

Jeremiah 41:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And they departed, and dwelt in the habitation of Chimham,
which is by Beth-lehem, to go to enter into Egypt,

Analysis

The remnant's stop at 'Geruth Chimham, which is by Bethlehem, to go to enter into Egypt' reveals their immediate decision: flee to Egypt rather than remain in Judah. The place name 'Geruth Chimham' (possibly meaning 'lodging place of Chimham') had historical significance—Chimham was likely the son of Barzillai the Gileadite, whom David blessed for supporting him during Absalom's rebellion (2 Samuel 19:31-40). This location near Bethlehem, David's hometown, carried rich covenant history. The irony is profound: at a site connected to David's restoration after rebellion, these survivors chose flight and abandonment rather than trusting God for restoration. Bethlehem's location south of Jerusalem made it a natural stopping point on the route to Egypt via Hebron and the Negev. The phrase 'to go to enter into Egypt' shows determined intent—they had already decided on Egypt before consulting Jeremiah in chapter 42 (where they asked for guidance but had already determined their course). Egypt represented apparent security: beyond Babylon's immediate reach, historically familiar (many Jews had fled there before, Jeremiah 42:15-17), and populous enough to absorb refugees. However, Egypt also represented the place of former bondage, the power God had delivered Israel from—choosing Egypt meant reverting to slavery rather than trusting God's purposes in Judah.

Historical Context

Geruth Chimham's location near Bethlehem (about 6 miles south of Jerusalem) positioned the remnant between Judah's heartland and Egypt. That they stopped

here rather than immediately crossing into Egyptian territory (still 70-80 miles away) suggests either they needed rest/supplies or were organizing for the journey. The historical connection to Barzillai and Chimham (2 Samuel 19:37-38) indicated this was a known lodging place, possibly an estate or caravanserai where travelers traditionally stopped. The choice to flee to Egypt rather than remain in Judah or flee east to Babylon represents their assessment that Babylon would punish the entire Jewish remnant for Ishmael's murder of Babylonian officials, making Judah unsafe. This fear was rational—ancient empires often practiced collective punishment for rebellion. However, their failure to wait for God's word through Jeremiah before deciding on Egypt showed faithless pragmatism. Egypt had been a place of Jewish refuge for centuries (1 Kings 11:40 records Jeroboam fleeing there; 2 Kings 25:26 notes others fled to Egypt after Gedaliah's murder), making it an obvious choice. But obvious choices based on natural reasoning often contradict faith-based obedience to God's revealed purposes.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. How does the remnant's stop at a site connected to David's restoration after rebellion contrast with their faithless choice to flee rather than trust God?
2. What does Egypt symbolically represent in biblical theology, and why is the choice to flee there particularly significant?
3. In what ways do believers sometimes choose apparently pragmatic solutions to crises without waiting for or submitting to God's revealed will?

Interlinear Text

וַיֵּלֶכְוּ	וַיֵּשְׁבוּ	בְּיָר וְ	כְּמֹהֶם	אֲשֶׁר	אֵלָּא	בְּ יֵת
H1980	and dwelt in	the habitation	of Chimham	H834	which is by	H0
	H3427	H1628	H3643		H681	
לְ הָם	לְלָכָת	לָב וְאֵל	מִצְרַיִם:			
Bethlehem	H1980	to enter	into Egypt			
H1035		H935	H4714			

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 42:14 (References Egypt): Saying, No; but we will go into the land of Egypt, where we shall see no war, nor hear the sound of the trumpet, nor have hunger of bread; and there will we dwell: