



# The **Fiery** Bones

Jeremiah 20:9

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Text

Jeremiah 44:1-30

Topic

Jeremiah rebukes the Jews who have fled to Egypt  
for their hard hearts

Title

*"A Good Day to Die to Hardheartedness"*

## Introduction

Diamonds might still be a girl's best friend but they are no longer the hardest material on earth. There are at least three things that are harder than diamonds.

Number three on the list is Lonsdaleite. It is formed when meteorites containing graphite strike the Earth, so it is pretty rare. It is translucent, brownish-yellow in color and the purest form of it is more than 50 percent harder than diamond.

Number two on the list is Wurtzite boron nitride. It is also extremely rare because it is only produced during volcanic eruptions.

What do you think is number one, the hardest material on earth? While you're thinking, factor in that this is a Bible study and we are thinking in a spiritual sense. The answer to the question is something that God says is extremely hard.

**Number one on the list, the hardest thing on earth, is the human heart.**

One such reference to its hardness is found in Ephesians 4:18. Describing nonbelievers the apostle Paul writes, "(ESV) they are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, **due to their hardness of heart.**"

Of course we're not talking about the heart beating in your chest - that wondrous pump that might beat 3 billion times over the course of your lifetime. The Bible uses the heart to describe the whole person in all of your distinct activities as a thinking, feeling, worshipping, social being. "Heart" means your total response to the world around you with special regard to God's will for your life.

One reason I say it is so hard is that hardness of heart can do a great deal of damage. Consider the Pharaoh of Egypt who defied God as Moses sought to deliver the Israelites out of slavery. Fifteen times, in the Book of Exodus, we are told he hardened his heart. He was so hard that he was willing to keep an entire people enslaved. If that's not hard enough, he subjected his people to the ten plagues. Harder still, he sent his army in their chariots to their watery graves as the Red Sea engulfed them.

Hardest of all, it cost him his own firstborn son as the death angel came on the night of Passover.

Our text in Jeremiah shows a people with hard hearts harden them all the more. It's a good place for us to search our own hearts for hardness and for hardening.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 The Hardness Of Your Heart Can Be Penetrated By God, and #2 The Hardening Of Your Heart Can Be Prevented By You.

## #1 The Hardness Of Your Heart Can Be Penetrated By God

(v1-14)

The Bible seems to differentiate between the *hardness* of the human heart in general and the *hardening* of a human heart in particular.

We are all born with the general condition of hardness of heart. Paul said as much to the Ephesians.

God, by grace, seeks to penetrate *every* heart and bring salvation. Theologians argue whether His grace is resistible (as I believe) or irresistible, but all agree that the human heart is impossibly hard until the operation of grace works upon it to penetrate it.

What about *hardening* of the heart? How is it different? Whereas you inherit hardness of heart, you choose whether or not to harden your heart further.

Allow me to quote from an article in *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*.

The heart... is hard, but not necessarily hardened. Hardening of the heart goes beyond the [tragedy] of our inherited condition. So, working upon the fertile ground of our innately hard hearts, sin may harden them further. People may harden their own hearts, in sinful rebellion, in bitterness over circumstances, or in sheer self-will...

Examples help, and we have one in our text - an example of the hardness of the human heart and its further hardening.

In the first part of this chapter God is seeking to penetrate the hardness of the hearts of the Jews who had disobediently fled to Egypt.

Jeremiah 44:1 The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the Jews who dwell in the land of Egypt, who dwell at Migdol, at Tahpanhes, at Noph, and in the country of Pathros, saying,  
Jeremiah 44:2 "Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: 'You have seen all the calamity that I have brought on Jerusalem and on all the cities of Judah; and behold, this day they are a desolation, and no one dwells in them,  
Jeremiah 44:3 because of their wickedness which they have committed to provoke Me to anger, in that they went to burn incense and to serve other gods whom they did not know, they nor you nor your fathers.  
Jeremiah 44:4 However I have sent to you all My servants the prophets, rising early and sending them, saying, "Oh, do not do this abominable thing that I hate!"  
Jeremiah 44:5 But they did not listen or incline their ear to turn from their wickedness, to burn no incense to other gods.  
Jeremiah 44:6 So My fury and My anger were poured out and kindled in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem; and they are wasted and desolate, as it is this day.'

God's people were guilty of sin - wicked, abominable, habitual sin. They set up idols in the Temple. They participated in crazy immoral sexual rituals worshipping false gods. They murdered their own infant children in sacrifices.

God patiently, graciously, "sent... all [His] servants the prophets..." but God's people refused to "listen or incline their ear."

God had mounted a decades-long campaign to penetrate the hardness of their hearts.

That's the point we want to derive from these verses - that God goes to great lengths in order to penetrate the hardness of the human heart.

Jeremiah 44:7 "Now therefore, thus says the LORD, the God of hosts, the God of Israel: 'Why do you commit this great evil against yourselves, to cut off from you man and woman, child and infant, out of Judah, leaving none to remain,

Jeremiah 44:8 in that you provoke Me to wrath with the works of your hands, burning incense to other gods in the land of Egypt where you have gone to dwell, that you may cut yourselves off and be a curse and a reproach among all the nations of the earth?

Jeremiah 44:9 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?

Jeremiah 44:10 They have not been humbled, to this day, nor have they feared; they have not walked in My law or in My statutes that I set before you and your fathers.'

One reason the Jews fled to Egypt was so they could continue to sin. They had learned nothing from God's discipline. If that's not hardness of heart, I don't know what is.

Jeremiah 44:11 "Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: 'Behold, I will set My face against you for catastrophe and for cutting off all Judah.

Jeremiah 44:12 And I will take the remnant of Judah who have set their faces to go into the land of Egypt to dwell there, and they shall all be consumed and fall in the land of Egypt. They shall be consumed by the sword and by famine. They shall die, from the least to the greatest, by the sword and by famine; and they shall be an oath, an astonishment, a curse and a reproach!

Jeremiah 44:13 For I will punish those who dwell in the land of Egypt, as I have punished Jerusalem, by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence,

Jeremiah 44:14 so that none of the remnant of Judah who have gone into the land of Egypt to dwell there shall escape or survive, lest they return to the land of Judah, to which they desire to return and dwell. For none shall return except those who escape.' "

It's a warning. By it God was still seeking to penetrate their hardness of heart.

Warnings are for your good, are they not? If you're traveling and you see a sign that says, "Bridge Out," do you put the pedal to the metal thinking that CalTrans is just messing with you?

It wasn't just that God was offended by their sin. A lot of times people think of God as being a prude; a cosmic killjoy who wants to keep them from having any fun. Truth is, God knows you are a spiritual being who was created to be in a relationship with Him. If your heart remains hard you will never be whole.

Sin might be pleasurable for a season but you will be left empty and, in the long run, it will destroy you.

The Jews could not survive in Egypt; it was a spiritual death camp for them. It was in their best interests that God intervene - even though His intervention may seem harsh on its surface.

Speaking to nonbelievers, Charles Finney said,

How astonishing is the long-suffering of God? How many ways have you hardened your hearts against him! How many times have you betaken yourselves to the most absurd, unreasonable, provoking reasons for girding yourself and resisting the claims of God! And God's forbearance is still lengthened out, even to this long-suffering! Will it not suffice you thus far to have resisted the mercy and compassion of God? I beseech you, now let the controversy cease. Lay down your weapons; accept God's claims; humble yourself under his mighty hand; lay down your sins, and accept the offer of eternal life.

The real question for most of us, gathered this day, is, "As a Christian, can I still have hardness of heart?"

Sadly the answer is "Yes." In Mark 6:52 and 8:17 Jesus described His disciples as having hearts that were hardened.

Mark 6:52 For they had not understood about the loaves, because their heart was hardened.

Mark 8:17 ... [Jesus said to them] "Do you not yet perceive nor understand? Is your heart still hardened?"

After His resurrection from the dead Jesus had to point out their hardness of heart.

Mark 16:14 Later He appeared to the eleven as they sat at the table; and He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen.

Three times in the book of Hebrews we are told, "harden not your heart" - Hebrews 3:8, 3:15 and 4:7. In two of those passages you read, "today if you will hear His voice, harden not your heart."

Christians *can* have hardness of heart. We must therefore allow His Word to penetrate **our** hearts to ask, "Is your heart still hardened?"

It's usually not either/or - either you're hardened or you're not. You might have a soft heart, a tender heart, towards God in most areas.

But are there **any** areas in which you might still have hardness - maybe towards a person, or a perspective, or a prompting from the Holy Spirit? Maybe an area of disbelief; or a bitterness?

Let The Lord show you. It's for your own good. You can't survive a spiritual Egypt.

## #2 The Hardening Of Your Heart Can Be Prevented By You

(v15-30)

The Jews in Egypt were warned and it was a genuine warning. By that I mean they could act upon God's Word. They could let it soften their hardness of heart; or they could harden their own hearts even further.



Knowing their history, what do you think they did?

Jeremiah 44:15 Then all the men who knew that their wives had burned incense to other gods, with all the women who stood by, a great multitude, and all the people who dwelt in the land of Egypt, in Pathros, answered Jeremiah, saying:

Jeremiah 44:16 "As for the word that you have spoken to us in the name of the LORD, we will not listen to you!

Jeremiah 44:17 But we will certainly do whatever has gone out of our own mouth, to burn incense to the queen of heaven and pour out drink offerings to her, as we have done, 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, were well-off, and saw no trouble.

Jeremiah 44:18 But since we stopped burning incense to the queen of heaven and pouring out drink offerings to her, we have lacked everything and have been consumed by the sword and by famine."

Jeremiah 44:19 The women also said, "And when we burned incense to the queen of heaven and poured out drink offerings to her, did we make cakes for her, to worship her, and pour out drink offerings to her without our husbands' permission?"

If I'm reading this correctly, Jeremiah confronted the people as they were busy celebrating a feast to the moon goddess - the "queen of Heaven." He talked to them red-handed, as it were.

These people had already heard the words of verses one through fourteen. This, then, was their decision - to go on, to go even deeper, into idolatry. Or, as we are describing it, to harden their already hard hearts.

Jeremiah 44:20 Then Jeremiah spoke to all the people - the men, the women, and all the people who had given him that answer - saying:

Jeremiah 44:21 "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 them, and did it not come into His mind?

Jeremiah 44:22 So the LORD could no longer bear it, because of the evil of your doings and because of the abominations which you committed. Therefore your land is a desolation, an astonishment, a curse, and without an inhabitant, as it is this day.

Jeremiah 44:23 Because you have burned incense and because you have sinned against the LORD, and have not obeyed the voice of the LORD or walked in His law, in His statutes or in His testimonies, therefore this calamity has happened to you, as at this day."

Jeremiah 44:24 Moreover Jeremiah said to all the people and to all the women, "Hear the word of the LORD, all Judah who are in the land of Egypt!

Jeremiah 44:25 Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, saying: 'You and your wives have spoken with your mouths and fulfilled with your hands, saying, "We will surely keep our vows that we have made, to burn incense to the queen of heaven and pour out drink offerings to her." You will surely keep your vows and perform your vows!'

I want to keep pointing out that the Jews were making a choice. God was graciously seeking repentance. They hardened their hearts.

Jeremiah 44:26 Therefore hear the word of the LORD, all 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 named in the mouth of any man of Judah in all the land of Egypt, saying, "The Lord GOD lives."

Jeremiah 44:27 Behold, I will watch over them for adversity and not for good. And 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 to them.

Jeremiah 44:28 Yet a small number who escape the sword shall return from the land of Egypt to the land of Judah; and all the remnant of Judah, who have gone to the land of Egypt to dwell there, shall know whose words will stand, Mine or theirs.

Jeremiah 44:29 And this shall be a sign to you,' says the LORD, 'that I will punish you in this place, that you may know that My words will surely stand against you for adversity.'

Jeremiah 44:30 "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 Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, his enemy who sought his life.' "

God ramped it up. Terrible things were in store for all but a tiny remnant of them. They needed to get out of Dodge.

Remember, being in Egypt was no good for the Jews. It would only further corrupt them. Life in Judah - tough as it would be - was the answer but they would have none of it.

We've learned that there is undoubtedly still hardness in our hearts. Even as believers, indwelt by God the Holy Spirit, we can remain hard to certain things.

God is gracious to reveal those things to us - to penetrate our hardness of heart for our own good.

For our part we need only admit we tend towards hardness and hardening.

Think of it this way. If your physician diagnosed you with blocked arteries, and recommended surgery, you'd probably agree - desiring to live and have a better quality of life. Before you go under the knife, you must sign a stack of waivers giving the doctor and his agents permission to operate. Until you sign he or she is powerless to intervene.

It's a little like that with God, Who is, of course, the Great Physician. His Word provides the diagnosis; but we won't hear it if we're not allowing Him to examine us; and we may not receive it even after He does. We have a tendency to hear God but then seek a second opinion - usually our own!

It's better to be compliant and sign-off each time Dr. Jesus reveals something to us.

Wave your will and let His will prevail.

