

The Queen of Heaven

In one of the most sobering chapters of the Old Testament, Jeremiah 44 tells the story of a people who refused to listen to God. After Jerusalem had fallen to Babylon, a remnant of Jews fled to Egypt, despite God's clear command not to go (Jeremiah 42:19). Once there, they fell back into old habits, reviving the idolatrous practices that had contributed to their downfall. Chief among these was the worship of a figure they called "the Queen of Heaven."

This "Queen" was likely a pagan fertility goddess, known to the Babylonians as Ishtar and to the Canaanites as Ashtoreth. Her worship involved burning incense, pouring out drink offerings, and baking sacrificial cakes. These acts were not only offensive to God, they were direct violations of His law. Yet when Jeremiah confronted the people, they stubbornly refused to repent.

"But we will certainly do whatever has gone out of our own mouth, to burn incense to the queen of heaven..." (Jeremiah 44:17)

They even claimed that their lives were better when they served this false deity, saying their troubles only began when they stopped worshiping her. They credited their blessings not to God, but to idolatry.

In response, God spoke through Jeremiah with unwavering judgment: those who clung to these idols would be destroyed in Egypt. Only a small remnant would survive to return. God said, ***"Behold, I will watch over them for adversity and not for good"*** (Jeremiah 44:27). Their flight to Egypt would not save them. The sword they feared in Judah would follow them there.

Scripture does not give a later record that directly says, "This prophecy was fulfilled." However, secular history strongly suggests that God's word of their destruction came to pass. In Jeremiah 43, God had already declared that Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, would come into Egypt and strike the land. Ezekiel also prophesied that Egypt would be given into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar (Ezekiel 29:19–20). These prophecies identify Babylon as the instrument of God's judgment.

History supports this conclusion. The Jewish historian Josephus wrote that after the destruction of Jerusalem, Nebuchadnezzar made an expedition against Egypt and carried away the Jews who were there. In addition, a Babylonian record from Nebuchadnezzar's thirty-seventh year, around 568/567 B.C., refers to a campaign involving Egypt. Though the record is fragmentary, it agrees with the biblical picture that Babylon did move against Egypt after Jerusalem's fall.

This means the idol-worshipping Jews who fled to Egypt were not beyond the reach of God's judgment. They had escaped Jerusalem, but they could not escape God. Their false confidence in Egypt and in the Queen of Heaven failed them. God had warned them, and history gives evidence that His warning was fulfilled.

A Timeless Lesson

While we may not bow before statues or burn incense to fertility goddesses, the heart of the issue in Jeremiah 44 still speaks to our time: Who or what do we honor above God in our lives and in our worship services?

Idolatry is not limited to golden calves or ancient goddesses. It can take modern forms—careers, material possessions, sports and entertainment, relationships, or anything we elevate above God’s will. Just as the people of Judah justified their disobedience by appealing to convenience and past prosperity, we too can fall into the trap of worshiping God on our own terms rather than on His.

Jesus said, ***“God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”***
(John 4:24)

God desires heartfelt worship, centered on truth, reverence, and obedience. When we alter His pattern, substitute His commands, or let tradition or emotion override Scripture, we echo the rebellion of those ancient worshipers of the Queen of Heaven.

Let Jeremiah 44 serve as a mirror for us. Are we giving God the worship He has commanded, or are we offering something more pleasing to ourselves? Do we look to God’s word for authority in our worship assemblies, or do we lean on human innovations that appeal to emotions?

Just as God watched over those ancient idolaters “for adversity and not for good,” He warns us today that worship must be grounded in His will, not our will.

Let us learn from the past and commit ourselves to pure, obedient, Christ-centered worship that glorifies our Father in heaven, and no other.

~Ron Josselet (ChatGPT assisted)