

# Jeremiah 49: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Jeremiah chapter 49 concerning the Ammonites, thus says the Lord. Has Israel no sons? Has he no heir? Why then has Milcom dispossessed Gad and his people settled in its cities? Therefore behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will cause the battle cry to be heard against Rabbah of the Ammonites. It shall become a desolate mound, and its villages shall be burned with fire. Then Israel shall dispossess those who dispossessed him, says the Lord. Wail, O Heshbon, for Ai is laid waste. Cry out, O daughters of Rabbah. Put on sackcloth, lament, and run to and fro among the hedges, for Milcom shall go into exile with his priests and his officials. Why do you boast of your valleys, O faithless daughter, who trusted in her treasures, saying, Who will come against me? Behold, I will bring terror upon you, declares the Lord God of hosts, from all who are around you, and you shall be driven out, every man straight before him, with none to gather the fugitives. But afterward I will restore the fortunes of the Ammonites, declares the

Lord. Concerning Edom, thus says the Lord of hosts, Is wisdom no more in Teman? Has counsel perished from the prudent? Has their wisdom vanished? Flee, turn back, dwell in the depths, O inhabitants of Dedan. For I will bring the calamity of Esau upon him, the time when I punish him. If grape-gatherers come to you, would they not leave gleanings? If thieves came by night, would they not destroy only enough for themselves? But I have stripped Esau bare. I have uncovered his hiding places, and he is not able to conceal himself. His children are destroyed, and his brothers, and his neighbors, and he is no more.

Leave your fatherless children. I will keep them alive, and let your widows trust in me. For thus says the Lord, If those who did not deserve to drink the cup must drink it, will you go unpunished?

You shall not go unpunished, but you must drink. For I have sworn by myself, declares the Lord, that Bosra shall become a horror, a taunt, a waste, and a curse, and all her cities shall be perpetual wastes. I have heard a message from the Lord, and an envoy has been sent among the nations. Gather yourselves together, and come against her, and rise up for battle. For behold, I will make you small among the nations, despised among mankind. The horror you inspire has deceived you, and the pride of your heart, you who live in the clefts of the rock, who hold the height of the hill.

Though you make your nest as high as the eagles, I will bring you down from there, declares the Lord. Edom shall become a horror. Everyone who passes by it will be horrified, and will hiss because of all its disasters. As when Sodom and Gomorrah and their neighboring cities were overthrown, says the Lord, no man shall dwell there, no man shall sojourn in her. Behold, like a lion coming up from the jungle of the Jordan, against a perennial pasture, I will suddenly make him run away from her, and I will appoint over her whomever I choose. For who is like me? Who will summon me? What shepherd can stand before me? Therefore hear the plan that the Lord has made against Edom, and the purposes that he has formed against the inhabitants of Teman. Even the little ones of the flock shall be dragged away. Surely their fold shall be appalled at their fate. At the sound of their fold the earth shall tremble. The sound of their cry shall be heard at the Red Sea. Behold, one shall mount up and fly swiftly like an eagle, and spread his wings against Bosra. And the heart of the warriors of Edom shall be in that day like the heart of a woman in her birth pains.

Concerning Damascus. Hamath and Arpad are confounded, for they have heard bad news. They melt in fear. They are troubled like the sea that cannot be quiet. Damascus has become feeble. She turned to flee, and panic seized her. Anguish and sorrows have taken hold of her, as of a woman in labour. How is the famous city not forsaken, the city of my joy? Therefore her young men shall fall in her squares, and all her soldiers shall be destroyed in that day, declares the Lord of hosts. And I will kindle a fire in the wall of Damascus, and it shall devour the strongholds of Ben-Hadad. Concerning Kedar and the kingdoms of Hazor that Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, struck down. Thus says the Lord, Rise up, advance against Kedar. Destroy the people of the east. Their tents and their

flocks shall be taken, their curtains and all their goods. Their camels shall be led away from them, and men shall cry to them, terror on every side. Flee, wander far away, dwell in the depths, O inhabitants of Hazor, declares the Lord. For Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, has made a plan against you, and formed a purpose against you. Rise up, advance against a nation at ease, that dwells securely, declares the Lord, that has no gates or bars, that dwells alone. Their camels shall become plunder, the herds of livestock a spoil. I will scatter to every wind those who cut the corners of their hair, and I will bring their calamity from every side of them, declares the Lord. Hazor shall become a haunt of jackals, an everlasting waste. No man shall dwell there, no man shall sojourn in her. The word of the Lord that came to Jeremiah the prophet concerning Elam in the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah, king of Judah. Thus says the Lord of hosts, Behold, I will break the bow of Elam, the mainstay of their might, and I will bring upon Elam the four winds from the four quarters of heaven, and I will scatter them to all those winds, and there shall be no nation to which those driven out of Elam shall not come. I will terrify Elam before their enemies, and before those who seek their life.

I will bring disaster upon them, my fierce anger, declares the Lord. I will send the sword after them, until I have consumed them, and I will set my throne in Elam, and destroy their king and officials, declares the Lord. But in the latter days I will restore the fortunes of Elam, declares the Lord.

[ 6 : 22 ] After declaring the Lord's judgment upon the Egyptians, the Philistines, and Moab, in Jeremiah chapter 49 we move to Ammon, Edom, Damascus, Kedar, and Elam. Ammon's position after Moab is a natural one, as the two nations were related through Lot. Both of the nations arose from incestuous relations between Lot and his daughters. Ammon was a trans-Jordanian tribe living to the north of Moab, in land that was disputed at various points in Israel's history. Much of their region was under the control of Israel's trans-Jordanian tribes at key points in their history. Disputes over the ownership of the land can be seen in the story of Jephthah in Judges chapter 11. King David had also famously besieged Rabbah in 2 Samuel and subjugated the Ammonites. During the reign of Jehoiakim, the Ammonites would assist the Babylonians in harassing Judah. 2 Kings chapter 24 verse 2, And the Lord sent against him bands of the Chaldeans, and bands of the Syrians, and bands of the Moabites, and bands of the Ammonites, and sent them against Judah to destroy it, according to the word of the

Lord that he spoke by his servants the prophets. In Jeremiah chapter 27 verse 3 we see that the Ammonites were one of the nations plotting rebellion against Babylon in 594 BC. Baalus, king of the Ammonites, had also supported Ishmael, the son of Nethaniah, against Gedaliah, the governor of Judah. The prophecy concerning the Ammonites begins by speaking about this disputed territory. They had dispossessed, in the name of their god Milcom, land that formerly belonged to the tribe of Gad. In a rhetorical question, the Lord asks whether Israel has no sons or no heirs, that this land should be given into the hand of Milcom and his people. Although they had dispossessed Gad, the time would come when they would be dispossessed. Rather, their capital would become a desolate mound. Its associated villages would be burned down, and later in time Israel would dispossess the Ammonites. We see this fulfilled, I believe, in 1 Maccabees chapter 5 verses 6 to 8.

Then he marched against the land of Ammon, where he met a large and powerful army under the command of a man named Timothy. Judas won many battles against them, and finally defeated them. He captured Jazar and its surrounding villages, and then returned to Judea. A similar judgment upon Ammon can be read in Ezekiel chapter 25 verses 1 to 7. The word of the Lord came to me, Son of man, set your face toward the Ammonites, and prophesy against them. Say to the Ammonites, Hear the word of the Lord God. Thus says the Lord God, because you said, Aha, over my sanctuary when it was profaned, and over the land of Israel when it was made desolate, and over the house of Judah when they went into exile. Therefore behold, I am handing you over to the people of the east for a possession, and they shall set their encampments against you, and make their dwellings in your midst. They shall eat your fruit, and they shall drink your milk. I will make Rabba a pasture for camels, and Ammon a fold for flocks. Then you will know that I am the Lord. For thus says the Lord God, because you have clapped your hands, and stamped your feet, and rejoiced with all the malice within your soul against the land of Israel.

Therefore behold, I have stretched out my hand against you, and will hand you over as plunder to the nations. And I will cut you off from the peoples, and will make you perish out of all the countries. I will destroy you. Then you will know that I am the Lord. In Ezekiel, Ammon is being judged for their response to the destruction of Judah, and the way that at that point they treated Judah as an object

of derision, and as prey. The prophecy here in Jeremiah likely dates from before the fall of Jerusalem, but it speaks of a coming judgment upon the land of Ammon, a judgment upon their people, but also upon their priests, and the officials, and the God who is over them all, Milcom. Like its brother Moab, Ammon is judged in part on account of its pride, its self-confidence, its boasting in its valleys and its security, not believing that anyone could come against it and truly threaten it. Yet the Lord will bring them to account. This likely came to pass in 582 BC. However, the time would come when Ammon would be restored. Edom comes next. The land of Edom went from the river Zered in the north, to the Gulf of Aqaba in the south, but it also included the land of Seir. It was below Judah and Moab. It had the Arabah Valley on the west, and the Syrian Arabian Desert on the east. However, by this point it seemed to have extended to the southeast, down into what is now Saudi Arabia, in Dedan. Later, the Edomites would become known as Idumeans, and after the Nabateans took over their original territory, they largely lived in the southern region of Judah. Edom was associated with Esau, who took over the region from the Horites. As Edom is associated with Esau, Jacob's brother, there are twin dynamics between Israel and Edom, something that we see particularly in Genesis chapter 36. Edom had been involved in the plot against Babylon in 594 BC. Edom was associated with wisdom, and it's quite likely that a lot of the wisdom literature had some connections with the land of Edom. Many have suggested that the book of Job has an Edomite provenance, and various passages in the book of Proverbs too. Teman, which is mentioned at the beginning of the oracle against Edom here, was a northeastern region of Edom, whose capital was Bosra. Teman was the firstborn son of Esau's firstborn son. In the book of Job, we have Eliphaz the Temanite. After the downfall of Jerusalem, the Edomites prayed upon Judah, rejoicing in Judah's demise. We have reference to this in

[12:04] Lamentations chapter 4 verse 21. Rejoice and be glad, O daughter of Edom, you who dwell in the land of Uz. But to you also the cup shall pass. You shall become drunk and strip yourself bare.

An extended judgment upon Edom is found in the book of Obadiah in verses 5 to 16. It uses very similar imagery to the book of Jeremiah, but it seems to be addressed to a slightly later period. If thieves came to you, if plunderers came by night, how you have been destroyed! Would they not steal only enough for themselves? If grape-gatherers came to you, would they not leave gleanings? How Esau has been pillaged, his treasures sought out. As your allies have driven you to your border, those at peace with you have deceived you, they have prevailed against you. Those who eat your bread have set a trap beneath you, you have no understanding. Will I not on that day, declares the Lord, destroy the wise men out of Edom, an understanding out of Mount Esau? And your mighty men shall be dismayed, O Teman, so that every man from Mount Esau will be cut off by slaughter, because of the violence done to your brother Jacob. Shame shall cover you, and you shall be cut off forever. On the day that you stood aloof, on the day that strangers carried off his wealth, and foreigners entered his gates and cast lots for Jerusalem, you were like one of them. But do not gloat over the day of your brother, in the day of his misfortune. Do not rejoice over the people of

Judah in the day of their ruin. Do not boast in the day of distress. Do not enter the gate of my people in the day of their calamity. Do not gloat over his disaster in the day of his calamity. Do not loot his wealth in the day of his calamity. Do not stand at the crossroads to cut off his fugitives. Do not hand over his survivors in the day of distress. For the day of the Lord is near upon all the nations. As you have done, it shall be done to you. Your deeds shall return on your own head.

[14:02] For as you have drunk on my holy mountain, so all the nations shall drink continually. They shall drink and swallow, and shall be as though they had never been. Obadiah verses 1 to 4 are also largely similar to verses 14 to 16 of this chapter in Jeremiah. Edom later seems to have been dispossessed by Nabonidus, the king of Babylon, in the mid-6th century. We can read a description of the aftermath of this destruction in Malachi chapter 1, verses 2 to 5.

I have loved you, says the Lord. But you say, How have you loved us? Is not Esau Jacob's brother? declares the Lord. Yet I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated. I have laid waste his hill country, and left his heritage to jackals of the desert. If Edom says, We are shattered, but we will rebuild the ruins. The Lord of hosts says, They may build, but I will tear down, and they will be called the wicked country, and the people with whom the Lord is angry forever. Your own eyes shall see this, and you shall say, Great is the Lord beyond the border of Israel. Edom is going to be stripped clean and laid bare.

It will have no hiding place from the Lord's judgment. There will be nothing left behind. However, as the Edomites are killed, the Lord tells them in a very arresting statement to leave their fatherless children to him. He will preserve them, and that their widows should trust in him.

The Edomite men will perish for their sins, but he will preserve their women and children. Edom must not think it unjust that it is suffering such judgment. Nations that have not sinned in the way that Edom has are having to drink the cup of the Lord's judgment, and so Edom has no grounds for any complaint. Once again, Edom is a proud nation that is going to be brought low. It thinks itself great and secure, but it will be made a wasteland. The Lord compares himself to a lion coming out of the thick forest to prey upon the animals of the pasture land. The shepherds, the kings of Edom, will be powerless to protect their flock, the people committed to their charge. The judgment declared here over Edom is declared in pretty much the same form over Babylon in chapter 50 verses 44 to 46, details being changed to make it appropriate to the object of the oracle.

47, behold, like a lion coming up from the thicket of the Jordan against a perennial pasture, I will suddenly make them run away from her, and I will appoint over her whomever I choose. For who is like me? Who will summon me? What shepherd can stand before me? Therefore hear the plan that the Lord has made against Babylon, and the purposes that he has formed against the land of the Chaldeans.

[16:39] Surely the little ones of their flock shall be dragged away. Surely their foals shall be appalled at their fate. At the sound of the capture of Babylon, the earth shall tremble, and her cry shall be heard among the nations. The next judgment is upon Damascus, the chief city of the Syrians.

The Syrians, or the Arameans, were the main threat to the northern kingdom of Israel until the rise of the Assyrians. They were an Assyrian province then, before being taken over by the Babylonians.

Carchemish and Hamath were both important territories during this period, strategic for the Assyrians, the Egyptians, and the Babylonians, the three major powers that were competing for dominance of that region from the 8th to the 6th century BC. This prophecy might be dated from around 605 BC, when Babylon defeated the Egyptians at Carchemish. Next there are judgments upon Kedar and Habor, northern Arabian people here called people of the east. The fulfillment of these prophecies likely occurred around 599 BC, when Nebuchadnezzar attacked the Arabs in the desert. These peoples controlled large numbers of cattle, many of them gained from plundering other peoples, but now they, who have ravaged many other peoples over their history, will be preyed upon themselves. Their camels will become plunder, and their herds of livestock are spoil. They are advised to flee and to find some place to hide themselves. The final word of this chapter is addressed to the Elamites.

The Elamites were one of the descendants of Shem in the Table of Nations in Genesis chapter 10. They're also mentioned in chapter 14, as King Chedorlaomer of Elam and the kings who were with him fought against Abram and his allies. Elam was situated to the east of the Tigris in modern-day Iran. The Elamites and the Medes lived in what would later become Persia. The attack upon the Elamites that's being prophesied here probably occurred in 596 to 595 BC. Later on, in Acts chapter 2, in the list of the peoples present on the day of Pentecost, we have another reference to Elamites. Walter Brueggemann draws attention to the series of verbs that express the Lord's purpose here. I will break, I will bring, I will scatter, I will terrify, I will bring evil, I will send, I will set.

[18:55] Elam will be scattered, refugees from the nation being dispersed to all different parts of the world. Throughout, the Lord underlines the fact that he is the one that is bringing this judgment upon them, and when he has consumed them, he will set his throne in Elam. The destruction of Elam will be a demonstration of his sovereignty. However, as in the case of Egypt, Moab and Ammon, there will be a mitigation of Elam's judgment. The time will come in the latter days when Elam's fortunes will be restored.

A question to consider. The prophecies of these chapters would mostly be delivered to a Judahite audience. Beyond mere prediction, what lessons could the people in Judah gain from the judgments declared upon their neighbors?