

Jeremiah's Prophecies Against Egypt and Philistia

Jeremiah 46-47

Jeremiah 46: 1-3 – *“The word of the Lord which came to Jeremiah the prophet against the nations. ² Against Egypt. Concerning the army of Pharaoh Necho, king of Egypt, which was by the River Euphrates in Carchemish, and which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon defeated in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah.”*

Background Notes

Jeremiah 46 begins the last major division of the book of Jeremiah. It contains Jeremiah's prophecies against the foreign nations surrounding Israel. The fact that the prophets of the Old Testament gave oracles about the foreign nations emphasizes that God is sovereign over this whole world. Jeremiah's prophecies concern nine of these foreign nations, moving in a general geographical direction from west to east, starting with Egypt in chapter 46.

The first part of Jeremiah's prophecy concerned Egypt's defeat at the hands of the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar at the battle of Carchemish in 605 BC. This was a major battle in world history, because it was key to the rise of the Babylonian Empire and the decline of Egypt's power. Jeremiah gave the description of that battle and the defeat of the Egyptian army in Hebrew poetry (v3-12). It appears, from what we read in Jeremiah 25, that Jeremiah wrote this up before the battle took place.

Doctrinal Point for Jeremiah 46

Jeremiah's prophecy concerning Egypt included a promise for the future.

Jeremiah 46:3-10 - *“Order the buckler and shield, and draw near to battle! ⁴ Harness the horses, and mount up, you horsemen! Stand forth with your helmets, polish the spears, put on the armor! ⁵ Why have I seen them dismayed and turned back? Their mighty ones are beaten down; they have speedily fled, and did not look back, for fear was all around,” says the Lord. ⁶ “Do not let the swift flee away, nor the mighty man escape. They will stumble and fall toward the north, by the River Euphrates.”*

In verses 3-6 of Jeremiah's prophecy, the Egyptians were seen retreating in terror from the Babylonians. Notice that the defeat was toward the north, beside the Euphrates River (v6). That would be the location of Carchemish. The Egyptian army was pictured as the Nile River vainly trying to flood the land - but to no avail. (v7-8)

Jeremiah 46:9-10 - *“Come up, O horses, and rage, O chariots! And let the mighty men come forth: the Ethiopians and the Libyans who handle the shield, and the Lydians who handle and bend the bow. ¹⁰ For this is the day of the Lord God of hosts, a day of vengeance, that He may avenge Himself on His adversaries. The sword shall devour. It shall be satiated and made drunk with their blood. For the Lord God of hosts has a sacrifice in the north country by the River Euphrates”*

In verse 9 the Egyptians and their allies including the hired mercenary soldiers fight in desperation, but the outcome of the Battle of Carchemish is controlled and determined by the Lord God. In verses 11 and 12, we see that the healing balm of Gilead and the medicines of Egypt would not be able to save them from loss and defeat.

The second oracle against Egypt (v13-24, written in fine Hebrew poetry) described Nebuchadnezzar's invasion of Egypt in 568-567 BC. *“The word that the Lord spoke to Jeremiah the prophet, how Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon would come and strike the land of Egypt” (v13)*. The cities of Egypt that were to be invaded (v14) were the very cities where the Jewish refugees had fled in disobedience to the Lord (Jeremiah 44). The gods of Egypt were helpless to save the people (v15-16).

Jeremiah 46:16-24 - *“And they said, ‘Arise! Let us go back to our own people and to the land of our nativity from the oppressing sword.’ ¹⁷ They cried there, ‘Pharaoh, king of Egypt, is but a noise. He has passed by the appointed time!’ ¹⁸ “As I live,” says the King, whose name is the Lord of hosts, “Surely as Tabor is among the mountains And as Carmel by the sea, so he shall come.*

¹⁹ O you daughter dwelling in Egypt. Prepare yourself to go into captivity! For Noph shall be waste and desolate, without inhabitant. ²⁰ Egypt is a very pretty heifer, but destruction comes, it comes from the north. ²¹ Also her mercenaries are in her midst like fat bulls, for they also are turned back. They have fled away together. They did not stand, for the day of their calamity had come upon them, the time of their punishment.”

For they shall march with an army and come against her with axes, like those who chop wood .²³ “They shall cut down her forest,” says the Lord,

“Though it cannot be searched, because they are innumerable, and more numerous than grasshoppers. ²⁴ The daughter of Egypt shall be ashamed. She shall be delivered into the hand of the people of the north.”

²⁵ The Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, says: “Behold, I will bring punishment on Amon of No, and Pharaoh and Egypt, with their gods and their kings—Pharaoh and those who trust in him. And I will deliver them into the hand of those who seek their lives, into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and the hand of his servants. Afterward it shall be inhabited as in the days of old,” says the Lord.”

In verses 16-17, the allies of Egypt and the mercenary soldiers spoke of going home because Pharaoh Hophra was nothing but big talk - just wind. The true King, the Lord of Hosts, described the invading Nebuchadnezzar and his forces as a mountain looming on the horizon (v18). In verse 19 an accurate prediction of the burning of Memphis in Egypt was given. Nebuchadnezzar would attack Egypt like a horse fly stinging a helpless heifer (v20). The mercenary soldiers would try to escape, but they would be cut down.

Egypt's defeat was likened to a hissing snake slithering away (v22-24). Egypt's defeat would be like forests that were easy to cut down, and like an invasion of locusts, and like a young girl taken captive.

But then some good news came in verses 25-26. Even though the Lord would punish all of Egypt with her pagan gods at the hands of the Babylonians, yet in the future times things would get better for Egypt. This promise was partially fulfilled when the Persian Empire came to power. But it will be ultimately fulfilled with the second coming of Christ, when the nation of Egypt will be included in the future earthly kingdom of our Lord. Jeremiah's prophecy about Egypt included a promise for the future.

Doctrinal Point for Jeremiah 47

Jeremiah's prophecy concerning the Philistines did not include a promise for the future.

Jeremiah 47 - *"The word of the Lord that came to Jeremiah the prophet against the Philistines, before Pharaoh attacked Gaza." ² Thus says the Lord: "Behold, waters rise out of the north, and shall be an overflowing flood. They shall overflow the land and all that is in it, the city and those who dwell within. Then the men shall cry, and all the inhabitants of the land shall wail. ³ At the noise of the stamping hooves of his strong horses, at the rushing of his chariots, at the rumbling of his wheels, the fathers will not look back for their children, lacking courage.*

⁴ Because of the day that comes to plunder all the Philistines, to cut off from Tyre and Sidon every helper who remains; for the Lord shall plunder the Philistines, the remnant of the country of Capthor. ⁵ Baldness has come upon Gaza. Ashkelon is cut off with the remnant of their valley. How long will you cut yourself?

⁶ "O you sword of the Lord, How long until you are quiet? Put yourself up into your scabbard. Rest and be still! ⁷ How can it be quiet, seeing the Lord has given it a charge against Ashkelon and against the seashore? There He has appointed it."

The prophecy in Jeremiah 47 was probably given before 609 BC, when Pharaoh Necho conquered Gaza (v1). Written again in some of the finest Hebrew poetry, the invasion of the land of the Philistines from the north was described. This invasion was most probably the invasion of Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian forces in 604 BC. The invasion would be so horrendous that parents would not turn back for their children in their attempts of escape (v2-3).

Every ally of the Philistines, including Tyre and Sidon, would be cut off. The Philistines, who had originally come from Capthor (the island of Crete), would be totally destroyed (v4). Two of the five cities of the Philistines, Gaza and Ashkelon, were named, as representative of the defeat of the Philistines (v5-7). In that culture, shaving your head and cutting yourself were signs of mourning and grief (v6). Inscriptions uncovered by archaeologists in Babylon confirm the historical accuracy of these prophecies.

Unlike the prophecy against Egypt, no promise was given for the future of the Philistines in Jeremiah 47 – and the Philistines have disappeared from history. The Palestinians of today are not the descendants of the ancient Philistines,

even though the name “Palestine” does trace back to the name “Philistine.” The Palestinians of today are primarily Arab peoples who migrated from the area of Saudi Arabia, but they are not the ancient Philistines as some have claimed. Jeremiah’s prophecies concerning the Philistines did **not** include a promise for the future.

Practical Application

Don’t confuse “Jacob” with the “Church”!

Jeremiah 46:27-28 - *“But do not fear, O My servant Jacob, and do not be dismayed, O Israel! For behold, I will save you from afar, and your offspring from the land of their captivity. Jacob shall return, have rest and be at ease; no one shall make him afraid.*

²⁸Do not fear, O Jacob My servant,” says the Lord, “for I am with you; for I will make a complete end of all the nations to which I have driven you. But I will not make a complete end of you. I will rightly correct you, or I will not leave you wholly unpunished.”

It’s important to distinguish between Israel and the Church in proper interpretation of the Bible.

In the context of Jeremiah 46 – of whom was God speaking when He said “*Jacob My servant?*” It’s obvious that he was speaking of the descendants of Jacob – the Jewish people - Israel. Clearly He was referring to the Jewish people, in contrast to the Egyptians.

When was the prophecy of verses 27-28 fulfilled? It was partially fulfilled when the Jews returned to Jerusalem from their Babylonian captivity in 638 BC. But to this day the Jewish people have never been secure, undisturbed and at ease, as these verses predict. These blessed conditions will become a reality when the Jewish people return to the Lord in the future. They will return to the Lord when God’s discipline (v28) is complete.

For proper biblical interpretation, it’s important to distinguish between Israel and the Church. Notice - “God’s servant Jacob” (v27) was **not** a reference to the Church. Verse 27 was **not** speaking of “Christians at rest” (as some Christians teach). No! When God said “My servant Jacob” He was referring to ***the Jewish people***. Who they were then is who they are now!

Don’t confuse “Jacob” with “the Church”!