

JEREMIAH 47

AGAINST THE PHILISTINES

The Philistines occupied the coast of Palestine, and their capital was Gaza; and they are the next of the heathen nations against whom Jeremiah lifted up his voice. This chapter reads the Philistines their doom, just as the former chapter read the Egyptians theirs. The words are few, but their predictions are very terrible; and the Phoenician cities of Tyre and Sidon – although they lay at a distance from the land of the Philistines – come in as sharers with them in the destruction that is here threatened.

Pharaoh Necho himself survived the Battle of Carchemish; and in humiliation, he returned to Egypt with the remainder of his beaten army. It was either then, or previously, that he took the Philistine city of Gaza – the last town southwest of Palestine, on the frontiers of Egypt. It is to this event that Jeremiah refers here in the opening verses of his prophecy. The Egyptians approached the city of Gaza from the north; hence the prophet says, “Waters rise up out of the north, and shall be an overflowing flood” (verse 2). It is probable that this is also a reference to the Philistines being attacked by the Babylonians as well, who also came from the north; but if they were, we are not sure how long that would have been after Pharaoh’s smiting of Gaza. At any rate, such was the despair which seized the inhabitants of that doomed city, that the fathers’ hands became too feeble to even attempt the rescue of their own sons and daughters (verse 3). Jeremiah himself was alarmed at this dreadful scene which unfolded before the eyes of his prophetic vision; and he cried out, “O thou sword of the Lord, how long will it be ere thou be quiet? put up thyself into thy scabbard, rest, and be still” (verse 6). But the Philistines also deserved chastisement, and so the Lord’s sword could not be quiet; for He had given it a commission against this heathen land, and it must execute His sovereign will. No matter who the human agent may be that wields the sword, it is God’s instrument of vengeance. It rises when He speaks, and it is put away in its sheath when He commands.

Among all the neighboring nations of the Jews, none had displayed more bitter and more continuous hostility to them than the Philistines had. From the days of Shamgar the Judge to those of King Hezekiah, they were bent on mischief; and they were full of enmity and spite against the Lord’s chosen people. Even the victories of David had not humbled their pride; and in the days of Jeremiah, they were still the same relentless foes as ever. It is not surprising, therefore, that the prophet was commissioned to utter this prophecy against

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ The Philistines are warned of the terror that would come upon them, when the forces of Babylon would attack them – verses 1-5
- ❖ They are told that the war would continue for a long time, and that their endeavors to put it to an end would be in vain – verses 6-7

them! And a very terrible prediction it was. Even the Phoenicians – who dwelt in Tyre and Sidon, and were friendly with the Philistines – would feel the blow when they were thus smitten by the Lord. Thus we see that the Philistines truly did deserve the chastisement which they received – if for nothing else than for their hostility to the people of God!

But that was not their only crime. The Philistines were also an idolatrous people – worshipers of Dagon, the fish-god, who had the face and hands of a man, and the tail of a fish. One of the temples of this idol was at Gaza, and another was at Ashdod (also known as Azotus). The latter of the two was destroyed by Jonathan in the times of the Maccabees, who set fire to both the idol-temple and the city. The prophet Zephaniah said, “Gaza shall be forsaken, and Ashkelon a desolation: they shall drive out Ashdod at the noon day, and Ekron shall be rooted up” (Zeph. 2:4). And again, he said (Zeph. 2:11), “The Lord will be terrible unto them; he will famish all the gods of the earth; and men shall worship him, every one from his place, even all the isles of the heathen.” Has not this prophecy been fulfilled? Where are the gods of the Canaanites and the Philistines? Where are the idols of Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon? Where are the gods and goddesses of Greece and Rome, which were once so mighty in their pride? Have they not been literally “famished”? Are not their places and their names unknown? And in the same manner, God will continue to “famish” all the idols of modern heathenism – of India, and China, and the islands of the sea! The day is hastening on when men, women, and children shall indeed worship Him – and Him alone! So let the heralds of the Cross take courage! These ancient prophecies belong to us also; and we are beholding their wider fulfillment in the spread of Christian truth, and in the desolation of the once-famous temples of idols. The good news of salvation and redemption by Jesus Christ is being crowned with victory almost everywhere; and idolatry and heathenism, in their proudest forms, are beginning to yield to the power of that Gospel which is destined to flood the whole world with its light!

Lord, we pray for grace to live and speak in such a way that no souls may ever be lost as a result of our own lazy neglect in striking blows at the idols of this world, and in sharing the good news of the Gospel of Christ. We ask for grace to be particularly poured out upon fathers and mothers, so that they may consistently pray with their sons and daughters, and instruct them in the things of God, and lead them to the Lord Jesus! Amen.

