly, because he goes to another tack. But if ***GOD*** is calling, ***TIME*** is a good ***TEST***.

And so, Jeremiah spent ***TEN DAYS*** getting the answer, and the answer, when it came, was crystal ***CLEAR***. Unfortunately, during those 10 days the people had made up their minds ever ***MORE*** ***FIRMLY***, as to what they were going to do ***ANYWAY***. But they listened to him.

***The Two Choices Facing the Remnant***

And so, we now come to the next section, the prophecy of verses 7 to 22, following the prayer of verses 1 to 6. The message was, *"****STAY*** *where you are, and I will look after you. You are safer with me in* ***JUDAH****, than in* ***EGYPT*** *without me. Haven't you yet learned that all the troubles that came on this place came because I brought them. And I have now* ***REPENTED*** *of all the evil that I've brought. I've changed now my outlook. And from now on there will be no more punishment of people who* ***STAY*** *in this land. I will bring* ***MERCY*** *on you even through Nebuchadnezzar. I brought the* ***PUNISHMENT****. I'll bring the* ***MERCY****. I'm in charge of the situation."* Or to put it in very simple language*, "Do you fear* ***MAN*** *more than you fear* ***ME****?"* That's the question. ***THAT*** will determine where you live. Is it ***HUMAN*** factors or ***DIVINE*** factors that are uppermost in your mind?

And Jeremiah spelled it out ***POSITIVELY*** and ***NEGATIVELY***. 1) ***POSITIVELY***: He said, *"If you will* ***REMAIN*** *in the land, I will* ***PLANT*** *you, not pluck you up. I will* ***BUILD*** *you, not break you down."* And then 2) ***NEGATIVELY***: *"But if you* ***GO****, then I foretell physical and mental* ***SUFFERING*** *on a scale you have never yet seen."* I don't know which is worse, ***PHYSICAL DEATH*** through famine, war, or disease (they're the three greatest killers of mankind), or the ***MENTAL ANGUISH*** of being an *'execration*,' a *'horror*,' a *'taunt*,' a *'joke*.' But he says, *"You will suffer* ***MENTALLY****; you will suffer* ***PHYSICALLY****-- if you* ***GO*** *to Egypt."* That's the ***CHOICE***. *"****STAY*** *where you are and be planted and* ***BUILT UP****. Or* ***GO*** *and* ***SUFFER*** *mentally and physically."* A straight ***CHOICE***. And that was the prophecy and the answer to their prayer.

***Prejudices In Their Minds***

It is now in verses one to seven of chapter 42 that we find the ***PREJUDICE*** in the minds of his hearers. Do you know what prejudice is? It is to *'Pre - Judge*' a question. It is to make your mind up before you've considered all the facts. And they said, "*Jeremiah, you're telling a* ***LIE****! We don't believe you! You never got that from God. Where did you get it from? I'll bet you got it from your secretary. Baruch. We know he is 'pro Babylon'. We know he wants us to stay."* And it's something of the sad, desperate state of their mind that they could ***RATIONALIZE*** the situation to this degree. And they thought, *"Since Jeremiah is getting on for 60, this young man Baruch (a much clearer thinker) ... and he has been persuading the old man to give us this message."* It's a terrible state of affairs! And yet, their mind is so made up that ***THEY ARE NOT OPEN TO REASON***. They are ***NOT OPEN*** to revelation. Their minds are just NOT OPEN. Their minds are ***CLOSED***. And yet, they dare to say, *"Whatever he says, we will do."* And the only way around that one, is to say that ***HE IS NOT SAYING IT.*** And so, they say, *"You are telling a* ***LIE****!"*

And off they ***SET OFF FOR EGYPT***, and they dragged Jeremiah and Baruch with them. Sorry little procession. Can you imagine the feelings of Jeremiah's heart as he trailed ***DOWN*** that desert route; ***DOWN*** from the healthy hills; ***DOWN*** to the steamy delta; to a place called Tahpanhes (which has now been discovered -- about 27 miles southeast...sorry, southwest of Portside). They went to that frontier town on the Nile delta, Jeremiah with a heavy heart. They ***ASKED*** the Lord. He ***TOLD*** them. It's the same old story. They make their own minds up, and just want God to ***RUBBER STAMP*** their plans. I think we're getting the message this morning, are we? We need that message as ***INDIVIDUALS***. We need it as a ***CHURCH***. We need it as a ***NATION***---- Not to ask God's blessing on what ***WE PLAN***, but to say, *"Lord,* ***SHOW US****... not even the* ***WAY*** *we should go, but whether you want us to* ***STAY****, or* ***GO****."* And to be totally ***OPEN*** to the Lord's will.

***Jeremiah Uses An Active Parable***

So, in verses 8 to 13 of chapter 42, Jeremiah makes a ***PREDICTION***--- one of his ***'ACTIVE PARABLES'***. He has done some funny things in his time, to get the truth across. Whenever he is ***DESPERATE***--- whenever the people are so ***HARDHEARTED*** that their minds seem closed---he seems to resort (under God's guidance) to giving them '*one in the* ***EAR***,' rather than *'one in the* ***EYE*'**. And since they are so hard and so tough, he gets up one morning and he goes out into the desert. And they see him staggering back with little boulders, until he has got a ***HEAP OF STONES***. Well, as I said, he has done some funny things. He has smashed pots. He has worn yokes. He has buried his underpants by the Euphrates River. He has done some extraordinary things to get the truth across. But now, he has got these ***BIG BOULDERS***. And he goes, very boldly, to the royal palace (at Tahpanhes).

Now we know that Pharaoh Nephro, the ruler of Egypt whose protection the Jews were seeking, had a ***FRONTIER PALACE AT TAHPANHES***. He didn't live there very often, so it was probably deserted; but it was still bold of Jeremiah. He went and dug up the pavement in front of the palace in the ***VERY COURTYARD*** where the Pharaoh used to sit to be greeted by people at the frontier. And he pulled up some of the ***PAVEMENT STONES***---actually it was made of brick. He pulled up some of the bricks, and then he ***DUG A HOLE***. And he got these boulders and he put them in the hole, and he put soil back on top, and he replaced the bricks. By this time there was quite a crowd around Jeremiah, *"Has the old boy gone a bit? What's he doing? What's the point of that?"* Jeremiah turns around, and with a voice like a whiplash, he says, *"You bury yourselves in Egypt to get away from Nebuchadnezzar. I tell you, Nebuchadnezzar will put his* ***THRONE*** *on this very pavement and spread his canopy over. And you who* ***BURIED YOURSELF IN EGYPT*** *to get away from him, will feel the* ***FULL WEIGHT*** *of Babylonian might* ***HERE****."* What a ***LESSON***. What a ***PARABLE***. Do you know that towards the end of the 19th century, Sir Flinders Petrie (have you heard of him?) the archeologist, found Tahpanhes... it's modern name---let me get it right, if I can find it---is Tel al-Daphana, Tel al-Daphane. A tel---mound---27 miles southwest of Port Saed and Sir Flanders Petrie went there. And ***FIRST*** he found that there was a ***‘PHARAOH'S PALACE'***. And ***SECOND*** he found the ***PAVEMENT***. And ***THIRD***, he found the ***STONES***.

Oh, people may say this book is a book of ***MYTHS*** and ***FAIRY TALES***. They just haven't studied the ***EVIDENCE***. And do you know that in the year 568 BC just 20 years after Jeremiah buried those stones, Nebuchadnezzar sat on that pavement---not facing ***OUTWARDS***, like the Pharaoh did to meet ***VISITORS*** to the frontier, but facing ***INWARDS***, looking at ***EGYPT***, which he conquered. And he went through the length and breadth of Egypt, from north to south, and he looted it. And Jeremiah said, *"He will* ***LOOT*** *Egypt like a shepherd picks lice off his coat."* As easy as that! Vivid picture! Prophets never mince their language. They use very every day metaphors. And he said, *"He'll just go through Egypt picking what he wants, and then he'll depart."* And you know, all that came ***TRUE*** to the ***LETTER***... to the letter. Nebuchadnezzar came and ***SAT*** on that pavement and he ***LOOTED*** the cities of Egypt... and the Jews ***DIED***. Oh, if only they'd listened to the word of the Lord.

***The Remnant in Egypt Chooses to Blaspheme God***

Now I'll move on to chapter 44. I want you to realize that this little ***REMNANT*** that found its way down to Tahpanhes was ***NOT*** the ***FIRST*** bunch of Jews from Judah to go to Egypt. By the way, the word Judah... *'Jew'*... is a shortened form of *'Judah'*. And in fact, it only begins to be used when the nation shrinked to the tribe of Judah. And so, there were ***JEWS*** down in Egypt already. They had gone in the ***EARLIER*** part of the troubles, just as in the 1930s Jews in Germany were planning how to get out---how to transfer their treasures. And do you remember those paintings we had just a few weeks back on display here, and how that Jewish artist copied the masters owned by Jews in Germany to get... smuggle them out to America before the Nazi authorities confiscated their wealth. Yes, Jews have a certain foresight at the ***PRACTICAL*** level in ***MATERIAL*** things. They can look ahead. And a number of Jews had ***ALREADY*** gone down to Egypt. And so, there were not only the last little remnant up at Tahpanhes, but there were scattered some at Memphis, Heliopolis, some right down in the south... or upper Egypt. And so, there were little pockets. Actually, there were ***FOUR COLONIES*** which are mentioned at the beginning of chapter four. ***TAHPANHES*** was the ***LAST*** of the four to be established.

And from time to time all the Jews got together, just as Scots get together for a ***'Burns Nighter***' once a year. So, the Jews got together, but they're very good at ***RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS***. And when they got together, they got together for ***RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS***, as they still do. And Jeremiah was present at the next religious festival. And the Jews from the other three centers further south, came north. And they met up with this latest group of refugees. And they met for a religious festival. There was a big crowd---men, women, children, all there. Great occasion. Every Jew in Egypt present. There was only ***ONE SNAG***. They did not meet to worship the ***KING*** ***OF HEAVEN***. They met to worship the ***QUEEN OF HEAVEN***. Wonder if that means anything to you. Do you know throughout the ancient world you find traces of the worship of ***FEMALE DEITIES*** around the whole Mediterranean coast and through to the Tigris-Euphrates basin. Pagan religion, so often, said God was ***'SHE'***, not ***'HE'***.

I remember being called one Thursday morning on the phone. Granada Television in Manchester said, "Will you come and take part in a recording of a discussion for Sunday evening on the future of Christianity?" I said, "Look, I'm in... I'm in Guildford. When is this recording?" They said, "This afternoon." I said, "That's hopeless. I can't get to Manchester in one day." They said, "We'll fly you up; we'll have a car waiting for you at Manchester Airport." So, I went, got there and found the whole thing was ***HOLLOW***. ***FIRST PERSON*** I was introduced to was John Allegro, who thought that Christianity started with a drug from a mushroom. Do you remember, *'The Sacred Mushroom'*? Best book he ever wrote! No one has taken him SERIOUSLY ever since. And the ***NEXT PERSON*** I was introduced to was the bishop of Kingston Montefiore, who believes that Jesus is homosexual. ***THEN,*** I was introduced to a Buddhist, an atheist. I thought, "What is this discussion of the future of Christianity?"

We got into the studio, and the discussion just went from bad to worse. And the question master---or the ***ANCHOR MAN***---had said, "Now when I want you to come in, I'll look to you and I'll say, 'Now what do you think?' " Well, after about three minutes the discussion left ***CHRISTIANITY***, and was on to ***BUDDIHISM***. Within another two, it was on to ***ATHEISM***. And then, in a very short while, the anchorman said, "Now for the big surprise of the evening. We have with us two real live ***WITCHES***." And on came two women painted up to the nines. And they said, "Well all the discussion is wrong, because God is ***FEMININE***. God is ***'SHE'*** not ***'HE'***." And from then on, I just began to pray that the Lord would ***BLOT ME OUT***.

And you know 40 minutes went by, and then the program closed down and the anchor man looked across at me and he said, "Oh, I forgot to bring you in." Just like that. My family were watching. All they saw of me was that part upwards. I just praise God! It was such utter tripe, and I wouldn't have had a chance to say much, because he was cutting everybody off after half a sentence. As usual, the thing was pure ***SENSATIONALISM***. So, I did accept my airfare back to Guildford; but I didn't accept any fee. The whole thing was just so ***HOLLOW***, and it was supposed to be a discussion about ***CHRISTIANITY***. There was nothing of the kind, whatever.

***The Remnant Worshisp The Queen of Heaven***

Well, Jeremiah turned up for the Jewish festival, and he expected that they'd worship the ***KING OF HEAVEN***. Instead, they worshiped the ***QUEEN OF HEAVEN***. Now in Babylon that was the star, Venus. In Canaan it had been the Goddess Astarte, in Egypt it was another female God. But they all used the same title, ***QUEEN OF HEAVEN***. And you know, ever since this has been a pressure, even on Christianity. I believe that this is the source of the title Queen of Heaven for the Virgin Mary. It was the influence of the Mediterranean world creeping through into even Christian circles. And there are still people who wish that it was a ***FEMALE*** up there instead of a ***MALE***, and especially the women. And I'll tell you why. Because the worship of Venus---or Astarte. or whatever other name she was given---consisted in ***BAKING CAKES***. Now it's something the women felt they could do.

And if you recall a way back in Jeremiah, Jeremiah chapter seven, Jeremiah said, *"Your children go out and collect sticks. Your husbands light the fires, and you bake the cakes to the* ***QUEEN OF HEAVEN****.”* They were a kind of hot *'cross bun'*. Just as at Easter we have buns with a cross on, they had little cakes with an image of the Astarte, or Venus, on them. And he said, "***YOU*** *baked the cakes."* And when he got to Egypt, he thought, *"Surely, surely, surely when they've lost their land and seen Jerusalem desolate and empty... surely they'll have* ***STOPPED*** *this rubbish."* But he found out that the women had kept it on and that the husbands hadn't dared to stop them. May I make a strong plea to the ***WOMEN*** of the congregation? You have untold power in your hands. You can lift men to great heights, and you can drag them to great depths. You can bring out and reinforce in men what is there. You have tremendous power. So often a family owes its very character to a good mother; and when the ***MOTHERS*** go wrong, something serious happens in a nation.

And so, it was the mothers. They said to Jeremiah, *"Well it was with our husband's approval."* But it was the wives that took the initiative, and they worshipped the ***QUEEN OF HEAVEN***. And they baked their cakes, and they offered them to the ***QUEEN OF HEAVEN***. And to his horror, Jeremiah saw this whole Jewish crowd gathered for a reunion hoping to one day to go back to the land of Jehovah---the land of Judah---and look at them all baking cakes with the image of ***VENUS*** on them. And so, out came one of the strongest sermons he ever preached. It's full of unanswerable questions. He says, *"****WHY****? You know what happened to Jerusalem? You've lost your land. Have you not learned your lesson?* ***WHY*** *are you hurting yourselves?"* And you know that's the perplexing question. *"****Why*** *are you hurting* ***YOURSELVES****?"* And his second question, *"****WHY*** *are you hurting* ***GOD****?* ***WHY*** *are you provoking him to anger?"* And this is the question... these are the two questions that God asks of people who do not worship him---of people who go away from him. "*Why do you hurt* ***YOURSELF****,"* and, *"Why do you hurt* ***ME****? That's what you're doing."* I notice the loving ***ORDER*** of those questions. God is even more concerned about them than Himself. But he asks both questions. The ***POSITIVE COMMANDS*** of God are: 1) love the ***LORD YOUR GOD*** with all your heart and soul and mind and strength and, 2) love your ***NEIGHBOR*** as yourself. The ***NEGATIVE QUESTIONS*** of God are, "Why do you hurt ***YOURSELF***. Why do you hurt ***ME***?"

And then Jeremiah says, with great poignancy, ***"HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN? HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN****?"* And five times in one sentence, he uses one word, ***WICKEDNESS***. *"Have you forgotten the* ***WICKEDNESS*** *of your nation? Have you forgotten the* ***WICKEDNESS*** *of your kings? Have you forgotten the* ***WICKEDNESS*** *of your fathers? Have you forgotten the* ***WICKEDNESS*** *of your wives? Have you* ***FORGOTTEN****?"* The truth was they'd never really remembered it. They'd never even thought of it. Could you go through a national disaster and still not think of it? Yes, you can! People can go right through this drought this summer, and they'll go through it for the next few summers, I believe. And they will still not ask the right question. They'll still put it down to sunspots or natural causes, and dismiss it and say, "We'll manage". But the ***RIGHT*** question is, *"Why do you hurt* ***YOURSELVES****? Why'd you hurt* ***GOD****?"*

And so, Jeremiah has to say, *"You may hope to go back to Judah, but not one of you will go except those who run away now... except a few fugitives."* How accurately the predictions of God are. If Jeremiah said, *"None of you shall return,"* and a few had got away, they’d have said, *"There. He was wrong."* But you know, God knows exactly the future, and he said, *"None of you shall return save for a few fugitives."* In other words, *"A few who run away from Egypt will get back; but for the rest, none. You'll all die here."* So. that was his ***PROGNOSIS*** of their problem.

And we now come to the ***MOST DISTURBING*** part of it all: verses 15 to 19, the ***WOMEN***. The women said, "***WE WILL NOT LISTEN TO YOU***! *Apart from anything else, you're not married, and you don't understand women. We will not listen to you."* Can't you hear them shouting? The insolence... the impudence of it!!

***The Tragedy of Relying on Sinful Logic***

And now we have an extraordinary kind of ***LOGIC***. I'm not going to say as some of you may think,. I'm going to say this is what ***'SINFUL LOGIC'***---masculine and feminine---does with facts. Jeremiah ***'FEMININE LOGIC'*** has appealed to ***HISTORY***---the history of the last 25 years of their nation. And he says, *"Haven't you learned the* ***LESSON****?"* And they said, *"Yes, we have learned the lesson, and we'll tell you what it is. While we were baking cakes to the* ***QUEEN OF HEAVEN****, we were prosperous. As soon as King Josiah told us not to, it was then that our troubles began, and we've had nothing but* ***TROUBLE*** *ever since."* Now isn't it extraordinary? The same facts of history. And ***JEREMIAH*** puts one interpretation on them, and the ***WOMEN*** put exactly the ***OPPOSITE*** interpretation on the facts. And all the facts of ***NATURE*** and ***HISTORY*** are open to ***OPPOSITE*** interpretations.

Was talking to someone Friday night who wants to study history. And it is a truth that you can make history say anything you like---by selection... by interpretation. ***THE IMPORTANT QUESTION IS WHICH INTERPRETATION IS THE RIGHT ONE***? For example, there are those who can say that the drought and natural disasters have ***NOTHING*** whatever to do with the moral quality of our nation--- there's no connection. There are those who could argue that when we were ***PERMISSIVE*** in the sixties, we were ***AFFLUENT*** and ***PROSPEROUS***. And our troubles have only come in the mid-seventies and they'd be arguing like this.

If I can show you how ***WRONG*** this argument is, I would use a very telling and appropriate ***ILLUSTRATION***. You've seen the details of this awful disease, asbestos, haven't you... the growths that come in the lungs through breathing the dust; and it's a killer. Now supposing you met a man in that Yorkshire village where so many have been affected, and supposing he wheezed and gasped for breath as he spoke to you... as one of them did when interviewed on television. And supposing he said, "You know, all the time I worked in the asbestos factory, I felt fine. This has only started since I retired. It's my retirement that's to blame. If only I'd gone on working in the factory, I'd be fit and well. I was fine while I worked there. But now look what's happening."

You can apply it very directly. Take smoking---a person taking in a cause of cancer every few minutes. And you can tell them, "Look, the evidence is there." I see doctors in their surgeries smoking and ashtrays full on their desks. They ***KNOW*** and yet they don't ***LEARN***. If you wear silly high heeled shoes when you're a youngster, you'll be in the chiropodist’s hands at 40. Try and teach your kids to brush their teeth. Say, "You know, in 20 years’ time you'll wish you had." Why don't we ***LEARN***? I'll tell you why. Because there's a ***TIME LAG***. There's a time lag. And that fools us. It's true of ***NATURE***, it's true of ***HISTORY***, that ***CAUSE AND EFFECT*** are usually separated by some ***YEARS***. And that's why we can deny the connection. If the moment you worship the ***QUEEN OF HEAVEN***, you were stricken with disease, you wouldn't do it, would you? If the moment you lit up a cigarette, you got lung cancer, you wouldn't do it, would you?

And if the permissive sixties had been punished ***IMMEDIATELY***, they'd have stopped. But there's a ***TIME LAG***. It goes in polluting nature. We don't know yet the effect of all the carbon dioxide we're pushing into the upper atmosphere from jet aircraft. We'll find out after the ***TIME LAG***. And this is the problem, we don't learn our lessons because of the ***TIME LAG***. The only lessons ***FLESH*** will learn are lessons that have an ***IMMEDIATE*** effect, right?... That have an ***IMMEDIATE*** result in health or sickness. But most things in this world---both in ***NATURE*** and ***HISTORY***---have the ***TIME LAG*** built in. And so, these women could argue, "*When we were worshiping the* ***QUEEN OF HEAVEN****, we were prosperous. It was only after we stopped that the troubles began."* But Jeremiah says, *"I put to you a proposition. The troubles when they began, were they not God's remembering what had gone before? Was it not the time length of God's patience?"* God has a ***LONG MEMORY***. God does not settle his accounts every Friday. If he did, everybody in Guildford would be in church this Sunday. And so, we ***GAMBLE*** on things not happening after the time lag. And we don't learn our lesson because the ***EFFECTS*** are not experienced ***IMMEDIATELY***. It's as simple as that. So, we think we've got away with it in the IMMEDIATE FUTURE---and we have. But in the ***ULTIMATE*** we have ***NOT***. And the ***FLESH*** can only learn ***IMMEDIATE*** lessons. It takes the ***SPIRIT*** to learn ***ULTIMATE*** lessons, because it takes the Spirit to say by faith, "I believe ***THIS*** will lead to ***THAT***." It takes ***FAITH*** for a doctor to stub out his cigarette and say, "I believe that in 20 years’ time I'll pay for doing this." It takes ***FAITH***. It takes a step of confidence in the ***FUTURE***, not just a response to the ***PRESENT*** to learn lessons.

And these people had drawn the ***WRONG CONCLUSION*** because they had expected God to act ***IMMEDIATELY***. And God doesn't. God is very ***LONGSUFFERING***. God is ***SLOW*** to anger. God is ***PATIENT***. This is the problem of Psalm 73. In that problem Psalm, ***DAVID*** goes to Temple, he says, *"God, I just don't understand it. The wicked prosper, they die in peace in bed. They have good lives. It doesn't pay to be good. Here I am, I've cleansed my heart in vain, and I just suffer all the time. It doesn't pay, I just don't get it."* And then he went into the house of the Lord, and he worshiped God. And then he said, *"Oh, I do get it. For now,* ***I PERCEIVE THEIR END****. And truly you have set their feet in slippery places."* You see it's the ***LONG-TERM*** view. And human nature only learns ***SHORT-TERM*** lessons in the flesh.

You learn ***LONG-TERM*** lessons in the ***SPIRIT***. It takes the ***SPIRIT*** to grasp heaven. It takes the SPIRIT to understand the rewards available for them who live by God's will here. You may not prosper here. Honesty may not be the best policy here. And in the short term, dishonesty can make more money than honesty. In fact, in our history now, crime does pay because the police are failing to find even 50% of the criminals who commit crimes. So, crime does pay in England---you stand a better chance of ***NOT*** being found out. But in the ***LONG-TERM***... in the long term it does ***NOT*** pay.

So, it's the difference between ***SHORT-TERM*** and ***LONG-TERM***. And Jeremiah says, *"Haven't you learned the* ***LONG-TERM*** *lesson?"* And they said, *"No. We learned the* ***SHORT-TERM****. When we offered cakes to the* ***QUEEN OF HEAVEN****, we prospered.”* When the Sikhs in London prayed for rain, we had a shower that very week. I'll say more about that tonight. It's the ***SHORT-TERM*** and the ***LONG-TERM***.

***2) The Remnant Defies God and Jeremiah***

And so, the women ***DEFIED*** Jeremiah. So, he put the proposition to them. *"Let's test with* ***TIME****."* You know, time is not only the ***TEST*** of God's ***GUIDANCE***, it is also the test of God's ***PROMISES***. ***TIME***... the best test*. "You will learn whose word shall stand, yours or mine. Only* ***TIME*** *will tell."* And you know the world rushes after the latest idea, the latest philosophy, and ***TIME*** proves them hollow and empty. But the ***WORLD*** loves to grasp something ***IMMEDIATE***. They want ***INSTANT*** religion, ***INSTANT*** answers to prayer, ***INSTANT*** guidance. God says, *"I'll tell you what you should do after 10 days."* God says, "*Give it 20 years and then see whose word shall stand."* You see, as Phillips Brooks, the American preacher often said, "The trouble is that I'm in a hurry, and God isn't. The mills of God grind ***SLOWLY***, but they grind exceeding ***SMALL***."

So, Jeremiah says, *"I propose to give you* ***TWO TESTS*** *as to whether* ***YOUR*** *word will stand, or* ***MINE****---whether* ***YOUR*** *interpretation of history is right, or* ***MINE****.”* And here are the two tests. ***NUMBER ONE***: ***THE NAME OF GOD WILL DISAPPEAR*** from Jewish lips. That's the ***FIRST*** test. And you know that has been true now for 2,500 years. Do you remember a Sunday or two ago we had a girl here who was a Leftenant in the Israeli army. I tried, in conversation with her, every way I knew to get her to use the name of God so I knew what the Hebrew pronunciation of it was, and I could not get her to say it anyway. Go to any Jew... and even if he's not an Orthodox Jew--- even if he doesn't go to church---he won't use the name. He will even refer to God as ***'THE NAME'.*** He will say, "Pray to The Name, The Name will help you," but he won't use it. And we will say later in the service, *"Hallowed be your name ..."* And we've got a better name than Jehovah, or Yahweh, or whatever it is. We've got the name ‘***JESUS’***. And that name is ***NOT*** disappearing from our lips. But Jeremiah said, *"Here's the* ***FIRST TEST*** *as to whether my word or yours is true: The name of God will not be used by Jews."* The simple fact is that if you're getting away from God, you use his name less and less, till there comes a time when it becomes a superstition, and you then use it. That's what it's become. Even Jews who don't worship God in Israel, they are so ***SUPERSTITIOUSLY*** afraid of mentioning His name, that they won't use it. And a dear man out there, from whom I tried to pick up a few pronunciations of biblical names (still not succeeding very well) ... he took me through all the prophet's names and told me how I ought to say them. And in the same tone of voice I said, "And how should I say the name of God?" Closed up!!

And the ***OTHER TEST*** that Jeremiah gave as to whether his interpretation of history, or theirs, was true was this: *"This Pharaoh, whom you have come to for protection---Pharaoh Hophra---****HE WILL BE DELIVERED INTO THE HANDS OF THOSE WHO SEEK HIS LIFE."*** And do you know that under 20 years later---just a few years after Jeremiah said it---Hophra was assassinated by his own cousin? You need to be pretty ***BOLD*** when you give a specific test like that. "Whose word is ***TRUE***??"

***Jeremiah Delivers Them Over to a Reprobate Mind***

And so, Jeremiah left them with this question. *"Who's reading history* ***RIGHTLY****... you or me? You explain it one way, I explain it another.* ***LET HISTORY DECIDE."*** And history is ***'HIS-STORY’.*** Do you know that this is the ***LAST*** recorded utterance of Jeremiah? So far as we know, he said no more. He ***FINISHED*** by delivering them to a ***REPROBATE MIND***. He said, *"You vowed to perform libations to the* ***QUEEN OF HEAVEN****. Then perform your* ***VOWS****. Get on with it!"* There comes a point where people are so stubborn, so hardhearted, so closed minded, that the only thing you can do is say, *"Then get on with it.* ***GO YOUR WAY****."* It happened on the night before Jesus died. He'd had a man who'd lived with him, eaten with him, slept in the same room, walked with him, talked to them for three years. But that night Jesus said to him, *"What you have to do, do it quickly. Get on with it. You've made your decision, then* ***GO****!"* ***JUDAS*** went out and did it. And there comes a point where, if we refuse to listen to God's interpretation of history---where we just close our hearts against the Spirit of truth---there comes a point where God says, *"Then perform your vows. Go off to the queen of heaven. I'm* ***FINISHED*** *with you and you'll never use My name again."* Romans 1 says, *"God delivered them over. MEN gave God up. So, GOD gave men up to a* ***REPROBATE MIND."*** (You can say, “to a ***CLOSED MIND.”***). There comes an awful moment where if you give God up, God gives you up.... “to a ***CLOSED MIND***.”

I feel for Jeremiah at this point. He has ***PREACHED FAITHFULLY*** the word of God for 40 years. And he has ended in ***TOTAL FAILURE***. He has pleaded with them for 40 years through disaster after disaster. *"Listen to God. This is what God says."* And they've said, *"No, we will not listen to you. You're lying."* And he's been through all their ***VICISSITUDES*** with them. He had the choice to go to Babylon, where he'd have met up with people like Ezekiel and Daniel and Nehemiah, and probably had a good old age. But he ***CHOSE TO STAY*** in Judah to try and rebuild the little poor remnant that remained. Now he's down with them in ***EGYPT***, and he chooses ***NOT*** to run from them. He's gonna die there and he is ***NEVER*** gonna see his own land again. And his last word to them is a word of ***HOPELESSNESS***. *"Perform your* ***VOWS****. Your mind is* ***CLOSED****!"*

Fancy, ministering the word for 40 years and finishing with total ***FAILURE***. Even the last little remnant of your congregation refusing to listen. And yet, Jeremiah stands out to me as a ***SPIRITUAL GIANT*** who had the ***HONESTY***---both with himself and his God---to go on speaking the ***TRUTH***, even when the word of God came at Tahphanes. And he was a man who was ***COURAGEOUS*** enough to say what he did against all public opinion. Again, and again democracy triumphed over him, and public opinion outweighed his conviction, but he went on speaking as long as he could. It's one of the saddest, loneliest paths a man has ever been called to tread---to preside over the ***COLLAPSE OF A NATION***. To warn that nation repeatedly, that it was ***NOT*** inevitable. And yet, ***FINALLY***, to have to say, *"Perform your vows.* ***YOU WILL NOT LISTEN****.'*

We don't know anything more about Jeremiah. The rest of the book are prophecies that he uttered ***EARLIER*** (and we shall look at them from next week), but we've reached the ***END*** of his story now. So far as we know, he ***DIED*** shortly afterwards in ***EGYPT***. It may be significant that the very next chapter (45---it was the little one about Baruch that we took earlier because it referred to something much earlier)... but it may be that Baruch finished chapter 44 and then just slipped in a little bit about himself: *"Baruch, don't seek great things for yourself if you have your life. That's something."* And maybe Baruch was the only one left after Jeremiah died who still knew the ***TRUTH*** of the word of God. And he wrote it down. And from the depths of Egypt, we have this book and we're reading it this morning. The word of God is still ***TRUE***, and ***HISTORY*** has shown that it was not the ***JEWISH*** interpretation of history, it was ***JEREMIAH'S*** that was ***TRUE***.

***The Lesson From These Chapters***

There's just ***ONE LESSON*** that I draw out from all this this morning, and I don't need to draw it out really, do I? It's this: When you ask for ***GUIDANCE***, really ask for it with an ***OPEN MIND,*** or you will finish up where you started. Whether to stay or to go, ***OBEDIENCE BRINGS BLESSING***.

But we finish now with the people of God ***OUT OF THE PROMISED LAND***! The majority have gone into compulsory exile in ***BABYLON***. The minority has gone into voluntary exile in ***EGYPT***. But isn't that interesting? They've all gone back after 900 years to where they came from. The majority has gone to where ***ABRAHAM*** was originally, when God said, "Come out and be with Me." The minority has gone to Egypt, to where God said to ***MOSES***, "Come out and be with Me." ***AND THEY'VE GONE BACK!!***

You make up your mind where you're going to live on your own basis; you decide your own life, and then ask God to rubber stamp it with His blessing; and I tell you, you will ***FINISH UP*** where you ***STARTED***. It may not happen immediately.... for God is slow to anger. But making plans and asking God to rubber stamp it, is tantamount to ***DISOBEDIENCE***, and will lead you to ***DEFIANCE***. And defiance will lead you to ***DISASTER***.

Let us pray. Father, we don't know whether to thank You that You are slow to anger or not. If You were quicker, we would learn more quickly. And yet, if You were quicker, we should all be dead. For You would not have been patient with us and given us an opportunity to repent. And so, we do thank You that You are slow to anger. But help us to realize that anger, by faith. And help us, also, to hold on to that word: "Stay where you are. I'm with You. You'll be safe. I will show mercy to you." Lord, help us not to move unless You tell us to. Help us to remain in Your blessing and to do Your will. "Trust and obey for there's no other way; to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey." Amen.