

Jeremiah 47: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 0 0] Jeremiah chapter 47. The word of the Lord that came to Jeremiah the prophet concerning the Philistines before Pharaoh struck down Gaza. 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, at the noise of the stamping of the hooves 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, 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 Kapthor. Baldness has come upon Gaza, Ashkelon has perished. O remnant of their valley, how long will you gash yourselves? Ah, sword of the Lord, how long till you are quiet? Put yourself into your scabbard, rest and be still. How can it be quiet, when the Lord has given it a charge? Against Ashkelon, and against the seashore he has appointed it. Jeremiah's oracles against the nations continue in chapter 47 with a prophecy against the Philistines. The Philistines, particularly in the years of the early kingdom, had been a powerful force within the land, representing an important enemy in the time of Saul and David. Before that time, they had struck a terrible blow against the

Israelites in defeating them at the battle of Aphek. That had led to the breakdown of the old tabernacle order. The judge Samson had also fought against them on several occasions. References to the Philistines go all the way back to the book of Genesis. Both Abraham and Isaac sojourned with the Philistines for a period of time, and then even before that we have a reference to the Philistines in Genesis chapter 10 verses 13 to 14 in the Table of Nations. Egypt father Ludim, Anamim, Lehebim, Naphtuhim, Pathrusim, Kasluhim, from whom the Philistines came, and Kaphtorim. By this point in history, the Philistines were not big players in the region. They came under the power of the Egyptians and Babylonians. Like the Judahites during this period, they were caught in the middle of these great powers, and their fate was largely determined by the rising and falling of those great powers' prospects. They had formerly been important as an Egyptian satellite, and one of the powers through which the Egyptians maintained their dominance within the land. The location of this oracle immediately after that concerning the Egyptians in chapter 46 is probably for this reason. The prophecies of this chapter concern the judgment and the destruction that's going to be brought upon

Philistia from the north, from Babylon. However, the prophecy is dated from before Pharaoh struck down Gaza. Philistia is going to experience an attack from the north, from the Babylonians, and then an attack from the south, from the Egyptians. After this, there will come a further attack, and a more decisive attack from the north. The series of events referred to in this prophecy likely start with the attack of Nebuchadnezzar upon Ashkelon and Ekron in 604 BC. We might reasonably presume that Gaza was attacked at the same time. It seems most probable that the Egyptian attack that's mentioned in verse 1 occurred around 600 BC, as the Egyptians sought to gain back control of this strategic coastal area.

However, a few years later, in 598 to 597 BC, the Babylonians attacked again, and this time the Egyptians did not strike back. While the Egyptians had won a limited victory around 600 BC, it was not to last.

In 2 Kings chapter 24 verse 7 we read, And the king of Egypt did not come again out of his land, for the king of Babylon had taken all that belonged to the king of Egypt, from the brook of Egypt to the river Euphrates. The prophecy compares the rise of Babylon to the rising of waters in the north that are going to come down and inundate the whole land of the Philistines. Like a flash flood, it's rapidly rising, it's going to come down quickly, it's going to overflow the whole land and wash them all away. The disaster coming from the north should remind us of the opening chapter.

[4 : 20] Then the Lord said to me, Out of the north, disaster shall be let loose upon all the inhabitants of the land. Neither the cities nor the countryside of the land are going to escape this judgment.

The prophet paints a vivid picture of rapidly approaching chariots, stamping horses, dust rising behind them, and the thundering of wheels as the great army of the Babylonians approaches.

Faced with this immense force, the Philistines proved powerless, their hands drooped down. They do not even have the strength to go back and rescue their own children. The Babylonians coming upon them will be the end of Philistia as a nation.

With the fall of Philistia, Tyre and Sidon will be left without supporters also. In verse 4, the Philistines are described as the remnant of the coastland of Kaphtor. In the prophecy of Amos, chapter 9, verse 7, the Philistines are described as having been brought from the land of Kaphtor.

Are you not like the Cushites to me, O people of Israel, declares the Lord? Did I not bring up Israel from the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Kaphtor, and the Syrians from Kerr?

[5 : 25] The exact location of Kaphtor is debated. It might be a reference to Crete. Verse 5 describes the situation of death. Baldness has come upon Gaza. Shaving the head was a pagan way of mourning the dead, as was the gashing of oneself described at the end of the verse.

Ashkelon has also been destroyed. Historically, there were five important cities in the Philistine pentapolis. Gaza, Ashkelon, Ekron, Gath, and Ashdod.

Gath was destroyed by the Assyrian Sargon II in 711 BC. Gaza wasn't completely destroyed by the Babylonians in 604 BC, as it was retaken by the Egyptians in 600 BC.

However, we have references to the kings of Gaza and Ashkelon as captives in Babylon. The prophecy against the Philistines ends with an image of the sword of the Lord.

The Lord is behind all of this judgment. The symbolism of the devouring sword is also found elsewhere in scripture. Within Jeremiah itself, we see such imagery again in chapter 50, verses 35 to 37.

[6 : 29] A sword against the Chaldeans, declares the Lord, and against the inhabitants of Babylon, and against her officials and her wise men. A sword against the diviners, that they may become fools.

A sword against her warriors, that they may be destroyed. A sword against her horses and against her chariots, and against all the foreign troops in her midst, that they may become women.

A sword against all her treasures, that they may be plundered. The prophet personifies and speaks to the sword. How long until it will be quiet and return to its sheath? And then he answers his question in verse 7.

It cannot be quiet, because the Lord has sent it out on its mission. The Lord has commissioned the sword against the land of the Philistines, and it will not be at rest until it has finished its task.

A question to consider. The prophecy against the Philistines in this chapter is distinguished in part by the fact that there is no reason given for the judgment upon the Philistines.

[7 : 28] How might the people first hearing this prophecy have interpreted the sort of judgment that it involved?