

Homiletics Analysis: Jeremiah 43

Content & Intent

Broader Unit: Jeremiah 43 belongs to the larger narrative movement spanning chapters 40–44, which chronicles the fate of the Judean remnant following the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. This unit traces the remnant's repeated rejection of the LORD's word through Jeremiah, culminating in their flight to Egypt and the prophet's final recorded ministry on Egyptian soil. Within this movement, chapter 43 serves as the hinge: it records both the formal rejection of the divine word delivered in chapter 42 and the remnant's flight into Egypt, along with a sign-act oracle pronouncing judgment on Egypt itself. The broader unit's claim is that the destruction of Jerusalem was not an accident of history — it was the LORD's judgment — and the remnant now faces the same choice that Judah faced: trust the LORD's word or pursue self-made security. They choose the latter, and chapter 43 records the consequences of that choice.

This Text — Content: The chapter opens at the precise moment when Jeremiah finishes delivering the divine word of chapter 42 — a word commanding the remnant to remain in the land and promising blessing for obedience and disaster for flight to Egypt. The leaders, Johanan ben Kareah and Azariah ben Hoshai, immediately accuse Jeremiah of lying and attribute the oracle to Baruch's personal agenda against them (vv. 1–3). The accusation is brazen: the text makes clear the leaders had already decided on Egypt before they asked, and now they manufacture a reason to dismiss what they did not want to hear. The remnant, including the daughters of the king and all the people Nebuzaradan had left, then departs for Egypt against the LORD's explicit command, taking Jeremiah and Baruch with them (vv. 4–7). Upon arrival at Tahpanhes, the LORD commands Jeremiah to perform a sign act: he is to bury large stones in the mortar at the entrance of Pharaoh's palace, in full view of the Judeans, and declare that Nebuchadnezzar will come, set his throne over these very stones, and bring judgment upon Egypt as he brought judgment upon Jerusalem (vv. 8–13). Egypt will offer no refuge. The gods of Egypt will be destroyed. The remnant has fled from the LORD's discipline only to find themselves in the path of the same instrument of that discipline.

This Text — Intent: God is seeking to accomplish two things simultaneously through this chapter. First, He is confronting the remnant — and through them, every reader — with the anatomy of unbelief: how people who already know what they want to hear manufacture reasons to disqualify the word of God when it contradicts their plan. The accusation against Jeremiah and Baruch is not an honest theological dispute — it is a rationalization. God intends the reader to see through it, and in seeing through it, to see themselves. Second, He is demonstrating that there is no geography of escape from His purposes. The stones buried at Tahpanhes are a visible, physical act declaring that Nebuchadnezzar's throne will stand wherever the remnant runs. The intent is not primarily to threaten but to

shatter the idol of self-arranged security — to show that Egypt, which the remnant has chosen over the LORD's word, will provide exactly nothing it was sought to provide.

Subject Sentence: The remnant flees to Egypt against God's word and finds no refuge there.

Primary Claim: God is confronting His people with the self-deception at the heart of unbelief — the willingness to accuse His word of falsehood rather than submit to it — and demonstrating that no self-chosen refuge can outrun His purposes or substitute for His protection.

Interpretive Evaluation

The accusation against Jeremiah (vv. 1–3) — genuine theological dispute or rationalization? Some commentators, particularly those concerned to show the complexity of the remnant's situation, read the accusation against Jeremiah with a degree of sympathy: the remnant has just survived catastrophic trauma, Babylon is a genuine threat, and their suspicion of Baruch's motives may reflect understandable anxiety rather than bad faith. This reading acknowledges a real pastoral insight — the remnant was not acting from comfortable complacency but from genuine fear. However, it cannot finally be sustained as an interpretive conclusion. The text provides no warrant for treating the accusation as good-faith theological inquiry. Chapter 42 explicitly records that the people asked Jeremiah to inquire of the LORD *before* deciding, yet their subsequent behavior makes plain the decision was already made. The accusation arrives the moment the answer fails to confirm what they wanted. This is not the profile of honest dispute; it is the profile of motivated reasoning. The Reformed reading, attentive to the heart's capacity for self-deception (Jeremiah 17:9 being the intra-book commentary), is to be preferred: the accusation is not a competing theological position but a rationalization manufactured by people who have already committed to Egypt.

Baruch's alleged role (v. 3) — anti-scribe polemic or deflection? A minority of critical scholars have read the accusation against Baruch as evidence of genuine tension between the prophetic tradition and the scribal tradition, seeing in this an early form of institutional conflict. This reading is historically interesting but exegetically weightless for the purposes of exposition: the text does not present Baruch as a competing voice, does not qualify Jeremiah's word, and does not grant the accusation any narrative credibility. The text's own framing presents the accusation as a lie. The Reformed reading does not need to adjudicate the social history of Israelite prophecy — it needs to preach what the text presents: the remnant is making up reasons not to obey.

The sign act and Nebuchadnezzar (vv. 8–13) — literal or symbolic? Dispensational readers sometimes press the sign act's fulfillment with strict literalism, seeking

archaeological confirmation of the buried stones at Tahpanhes or precise correspondence between the oracle and Nebuchadnezzar's actual Egyptian campaign (which is historically attested, though its scope is debated). The Reformed reading neither dismisses the literal dimension — Nebuchadnezzar did campaign in Egypt, and the sign act was a real physical action — nor reduces the text to journalistic prediction. The primary function of the sign act is theological, not prophetic-fulfillment bookkeeping: it demonstrates that the LORD's sovereignty follows the remnant into Egypt; that Nebuchadnezzar is the LORD's instrument (v. 10, "my servant Nebuchadnezzar"), not a rival power the remnant can outmaneuver; and that Egypt, which in the Exodus narrative was the place of bondage from which the LORD delivered His people, now becomes the place of judgment to which His people have run in unbelief. The canonical irony is load-bearing. Reformed exposition should press the theological claim without being either dismissive of or obsessed with precise historical correspondence.

No significant divergence on this passage exists among evangelical traditions regarding the fundamental reading: the remnant disobeys, faces judgment, and finds no refuge in Egypt. The Interpretive Evaluation above addresses the three most live subsidiary questions within that broad consensus.

Key Canonical Support

- **Jeremiah 17:9** — *"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?"* The intra-book commentary on the accusation in 43:1–3: the remnant's dismissal of Jeremiah's word is a specimen of the universal human condition Jeremiah has already diagnosed.
- **Exodus 14:10–14** — Israel at the Red Sea, tempted to return to Egypt rather than trust the LORD's deliverance. The canonical echo is deliberate: the remnant is reversing the Exodus, choosing the place of bondage over the LORD's provision. Egypt was never meant to be refuge; it was the place the LORD brought His people *out of*.
- **Isaiah 31:1–3** — *"Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help...but do not look to the Holy One of Israel."* The LORD's word through Isaiah indicts the same pattern: seeking military and political security from Egypt rather than from the LORD. Jeremiah 43 is the narrative enactment of this prophetic warning.
- **Romans 1:18–21** — Suppression of the truth in unrighteousness. The accusation against Jeremiah in 43:1–3 is a concrete, narrative illustration of what Paul diagnoses theologically: human beings who know the truth, suppress it, and construct alternative explanations to justify what they have already decided to do.
- **Psalms 139:7–10** — *"Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?"* The sign act at Tahpanhes answers this question from the negative

direction: there is no geography of escape from the LORD's purposes, whether those purposes are protective or judicial. The remnant has fled to Egypt; the LORD's word and the LORD's instrument follow them there.

Aim: To expose the anatomy of rationalized unbelief — the willingness to accuse God's word rather than submit to it — and to confront the reader with the futility and self-destruction of seeking security outside the LORD's provision.

Content Table

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
43:1–2a	Jeremiah finishes delivering the LORD's word from chapter 42; Johanan and Azariah immediately accuse him of lying	The accusation arrives without deliberation — the decision to go to Egypt precedes and drives the accusation
43:2b–3	The accusation is specified: Baruch is alleged to be inciting Jeremiah against them so they will be handed over to Babylon or killed	A projection of political motive onto Baruch; no textual basis is offered; the accusation functions as a pretext
43:4–5	Johanan and all the military commanders disobey the LORD's command to remain in the land; they take the entire remnant with them	The scope of the disobedience is total — no sub-group remains obedient
43:6	Specific enumeration of those taken to Egypt: men, women, children, king's daughters, and all whom Nebuzaradan had committed to Gedaliah	The explicit mention of king's daughters carries weight — the Davidic line, however attenuated, is now in Egypt
43:7	They arrive at Tahpanhes; this is explicitly stated to be against the LORD's command	The narrator underscores the disobedience; no ambiguity is permitted
43:8–9	The LORD commands Jeremiah to take large stones and bury them in mortar at the entrance to	The sign act is public and physical — visible proof; Tahpanhes is in the eastern Nile Delta, a major Egyptian

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
	Pharaoh's palace in Tahpanhes, in the sight of the Judeans	administrative site
43:10	The LORD declares He will bring Nebuchadnezzar ("my servant") and set his throne over these very stones; Nebuchadnezzar will spread his canopy over them	The LORD identifies Nebuchadnezzar as His instrument — not a rival power but the LORD's own agent; the canopy imagery suggests royal sovereignty
43:11	Nebuchadnezzar will come and strike Egypt — those destined for death, plague; for captivity, captivity; for the sword, the sword	The same tripartite formula of judgment used throughout Jeremiah — the formula links Egypt's fate to Judah's prior judgment
43:12	The LORD will set fire to Egypt's temples; Nebuchadnezzar will pick Egypt clean as a shepherd picks lice from a garment, and depart safely	The pastoral simile is striking — Egypt will be completely stripped; its gods and their houses will fall
43:13	The sacred pillars of Heliopolis (Beth-shemesh) will be broken; the temples of Egypt's gods will be burned	Heliopolis was the center of Egyptian sun worship — its destruction is the demolition of Egypt's greatest religious claim

Divisions Table

Division	Verses	Label
1	43:1–3	The Word Rejected: Accusation as Rationalization
2	43:4–7	The Flight Executed: Disobedience into Egypt
3	43:8–13	The Word Pursued: Judgment Follows the Remnant to Egypt

Subject Sentence & Primary Claim (*restated*)

Subject Sentence: The remnant flees to Egypt against God's word and finds no refuge there.

Primary Claim: God is confronting His people with the self-deception at the heart of unbelief — the willingness to accuse His word of falsehood rather than submit to it — and demonstrating that no self-chosen refuge can outrun His purposes or substitute for His protection.

Applications (Five)

1. When God's word conflicts with your plan, notice what happens next in your own reasoning. (*Mind/belief*) The remnant did not immediately and explicitly reject the LORD's word. They accused the messenger and invented a motive for the message. This is the anatomy of rationalized unbelief, and it is not unique to the sixth century B.C. — it is the default response of the human heart when the word of God confronts a settled intention. The application is diagnostic before it is prescriptive: readers must be taught to notice the moment when their response to Scripture shifts from "what does this mean?" to "what is wrong with this interpretation?" — because that shift often signals not theological discernment but the heart's self-protective move. The question is not whether you believe the Bible in general; it is whether you believe it at the specific point where it costs you something.

2. Refuse the comfort of blaming the messenger when the message is unwelcome. (*Will/behavior*) The accusation against Baruch is the remnant's way of making their disobedience someone else's fault. Baruch is a convenient target: he is literate, he is close to Jeremiah, he has social influence — easy to suspect, easy to accuse. The concrete behavioral application is to identify the specific person, institution, or tradition you tend to discredit when its teaching conflicts with your desired course of action. The Reformational insight from Jeremiah 17:9 is that this discrediting is almost never experienced as motivated reasoning — it feels like theological discernment. The safeguard is to ask not "is this messenger perfect?" (none are) but "is this message consistent with the whole of Scripture?" and then to let that answer govern the response.

3. Take seriously that self-arranged security is not neutral — it is a declaration of distrust toward the LORD. (*Affections/worship*) The remnant's flight to Egypt was not irrational by ordinary standards. Egypt was powerful, geographically distant from Babylon, and familiar. But the LORD had explicitly named Egypt as the wrong direction, and their insistence on going there was not merely a strategic mistake — it was a declaration that they trusted Pharaoh's army more than the LORD's word. The affectional application is that our self-made security arrangements are always theological statements. The retirement account that produces more peace than the promises of God, the relationship clung to because it feels safer than trusting the LORD's provision, the vocational choice

made on the basis of safety rather than calling — these are not neutral pragmatic decisions. They are answers to the question “who do you trust?” The remnant answered: Egypt. The reader must be pressed to name what their Egypt is.

4. Receive the sign act at Tahpanhes as God’s word of grace as much as judgment — He pursued them. (*Affections/worship*) It would be easy to read the Tahpanhes oracle as purely threatening, but the act of God speaking through Jeremiah *after* the remnant’s disobedience is itself an act of mercy. He did not simply abandon them to the consequences of their choice. He sent His prophet to Egypt with them. He spoke a further word. The sign act was not merely prediction — it was a last call: the same Nebuchadnezzar who will come to Egypt is “my servant,” the LORD’s instrument, not an autonomous destroyer. The remnant had run away; the LORD’s word followed them. This is the character of the God who continues to speak even to the disobedient. The application for the reader who has already made the wrong choice is that the word of God can still find you in Egypt — but only if you are willing to hear it as word rather than accusation.

5. Do not confuse the absence of immediate consequences with confirmation that your plan was right. (*Mind/belief*) The remnant arrived in Egypt. Nothing immediately happened. Life presumably continued. Nebuchadnezzar did not appear at the border the next day. This is always the danger of the self-chosen path: its early non-catastrophe feels like validation. But the oracle of Jeremiah 43 was not given to be fulfilled immediately — it was given to be fulfilled in the LORD’s time, in the LORD’s way. The buried stones were not a magic trigger but a witness. The theological re-framing required here is that the absence of immediate divine judgment is not evidence of divine approval. The remnant in Egypt in the short term had food and shelter; the stones were still in the ground at the palace entrance. The reader who has disobeyed and found that nothing terrible has happened yet must be confronted with the difference between delay and disapproval, between patience and permission.

Theological Importance

Theological Importance: Jeremiah 43 is a sustained demonstration of the sovereignty of the LORD’s word over the sovereignty of human decision-making. Three theological claims converge: First, the LORD’s word is not neutralized by human rejection of it — the oracle delivered in chapter 42 is not rendered void by the accusation in chapter 43; its substance is confirmed and extended in the sign act of verses 8–13. Second, the LORD’s sovereignty is not geographically constrained — Nebuchadnezzar is “my servant” whether he acts in Jerusalem or Tahpanhes; the LORD’s purposes follow His people wherever they go, whether in protection or judgment. Third, the human heart’s resistance to God’s word is not primarily intellectual but volitional — the accusation against Jeremiah and Baruch is not presented as honest theological doubt but as the heart’s self-protective maneuver. The text thus expands the Jeremiah 17:9 diagnosis of the heart into narrative form, showing in

concrete human behavior what the deceitfulness of the heart looks like when it meets a word it does not want to hear.

Reformed Theological Significance

Reformed Theological Significance: Jeremiah 43 is a canonical illustration of total depravity applied not to the unconverted pagan but to the covenant community — people who had witnessed the fall of Jerusalem, who had heard Jeremiah’s ministry, who had seen the word of the LORD proven true repeatedly, and who still manufactured reasons to disobey when the word conflicted with their plan. The Reformed doctrine of the heart’s bondage is not merely an abstraction about the spiritually dead — it describes the persistent pull toward self-sovereignty in the regenerate as well, and Jeremiah 43 provides the exegetical warrant for applying this diagnosis broadly. The chapter also grounds the Reformed insistence on the sufficiency and authority of Scripture: the remnant’s error was not primarily a failure of intelligence or courage but a failure to receive the word of God as word of God — authoritative, sufficient, and not subject to revision by preferred outcomes. The gospel application in Reformed preaching must be that the same LORD who sent Jeremiah to Egypt after the disobedient remnant has sent His Son into the far country after His disobedient people — not to confirm them in their Egypt but to bring them out of it.

Main Takeaway

You already know what God has said. The question this chapter forces is whether you will receive it as His word or find a reason why, in your particular case, it doesn’t apply — why the messenger has an agenda, why your situation is different, why Egypt is actually a reasonable option. The remnant buried at Tahpanhes what they could not hear at Mizpah: that there is no geography of escape from the LORD’s purposes, no self-arranged security that will hold, no accusation against the messenger that makes the message go away. Your Egypt will not protect you. The word you are trying not to hear is the word you most need.

Preaching/Teaching Pitfalls

- **Treating the remnant’s accusation as theologically serious rather than self-serving.** The temptation in pastoral preaching is to be sympathetic to the remnant’s trauma and to grant their suspicion of Baruch some intellectual credibility. While pastoral sensitivity to their situation is appropriate, the text does not grant the accusation credibility — and preaching must not grant what the text withholds. To treat the accusation as a genuine theological dispute is to undermine the chapter’s central diagnostic function: showing what the human heart does with unwelcome

truth. The preacher may sympathize with the remnant's fear while refusing to legitimize their rationalization.

- **Preaching the sign act as primarily a prediction to be fulfilled rather than a theological demonstration in the present.** The stones buried at Tahpanhes are sometimes treated as a fulfilled-prophecy proof text — the preacher demonstrates that Nebuchadnezzar did indeed campaign in Egypt and declares the Bible reliable. This is not wrong, but it is thin. The sign act's primary function is not apologetic but confrontational: it tells the remnant, right now, in Egypt, that they have run into the path of the same instrument they were fleeing. Reduction to prophecy-fulfillment skips the existential force of the oracle for its original hearers and, by extension, for contemporary ones.
- **Moralizing the narrative into a general lesson about obedience without diagnosing the specific mechanism of the failure.** Preaching “obey God, don't be like the remnant” is not wrong, but it is incomplete. The text's power lies in the specific anatomy of the disobedience: they asked, heard, decided against, then rationalized. The sermon must walk through that anatomy in enough detail that the congregation recognizes it as their own, not a historical curiosity. The mechanism of motivated reasoning — accusing the messenger when the message is unwelcome — is the diagnostic contribution of this chapter and must not be bypassed in favor of a generic call to obedience.
- **Missing the canonical irony of Egypt as the destination.** The remnant goes to Egypt. In the canon of Scripture, Egypt is the place of bondage, the place the LORD delivered His people *from* at the Exodus, the place repeatedly invoked as the paradigmatic site of human slavery versus divine liberation. The remnant's flight to Egypt is not a neutral geographical choice — it is a reversal of the Exodus, a return to bondage in the very land that stands in the Old Testament for the condition from which the LORD redeems. Preachers who miss this miss the theological depth-charge the text is setting off.
- **Failing to address the present-tense application of the sign act's theology — that there is no geography of escape from the LORD's purposes.** The Tahpanhes oracle is sometimes preached as though its relevance is entirely to the remnant's specific historical situation. But its theological content — that the LORD's purposes follow His people into every self-chosen refuge, that His instrument arrives wherever they have run — is universally applicable. The preacher must make the move from Tahpanhes to the contemporary “Egypt” the congregation has chosen, and must press the claim that buried stones are already in the mortar at the entrance to that palace too.
- **Neglecting Baruch's presence as a note of grace.** Baruch appears in verse 6 as one taken to Egypt. He is Jeremiah's scribe, his companion, the one who has faithfully recorded and preserved the prophetic word. His presence in Egypt is not

incidental — it means the word of God is present with the remnant in their disobedience. The LORD does not abandon the disobedient to silent Egypt; He sends His word with them. This is a note of grace that the preacher should not omit: even in judgment, God speaks; even in Egypt, the word pursues.