

Jeremiah 46-47 “Politics and the Kingdom of God I: Nations, Know Your Limits” July 10, 2016

In one sense it is proper to be angry about injustice –  
and it is right to plead with God to bring vengeance.  
After all, God says, “Vengeance is *mine*. I will repay.”

But there also comes a point when you are grieved to the heart at the slaughter and bloodshed,  
and you just cry out,

*<sup>6</sup> Ah, sword of the LORD!  
How long till you are quiet?  
Put yourself into your scabbard;  
rest and be still!*

Jeremiah is speaking about the *Philistines*.

These are the enemies of God’s people – and have been for hundreds of years!  
But even as God himself does not delight in the death of the wicked,  
so also we may grow weary of the violence and death.

I have long maintained the practice of preaching through books of the Bible,  
resisting the temptation to use the pulpit as my own platform for my opinions.  
Hot button topics will come and go –  
but the Word of God endures forever.

What we need most of all is *not* to hear what Pastor Peter thinks about modern politics –  
what we need most of all is to hear what *God* says to all generations.

But every once in a while, the text for a given Sunday  
happens to line up neatly with what is happening in our society.

And so for the next few weeks we will be looking at what Jeremiah says  
about “Politics and the Kingdom of God.”

So far in Jeremiah we have focused mostly on Jeremiah’s message to the church –  
the people of God.

But now we hear Jeremiah’s message concerning the nations.  
Now, it’s important to recognize that Jeremiah is not actually speaking *to* the nations.  
He is still speaking to the church – to the people of God.

But he is speaking to the people of God *about* the nations.  
How should we think about the political world around us?  
How should we think about the powers of this age?

And verse 1 of chapter 46 makes this clear:

## **Introduction: “Concerning the Nations” (46:1)**

*46 The word of the LORD that came to Jeremiah the prophet concerning the nations.*

God had told Baruch that he was bringing disaster on all flesh.

Not just Jerusalem – not just the Jews –  
but upon all humanity.

Therefore the oracles concerning the nations fits well in this place.

In the Babylonian text (which we have)

the oracles against the nations appear as a Postscript  
to Jeremiah’s prophecies regarding Jerusalem.

In one sense, it feels like the book of Jeremiah is over.

And now we get these seven chapters of oracles against the nations.

But in the Babylonian text of Jeremiah,

this postscript is designed to show us that God’s purposes are *broader*  
than just Jerusalem.

Yes, salvation will come through Jerusalem –

but Yahweh is God over all nations!

On the other hand, in the Alexandrian text (used in the Eastern Orthodox Church)

the oracles against the nations are inserted in the middle of chapter 25.

So, just for a moment, turn back to chapter 25.

Chapter 25 speaks of the fourth year of Joehoiakim – the first year of Nebuchadnezzar –

and says that God will give Jerusalem over to Nebuchadnezzar,

and Jerusalem will become a ruin and a waste,

and these nations will serve Babylon for seventy years.

Then after seventy years, God will punish Babylon and restore his people.

Chapter 25, verse 13 says:

“I will bring upon that land [Babylon] all the words that I have uttered against it,  
everything written in this book which Jeremiah prophesied against all the nations.”

And then, the Alexandrian text inserts what we call chapters 46-51.

And then after the oracles concerning the nations,

the Alexandrian text comes back to the cup of wrath (25:15ff).

That’s a really good spot for the Oracles against the Nations.

But, then again, so is this!

It’s also the case that the two texts put the oracles in different order.

In the LXX, the order is Elam, Egypt, Babylon, Philistines,

Edom, Ammon, Kedar, Damascus and Moab;

In the MT, the order is Egypt, Philistines, Moab, Ammon, Edom,

Damascus, Kedar, Elam, and Babylon.

If you end the book with chapter 45 – like the Alexandrian manuscript does,  
then the point to the Alexandrian exiles is *you are all going to die!*  
(Except those few who repent and trust the LORD like Baruch and Ebed-Melech)  
But in the Babylonian manuscript,  
the focus is *not* on the Egyptian exiles, but on God’s purposes for all of history –  
and for all nations.

The judgment of the nations begins with Egypt – and ends with Babylon.

Why is this important?

This takes the same pattern as the history of Israel.  
From slavery in Egypt to exile in Babylon.  
(and in the middle, Israel skirmished with the Philistines,  
the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Syrians, etc.)

And that’s why it is fitting that in the Babylonian text  
the oracles begin with Egypt.

### 1. Regarding Egypt (46:2-28)

#### a. The Battle of Carchemish: The Pride of Nations Will Be Vanquished (v2-12)

##### i. “Terror on Every Side” – Egypt Defeated (v2-6)

<sup>2</sup> *About Egypt. Concerning the army of Pharaoh Neco, king of Egypt, which was by the river Euphrates at Carchemish and which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon defeated in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah:*

The battle of Carchemish in 605 B.C. (the 4<sup>th</sup> year of Jehoiakim)  
was the final step in the ascendancy of Babylon.

The Neo-Babylonian empire had been rising for a generation.

The Assyrians had been pushed back step by step.

The Egyptians (who had long been opposed to Assyria)  
were now Assyrian allies,

because they preferred the enemy they knew (Assyria)  
to the enemy they didn’t know (Babylon).

Assyria was weak.

They needed Egypt’s help – and Egypt knew it.

And so Pharaoh Neco of Egypt took his army up to the Euphrates River –  
to Carchemish – where he battled Nebuchadnezzar – and lost.

The description of the battle in verses 3-5 is pretty generic.

Get ready for battle!

<sup>3</sup> *“Prepare buckler and shield,  
and advance for battle!*

<sup>4</sup> *Harness the horses;*

*mount, O horsemen!  
Take your stations with your helmets,  
polish your spears,  
put on your armor!  
5 Why have I seen it?  
They are dismayed  
and have turned backward.  
Their warriors are beaten down  
and have fled in haste;  
they look not back—  
terror on every side!  
declares the LORD.*

But then in verse 5, everything turns against them –  
“Their warriors are beaten down and have fled in haste;  
they look not back – terror on every side! declares the LORD”

And in keeping with what we know about the battle –  
the Babylonians pursued and effectively destroyed the Egyptian army:

*6 “The swift cannot flee away,  
nor the warrior escape;  
in the north by the river Euphrates  
they have stumbled and fallen.*

Then in verses 7-9, Jeremiah provides the explanation for Egypt’s fall:

#### **ii. Pride Goes Before a Fall (v7-9)**

*7 “Who is this, rising like the Nile,  
like rivers whose waters surge?  
8 Egypt rises like the Nile,  
like rivers whose waters surge.  
He said, ‘I will rise, I will cover the earth,  
I will destroy cities and their inhabitants.’  
9 Advance, O horses,  
and rage, O chariots!  
Let the warriors go out:  
men of Cush and Put who handle the shield,  
men of Lud, skilled in handling the bow.*

The flooding of the Nile is what makes the land of Egypt fertile.  
If it wasn’t for the annual inundation of the Nile,  
Egypt would be a desert.  
That is what God intended for the Nile River.

But what would happen if the Nile River decided to flood the whole world?!

“I will rise, I will cover the earth, I will destroy cities and their inhabitants.”

When nations seek to expand their own bounds –  
when nations seek their own glory at the expense of other nations –  
they are setting themselves up for destruction.

What is God’s rule for the nations?

When you look at the oracles against the nations in Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Amos,  
one common feature is something very like the golden rule.

“Do unto others as you would have them do to you.”

If Egypt tries to rule the world,  
then the world will overrun Egypt.

Paul says in Acts 17:26-27, that God

*“made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth,  
having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place,  
27 that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him.”*

That’s not merely descriptive.

God has appointed boundaries for every nation.

When nations overstep their boundaries, they are storing up wrath for themselves.

Let me give an easy example.

In 1846, the United States started a war with Mexico

because Mexico wouldn’t sell a large percentage of its land to the US.

Most of the US territories were in the northwest –

designated by the Missouri Compromise of 1820 as free soil – not open to slavery.

Southerners wanted more slave states – but the southwest belonged to Mexico –

so the United States started a war in order to add slave states.

A large number of Christians in the US protested against the Mexican War.

Many recognized that it was entirely unjust.

But sometimes the wicked prosper.

Sometimes it takes time for judgment to fall.

The Mexican War worked.

The United States added the Southwest from Texas to California –

but in so doing, the US stored up an extra measure of wrath,

which was meted out fifteen years later in the Civil War.

(More Americans died in the Civil War than in all other wars combined)

I have no difficulty saying that the death and destruction of the Civil War

was due – at least in part – to America’s national, corporate sins.

The Mexican War, slavery, our nation’s treatment of Indians, and *many other sins*

all combined to warrant God's mighty hand smiting the United States in 1860.

It's important to be careful in a providential reading of history.

We don't know in advance how long God will give.

In chapter 25, we were told that God would give Babylon 70 years.

After the Mexican War, he gave the US less than fifteen years.

But it's not clear to me that the US ever "repented" –

as our subsequent treatment of blacks, Indians, and Mexicans demonstrates!

So, if God will judge the nations for expanding beyond their borders –

how can a nation know its limits?

Again, the Golden Rule is a good test!

If you wouldn't want another nation to do it to you,  
then don't do it to another nation!

If you don't like Saddam Hussein, and you think that someone else who would do better,  
only seek regime change if you wouldn't mind another country  
doing the same to us if they don't like our president!

God did not give George W. Bush rule over Iraq.

He gave him rule over the United States.

Can you imagine a world in which the United States is not the power-broker among the nations?

In the same way, the Egyptians could not imagine a world in which Egypt did not have a say  
in the affairs of the middle-east.

But when nations overstep their bounds –

when nations pursue their own self-interest rather than the Golden Rule –  
then will come the day of the Lord GOD of Hosts.

### **iii. The Day of the LORD – a Day of Vengeance (v10-12)**

*<sup>10</sup> That day is the day of the Lord GOD of hosts,  
a day of vengeance,  
to avenge himself on his foes.*

*The sword shall devour and be sated  
and drink its fill of their blood.*

*For the Lord GOD of hosts holds a sacrifice  
in the north country by the river Euphrates.*

The day of the LORD is a day of vengeance

where God will avenge himself on his foes.

Vengeance is a good thing – when God does it!

It's not so good when we do it!

The story is told of a young monk in the desert who went to his advisor

and told him how he had been wronged,  
and how he intended to make things right  
by getting revenge on the man who had wronged him.

The older monk said, “Indeed, let us pray:  
‘Ah Lord God, we don’t need you for this one,  
we can take vengeance for ourselves. Amen.”  
Immediately the younger monk recognized his fault!

Our anger can accomplish nothing good!  
The wrath of man does not accomplish the righteousness of God!

Vengeance belongs to the LORD.

And we need to be patient and allow him to do his mighty deeds.  
Otherwise, yes, we may become the instrument of God in bringing justice to the wicked.  
(I have no difficulty saying that Saddam Hussein *deserved* to be overthrown –  
and George W. Bush served as God’s agent in bringing vengeance!  
But in so doing, the United States once again overstepped our boundaries,  
and stored up another measure of vengeance against us!)

There are two images used in verses 10-12.

First, in verse 10, there is the image of the Day of the Lord GOD of hosts –  
where the sword devours and drinks its fill of blood –  
which is called “a sacrifice...by the river Euphrates.”  
What does it mean that the Battle of Carchemish is a “sacrifice”?

Think about the way Hebrews says it:  
“without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sins.” (Heb 9:22)

Sin demands a blood sacrifice.  
The wages of sin is death.  
So either *you* die – or someone dies in your place.

The second image in verses 11-12 is the image of healing – or balm.

<sup>11</sup> *Go up to Gilead, and take balm,  
O virgin daughter of Egypt!  
In vain you have used many medicines;  
there is no healing for you.*  
<sup>12</sup> *The nations have heard of your shame,  
and the earth is full of your cry;  
for warrior has stumbled against warrior;  
they have both fallen together.”*

There is no medicine that can cure Egypt.  
There is no nation that can rescue her.

There is a balm in Gilead – on the east side of the Jordan in Israel.  
But of course, since Nebuchadnezzar has swept through Israel,  
there nothing left.

The nations have heard of your shame.  
All the greatness of Egypt is now cast down.  
Never think that the United States to “too big to fail.”

And that is the theme of part two –  
a message that would appear to come from around the time of Jeremiah’s arrival in Egypt.  
(since verse 14 refers to the same places where the refugees settled).

**b. The Coming of Nebuchadnezzar: The Fate of Nations and Their Gods (v13-28)**

**i. The Nations Are Noisy – But Powerless (v13-17)**

<sup>13</sup> *The word that the LORD spoke to Jeremiah the prophet about the coming of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon to strike the land of Egypt:*

<sup>14</sup> *“Declare in Egypt, and proclaim in Migdol;  
proclaim in Memphis and Tahpanhes;  
say, ‘Stand ready and be prepared,  
for the sword shall devour around you.’*

<sup>15</sup> *Why are your mighty ones face down?  
They do not stand<sup>[a]</sup>  
because the LORD thrust them down.*

<sup>16</sup> *He made many stumble, and they fell,  
and they said one to another,  
‘Arise, and let us go back to our own people  
and to the land of our birth,  
because of the sword of the oppressor.’*

<sup>17</sup> *Call the name of Pharaoh, king of Egypt,  
‘Noisy one who lets the hour go by.’*

Yes, in one sense it is Nebuchadnezzar who comes against Egypt.  
But verse 15 points out that before Nebuchadnezzar’s army arrives,  
the mighty ones of Egypt are face down – because the LORD thrust them down.  
This brings back memories of how the ark of the LORD went before Israel  
into the temple of Dagon – the Philistine god –  
and how the LORD cast down Dagon before the ark of the covenant.

The gods of Egypt cannot stand against the LORD.  
Therefore the armies of Egypt cannot stand against Babylon.

And so the armies flee back to Egypt because of the “sword of the oppressor”  
and the LORD gives Pharaoh Hophra a new name.

The Egyptian name of Hophra is Haabire.



The Hebrew for “lets go by” is *he’ebir*.

So call the name of Pharaoh – “Noisy one who lets the hour go by.”

He’s all talk.

When the hour comes, he will do nothing.

**ii. The Fate of Egypt: the Heifer and the Serpent (v18-26)**

<sup>18</sup> *“As I live, declares the King,  
whose name is the LORD of hosts,  
like Tabor among the mountains  
and like Carmel by the sea, shall one come.*

<sup>19</sup> *Prepare yourselves baggage for exile,  
O inhabitants of Egypt!  
For Memphis shall become a waste,  
a ruin, without inhabitant.*

In verses 18-19, Jeremiah says that the people of Egypt should prepare themselves for exile – for Memphis shall become a waste, a ruin, without inhabitant.

And then in verses 20-21, Jeremiah compares Egypt to a “beautiful heifer” – a cow plagued by a biting fly – a gadfly from the north.

<sup>20</sup> *“A beautiful heifer is Egypt,  
but a biting fly from the north has come upon her.*

<sup>21</sup> *Even her hired soldiers in her midst  
are like fattened calves;  
yes, they have turned and fled together;  
they did not stand,  
for the day of their calamity has come upon them,  
the time of their punishment.*

Egypt may try to buy their way out of trouble –  
but the day of their calamity has come upon them –  
the time of their punishment.

<sup>22</sup> *“She makes a sound like a serpent gliding away;  
for her enemies march in force  
and come against her with axes  
like those who fell trees.*

<sup>23</sup> *They shall cut down her forest,  
declares the LORD,  
though it is impenetrable,  
because they are more numerous than locusts;  
they are without number.*

<sup>24</sup> *The daughter of Egypt shall be put to shame;  
she shall be delivered into the hand of a people from the north.”*

The heifer tries to escape – making a sound like a serpent  
(which is one of the traditional images of Egypt –  
the sea monster lying in the waters of the Nile!)  
but her enemies will do to her what they did to Jerusalem –  
felling trees – cutting down her forests –  
like a plague of locusts from the north.

(read 25-26)

*<sup>25</sup> The LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, said: “Behold, I am bringing punishment upon [against] Amon of Thebes, and [against] Pharaoh and [against] Egypt and [against] her gods and [against] her kings, upon [against] Pharaoh and those who trust in him. <sup>26</sup> I will deliver them into the hand of those who seek their life, into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and his officers. Afterward Egypt shall be inhabited as in the days of old, declares the LORD.*

God is *against* Egypt!

God will do to Egypt what he did to Jerusalem.

Remember that Jeremiah is not actually talking to Egyptians.

He is speaking to Israel.

Those who dwell in Egypt had been pro-Egyptian.

They had hoped that Egypt would defend them from Babylon.

But Egypt has failed – and now Egypt will be destroyed.

The end of verse 26 provides only the faintest of hope to Egypt –  
but that is because Jeremiah is not really talking to Egypt!

And even as he says this to Israel, the LORD has a word to Israel as well:

### **iii. A Promise to Jacob, My Servant (v27-28)**

*<sup>27</sup> “But fear not, O Jacob my servant,  
nor be dismayed, O Israel,  
for behold, I will save you from far away,  
and your offspring from the land of their captivity.  
Jacob shall return and have quiet and ease,  
and none shall make him afraid.*

*<sup>28</sup> Fear not, O Jacob my servant,  
declares the LORD,  
for I am with you.  
I will make a full end of all the nations  
to which I have driven you,  
but of you I will not make a full end.  
I will discipline you in just measure,  
and I will by no means leave you unpunished.”*

Verses 27-28 function as something of an awkward addendum to the oracle against Egypt.  
It has nothing to do with Egypt at all!  
Indeed, there is nothing here that would give particular hope to the refugees in Egypt.  
“I will save you from far away, and your offspring from the land of their captivity”  
probably refers to those in exile in *Babylon*.

Is there a future for the Egyptian refugees?

Perhaps.

God says that he will not make a *full end* of his people.

“I will discipline you in just measure, and I will by no means leave you unpunished.”

As we consider the coming wrath of God against the nations,  
we are reminded that judgment begins with the household of God (1 Peter 4),  
and if it begins with us, what will happen  
to those who do not obey the gospel of God?

There is a future for the people of God.

Therefore repent and believe the gospel!

## **2. Regarding the Philistines: God’s Judgment Will Not Fail (47:1-7)**

We conclude tonight with the word of the LORD “concerning the Philistines.

This was given “before Pharaoh struck down Gaza.”

We don’t know when that happened.

We know that Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Ashkelon in 604 BC,  
so this might be even earlier.

While the Philistines had been a big thorn in Israel’s side earlier,  
by this era they were simply an extension of Egypt,  
since they were pretty fully under Egyptian rule.

(the event of verse 1 might have been a futile, last-minute attempt by the Philistines  
to disengage from Egypt...)

*47 The word of the LORD that came to Jeremiah the prophet concerning the Philistines, before  
Pharaoh struck down Gaza.*

<sup>2</sup> *“Thus says the LORD:*

*Behold, waters are rising out of the north,  
and shall become an overflowing torrent;  
they shall overflow the land and all that fills it,  
the city and those who dwell in it.*

*Men shall cry out,  
and every inhabitant of the land shall wail.*

<sup>3</sup> *At the noise of the stamping of the hoofs of his stallions,  
at the rushing of his chariots, at the rumbling of their wheels,  
the fathers look not back to their children,  
so feeble are their hands,*

*<sup>4</sup> because of the day that is coming to destroy  
all the Philistines,  
to cut off from Tyre and Sidon  
every helper that remains.*

*For the LORD is destroying the Philistines,  
the remnant of the coastland of Caphtor.*

*<sup>5</sup> Baldness has come upon Gaza;  
Ashkelon has perished.*

*O remnant of their valley,  
how long will you gash yourselves?*

Again Jeremiah speaks of the coming day when the Philistines, Tyre, Sidon –  
all nations who might have been of use against Babylon  
are all destroyed by the LORD through the northern waters.

The northern waters – of course – are the Babylonian armies –  
here portrayed as a flood (like the image of Egypt as the Nile River earlier).

And the sword of the LORD comes relentlessly down from the north to destroy and kill.

*<sup>6</sup> Ah, sword of the LORD!  
How long till you are quiet?  
Put yourself into your scabbard;  
rest and be still!*

God uses the wicked (like Nebuchadnezzar) as his instrument in bringing judgment.  
Jeremiah watches as the sword of the LORD continues to be noisy.  
And he pleads with it to “rest and be still.”

But in the next breath, he recognizes the purposes of God:

*<sup>7</sup> How can it<sup>[b]</sup> be quiet  
when the LORD has given it a charge?  
Against Ashkelon and against the seashore  
he has appointed it.”*

God is using foolish and wicked men to bring destruction on our land.  
Every time a police officer shoots a black man, it stokes the embers of the fire.  
And every time a black man shoots a police officer,  
it raises the fears and tensions another step.

In one sense we are helpless to stop it –  
“how can it be quiet when the LORD has given it a charge.”

But in another sense, we do not know the limit God has appointed for this cycle of destruction.  
And so we continue to plead with God to have mercy.