

A Message Concerning Egypt

46: 1-28

DIG: Why did Necho march against Nebuchadnezzar? Who would the people of Judah want to win and why? Why does Jeremiah prophesy defeat for Egypt? What is Egypt's problem (verse 25)? Why does God favor the pagan Babylonians (Ezekiel 29:19-20)? Thirty years later Nebuchadnezzar carries the war back into Egypt (see Gq - I am Going to Give Egypt to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon). What changed after this decisive battle? What does disciplined only with justice mean? What other types of justice are there? What is Egypt's ultimate destiny (see my commentary on Isaiah Ef - The LORD Will Make Himself Known to the Egyptians)?

REFLECT: How visible is God's plan and power, apart from the eyes of faith? Where do you see ADONAI's activity in your world, or don't you? Are you troubled by the direction of the world? What is your role? The LORD's role? The universal Church's role? Have you lived through a trying time, learned lots of lessons and then gone back to ways as in times past when the dust settled? How can you make a lesson once learned stick for all time? Do you stumble repeatedly over the same problem? What is the difference between a trial and temptation? Have you ever missed [your] opportunity when its time finally came? Why did you hesitate to follow through?

Sometime between 604 and 601 BC during the eleven-year reign of Jehoiakim

It is clear that Jeremiah and Ezekiel prophesied against Egypt at different times: Jeremiah 604-602 BC and Ezekiel 587 BC (see Fn - The Sin and Judgment of Egypt):

Both prophecies, however, were fulfilled many years later in 571 BC when king Nebuchadnezzar attacked Egypt and took massive amounts of plunders as his reward.

There are three parts of this message given by Jeremiah. First, there is a *look back* on Egypt's defeat by the Babylonians at **Carchemish** in 605 BC (46:3-12); then second, a *look forward* into the **near historical future** when Babylon will conquer Egypt in 571 BC. Third, Jeremiah gave a **far eschatological future** prophecy about Egypt in the messianic Kingdom.

This is the word of ADONAI that came to Jeremiah the prophet concerning the nations (46:1). This serves as an introduction to the entire unit of Chapters 46-51, connecting the Word of God and the future of the Gentile nations.

In the messages to Gentile nations, YHVH's governance over the world around Zion is asserted. In this assertion, **Egypt** is addressed first. **God** was using **Babylon** to discipline **Judah** and **Egypt** was **her** main adversary, consequently **Egypt** needed to be brought under the auspices of **the LORD** and conquered by **Nebuchadnezzar**. Furthermore, **Egypt** has come to be the original metaphor for worldly power that is organized against the purposes of **God**. So for both political and metaphorical-theological reasons, **Egypt** is named first in this list of Gentile nations, for when **Egypt** is brought under the rule and purpose of **Ha'Shem**, in effect, **ADONAI's** governance will be fully established.²¹³

Jeremiah first looks back on Egypt's defeat by the Babylonians at the battle of Carchemish. Concerning Egypt: This is the message against the army of Pharaoh Necho king of Egypt, which was defeated at Carchemish on the Euphrates River by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon in the fourth year of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah (46:2), which extended from March/April 605 to March/April 604 BC. Pharaoh Necho had defeated and killed king Josiah at Megiddo in 609 BC, whose successor, Jehoahaz, he deposed after a reign of only three months, and set Jehoiakim upon the throne. Extending Necho's conquests eastwards, he clashed with Nebuchadnezzar who overthrew him at Carchemish in 605 BC. This decisive victory, which continued the widespread Babylonian supremacy over nations in the region (see **Gt - Seventy Years of Imperial Babylonian Rule**) was the occasion of this message. The outcome of this battle displayed **ADONAI's** will and power.

Jeremiah mocks the weakness of the **Egyptian** army in the battle of Carchemish. **ADONAI** sarcastically called the army of **Egypt** to prepare their shields, both large and small, and march out for battle against the **Babylonians**! The prophet **knew that resistance would prove useless**. The horses for their chariots were harnessed and mounted. Their helmets and armor were put on, their spears were polished, and the infantry had taken their positions. The **Egyptian** army was poised for battle!

But the battle did not go **Egypt's** way. **Babylon's** swift attack left them terrified. The panic stricken soldiers fled in haste. In the ensuing confusion the fleeing warriors hindered their own retreat so much so that the swift were not able to flee nor were the strong able to escape. There was *magor-missabib*, or *terror on every side* (Jeremiah 6:25, 20:3-4 and 10; 49:29; Psalm 31:13; Lamentations 2:22). In the north by the River Euphrates they stumbled and fell (46:3-6). **Utter defeat overtakes them; neither swift retreat nor brave stand is of avail.** The **Babylonian Chronicle** confirms this picture of hopeless confusion and defeat. The **Egyptian** army "withdrew" before the **Babylonians**, but the **Babylonians** "overtook and defeated them" so that not a single man escaped to his own country.²¹⁴

ADONAI continued His sarcasm and asked **who** this nation was trying to imitate - **the Nile River** with its **surging waters** that overflowed **her** banks and inundated the countryside? The answer: **Egypt** - arrogant, powerful, threatening - would pretend to **rise like the Nile, like rivers of surging waters**. She would egotistically say: **I will rise and cover the earth with my conquests; I will destroy cities and their people (46:7-8)**. The nation was trying to take on the characteristics of **her** life-giving river.

The surge of **Egypt's** armies with **her horses** and **charioteers** would resemble the rushing of a mighty river. **Egypt's** army used mercenary soldiers from **Cush** (present day southern **Egypt**, Sudan, and northern Ethiopia) and **Put** (modern day Libya) **who carried shields** as infantrymen, and soldiers from **Lydia** (modern day west coast of Asia Minor) **who were archers and drew the bow (46:9)**. **Ezekiel 30:5** named the same group of mercenaries.

But suddenly we see the disarray of **Egypt** and the decisive power and purpose of **God**. Although **Egypt** amassed a mighty army, **the day of battle belonged to ADONAI, the LORD of heaven's angelic armies - a day of vengeance on His foes (see Ae - The Problem of Holy War in the TaNaKh)**. **God** would bring **vengeance** on **Egypt** until she was defeated. He was **Egypt's** real enemy, not **Babylon**. It is the **God of Isra'el**. Only then would His sword of judgment be **satisfied, till it had quenched its thirst with blood!** For the **LORD, the LORD Almighty**, compared this slaughter to the **offering of a sacrifice as He destroyed the Egyptians at Carchemish by the River Euphrates (46:10)**.

Even if the **Egyptians** went up to **Gilead** (interesting because **Egyptian medicine** was world renown) to **get balm for their wounds, their many medicines would be in vain** because **God** would permit **no healing for them**. The surrounding nations would hear of **Egypt's** shame as **her cries of anguish and pain filled the earth. One warrior will stumble over another (see 46:6); as they would both fall down together in defeat (46:11-12).**²¹⁵

This is the message **ADONAI** spoke to **Yirmeyahu** the prophet about the coming of **Nebuchadnezzar** king of **Babylon** to attack **Egypt (46:13)**. **Nebuchadnezzar** defeated the **Egyptians** at **Carchemish** in 605 BC, but he did not invade the land of **Egypt** until 571 BC (see **Gi - Nebuchadnezzar Will Burn Down the Temples of the gods of Egypt**).

Then **Jeremiah** looked forward to the near historical defeat of **Egypt** by the **Babylonians in 571 BC (see Gq - I Am Going to Give Egypt to Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon)**. Announce this in **Egypt**, and proclaim it in **Migdol**; proclaim it also in **Memphis** and **Tahpanhes**. These were the same three cities mentioned by **Jeremiah** in **44:1** to describe Lower (northern) **Egypt**. This is where **Nebuchadnezzar's** forces were urged to **take their positions and get ready, for the sword devours those around you (46:14)**.

Jeremiah asked rhetorically: **So why is your strong ones lying flat** (Hebrew: *maddua* [*nishap*] *abbireyka*)? This verse has been a problem from earliest times, with two different but not incompatible images having been assumed. One is that of fleeing warriors, the other of a fleeing bull representing **Egypt's** god. The vagueness of the Hebrew word *abbireyka* is at the heart of the problem. It can mean **stallions** (**Jeremiah 8:16, 47:3, 50:11; Judges 5:22**) or **mighty bulls** (**Isaiah 34:7; Psalm 22:12, 50:13, 68:30**). *Ab bireyka* is a plural of majesty, which means it is a plural referring to pagan gods or even to **the Trinity**. The LXX (the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the TaNaKh), however, reads *dia ti ephygen ho apis*, or, "Why has Apis fled?"²¹⁶

Today the Masoretic Text translates **lying flat** (*nishap*), as one word with four letters. But in all likelihood the original was two different words: *nis* and *hap*. "Why did *hap* flee?" *Hap* is the name of the Apis bull. This Apis was the sacred bull revered as the incarnation of the great Egyptian gods *Ptah* and *Ra*. As succession of Apis bulls were worshiped in **Memphis** from the earliest of times (see the commentary on **Exodus 9 - The LORD Will Bring a Terrible Plague on Your Livestock in the Field**). As a result, it seems that the best translation would be: **Why is your mighty Apis bull lying flat? Yirmeyahu** pointed to the fact, as Moshe did in **Exodus**, that **Egypt's** god **Apis** was unable to protect **her** from **YHVH**.

So why (Hebrew: *maddua*)? **He** (singular in the Hebrew text, a reference to a singular Apis bull) **failed to stand because ADONAI pushed him down (46:15 CJB)**. As the mercenary army **stumbled repeatedly over each other** in their effort to **flee from Egypt, they decide to return home to their own people and their native lands. They will say: Get up, let us go back (shuwb) to our own people and our native lands, away from the sword of the oppressor (46:16)**.

Pharaoh Hophra had made bold claims about **his** ability to defeat **the Babylonians**, but those defeated soldiers realized the truth of the matter. **There they will exclaim, "Pharaoh king of Egypt is only a loud noise (an old wind-bag) and he has let the appointed time pass by to defeat Babylon" (46:17 NASB)**. The poet **Jeremiah** could not resist one more cutting jab at the failed **pharaoh**. This verse is almost like a political cartoon in which **the pharaoh** is mocked as the boisterous leader who fails in the moment of crisis. **Pharaoh "passed by" has let his appointed time "pass by,"** as if taunting him with this saying.²¹⁷ As they say in Texas, "Big hat, no cattle."

The sure guarantee of invasion: **God** would send someone (**Nebuchadnezzar**) to **Egypt** who would tower over all others as **Mount Tabor** stood out among **the mountains** of **Galilee**. **Tabor** is only 1,800 feet high but rendered conspicuous by the fact that it is situated on the plain. This one would rise as impressively as **Mount Carmel** does **by the sea**. "**As surely as I**

live," declares the King, whose name is ADONAI-Tzva'ot, "one will come who is like Tabor among the mountains, like Carmel by the sea (46:18). The LORD of heaven's angelic armies will send the one who will come. YHVH is a covenant keeper.

These two mountains stand out from all the other mountains in Galilee. Mount Tabor is at the very eastern end of the Valley of Jezreel, what is now commonly called the Valley of Armageddon. Mount Carmel is at the very western end. If you stand in the middle of the Jezreel Valley and look to the east you can see many mountains, but Mount Tabor stands out by itself. If you look to the west you can see many mountains, but Mount Carmel stands out all by itself. As sure as these two mountains are standing out by themselves, as sure as they are conspicuous to the surrounding terrain, so sure will be the judgment come to pass, so sure will King Nebuchadnezzar come, and just as these mountains tower over Isra'el, so the king of Babylon will tower over Egypt.

The Jews who fled to Egypt to avoid exile (see Gh - [The Flight to Egypt](#)) will in fact be exiled because of their lack of faith. Daughter living in Egypt, [pack your belongings] for exile, for Memphis will be laid waste and lie in ruins without inhabitant (46:19). Memphis is one of the places the Jews settled. Instead of walking from Judah, which would have been shorter, they will have to walk all the way from Egypt! If Jeremiah were talking about Egyptians, he would have used the phrase: Daughter of Egypt (see verse 24 below).

Egypt is compared to a beautiful heifer, attractive, dumb, helpless and vulnerable; so a gadfly, an enemy, is coming against her from the north from Babylon. The mercenaries (the Ionians and Carians, introduced into his service by Psammetichus, and retained by Hophra) that Egypt had bought will prove to be worthless. Her mercenaries too, that she had with her, were like well-fed calves in a stable; but they too have withdrawn in retreat, they all ran away without standing their ground. For their day of disaster has come over them, the time for them to be punished (46:20-21 CJB).

The image of Egypt now changes. The heifer has become a snake, quietly, stealthily sneaking away. The serpent may seek to hide underbrush, but the coming one will destroy it. Instead of the heavy tramp of victorious soldiers, the sound made by the Egyptian army will be like that of a hissing snake fleeing as the enemy advances in force. As the Babylonians attack they will find the destruction of Egypt so easy it will be like chopping wood. They will come against her with axes, like men who cut down trees. The vast population of Egypt, which looks like a thick forest will be defeated. They will chop down her forest, declares ADONAI, dense though it be. They are more numerous than locusts, so many they cannot be counted, but they will still be defeated (46:22-23).

The result is inescapable. Undeniable. Daughter Egypt will be put to shame, given into the hands of the people of the north. The LORD of heaven's angelic army, the God of Isra'el, says: I am about to bring punishment on Amon, the chief god of Thebes, on Pharaoh, on Egypt and all her gods and her kings, and on those who rely on Pharaoh. Then Yirmeyahu describes what the punishment will be: I will give them into the hands of those who want to kill them - Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and his officers (46:24-26). It is YHVH and not Babylon who will fix the long-term destiny of Egypt.

Finally, Jeremiah gives a far eschatological prophecy about Egypt in the messianic Kingdom. But there will be a future restoration of Egypt. Later Egypt will be inhabited as in times past, declares ADONAI. However, as promised by Isaiah (see my commentary on **Isaiah Eg - Blessed Be Egypt, Assyria and Isra'el**), Ezekiel (Ezekiel 29:13-16), and John (see the commentary on **Revelation Fk - Gentiles in the Messianic Kingdom**), Egypt's destruction will not be complete. For the first forty of the thousand year millennial Kingdom, the Egyptians will be dispersed all over the world and the land of Egypt will be uninhabited. Nevertheless, after forty years the Egyptians will be regathered as a nation and send representatives up to Zion to keep the festival of Sukkot (Zechariah 14:16-19).

Jeremiah gives a far eschatological prophecy about Isra'el in the messianic Kingdom: Isra'el will be restored. Do not be afraid, Jacob My servant; do not be dismayed, Isra'el. I will surely save you out of a distant place, your descendants from the land of their exile. Jacob will again have peace and security, and no one will make him afraid. Do not be afraid, Jacob My servant, for I am with you, declares the LORD. Though I completely destroy all the nations among which I scatter you, I will not completely destroy you. I will discipline you, but only in due measure; I will not let you go entirely unpunished (46:27-28). God's punishment is measured (30:11), and there will always be a remnant of the sons and daughters of the covenant.