

A Message Concerning the Philistines

47: 1-7

DIG: What terrifying natural disaster did God compare the Egyptian conquest of Philistia to? What do your five senses tell you is happening in this prophecy? How were relations between Judah and Philistia in the past (Judges 13:1; First Samuel 18:25-27)? Why did ADONAI order the sword against the Philistines (Ezekiel 25:15-17)?

REFLECT: Is there such a thing as a righteous war? Did you know that the LORD keeps a record of His wars? It is called the Book of the Wars of ADONAI (Numbers 21:14). How do you feel about the slaughter here (see Ae - The Problem of Holy War in the TaNaKh)? If Ha'Shem is holy, is it not righteous for Him to punish sin? Ultimately, does God wink, or ignore, sin? Can He? Should He? Why or why not? Should the LORD protect and defend His children? To what lengths would you go to protect your children? Your grandchildren? If someone had a problem with that, or think you are viscous, what would you say to them?

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

The Philistines are an old, traditional enemy of Isra'el, especially prominent in the time of Saul and David. Later, by the time of Jeremiah, they did not figure as a political force, but are pawns of the greater powers in the region. The territory of the Philistines, however, continued to be a strategically crucial position in the path between Egypt and the Babylonians of the north. In practice, the Philistine region had become a satellite of Egypt, exposed to and vulnerable before the same threat as Egypt. They are the subject of prophecies elsewhere in the Scriptures (Isaiah 14:28-31; Ezekiel 25:15-17; Amos 1:6-8; Zeph 2:4-7; Zechariah 9:5-7). Now Jeremiah adds his prophesy to these five others.

This near historical prophecy is the word of ADONAI that came to Jeremiah the prophet concerning the Philistines before Pharaoh attacked Gaza (47:1). Gaza (the southern coastal plain of Judah, currently occupied by the Palestinians) along with Ashkelon, Ekron, Ashdod and Gath were the five major Philistine cities. In 605 BC Pharaoh Hophra was returning from being defeated at Carchemish by the Babylonians and he took his revenge out on Gaza. This had to take place before 604 BC because in that year Gaza was attacked, defeated and exiled by Nebuchadnezzar. Here is what ADONAI says:

This describes the invasion with the picture of a flood. Whenever a flood is used symbolically in the Bible, it always pictures an invasion. **The Babylonians** were pictured as **waters that were rising in the north**. They were about to **become an overflowing torrent** that would sweep away **the Philistines**. The Babylonians **will overflow the land and everything in it, the towns and those who live in them**. When the battle turns against **the Philistines** they would panic and flee. They would **cry out** in anguish as the swirl of **galloping steeds** and **enemy chariots** rushed through **their land**. **The people** would be so overcome by fear that **fathers** would **not even turn back to help their children (47:2-3)**. This was all a result of the judgment of **ADONAI-Tzva'ot**. Being **destroyed**, **the Philistines** would not be able to **help their allies, Tyre and Sidon** (see the commentary on **Isaiah Eq - Timeline for Tyre**). The real **Destroyer** was not **Babylon** but **YHVH**.

ADONAI was about to destroy **the Philistines**, who were **the remnant from the coasts of Caphtor**, that is, **Crete**, where **the Philistines** originated (**Amos 9:7; Zephaniah 2:5**). **The Philistine** response to the massive threat of **God** is then seen. Reference is made to two **Philistine** cities **Gaza** and **Ashkelon**, who were centers of power, but now, were centers of grief. **Gaza** would **shave her head in mourning**. **How long will you cut yourselves? How long will you mourn? HaShem's sword** of judgment would **not be silenced** until it had totally demolished **Ashkelon** (see **Ae - The Problem of Holy War in the TaNaKh**) and **the rest of the coast (47:4-7)**. The brutality was unbelievable. The force set loose was like that of flowing volcanic lava, and that chaos had a name - **Babylon**.

The final fulfillment came in 604-603 BC when Nebuchadnezzar attacked **Ashkelon** (see **FI - Prophecies Against the Nations: A Prophecy Against Philistia**). **The Philistines** would be nonexistent in the **near historical future**. And as a result, there are no more **Philistines** in existence today: **And what sorrow awaits you Philistines who live along the coast and in the land of Canaan, for this judgment is against you, too! The LORD will destroy you until not one of you is left (Zephaniah 2:5 NLT)**.

While the political and military situation continues to be volatile in **Isra'el**, many people are wondering if there is any solution to this ongoing conflict. The politicians and talking heads of the news channels have their opinions but it would be a good time to look outside the box for some possible answers: namely **God's Word**. **Gaza** holds a prominent place in the Scriptures as well as Jewish and Arab history.

Azah, (English: **Gaza**) as it is called in Hebrew, comes from the word *oz* or *stronghold*, which reflects its strategic place in the Near East. It started out as a vital military base for Egypt under **the Pharaohs** as seen above. And it was designated as part of the inheritance for the tribe of Judah (**Judges 1:18**). It later became one of the five **Philistine** cities in southern **Isra'el** (see above) and was a constant source of conflict. It was **Gaza** that

Sampson famously brought down the pagan temple and eventually the town submitted to the rule of King David (**Judges 13; First Samuel 5**).

From there **Gaza** continued as an important agricultural resource and military outpost for various occupiers. Assyria, Egypt, Greece, Rome, and Byzantine: all these were part of the history of the area. It should be noted that through all these changes, there was always a strong Jewish presence in **Gaza**. Archaeology testifies to this with the discovery of several synagogues dating from the biblical time period all the way until the last Jews were driven out by Arab riots in 1929, only to return after the six-day War of 1967. Of special note to all believers is the reference to **Gaza** as the place of the mikveh/ritual immersion of the **Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake, which means "queen of the Ethiopians" in Acts 8:26-40.**

In short, **Gaza** has had an interesting history and many eras of blessing and prosperity. In the right conditions it is actually a wonderful beach community! Check out the group that even brought surfboards from **Isra'el** to donate to aspiring surfers of **Gaza** (on the movie "Promised Land- Documentary" available on iTunes).

But too often these blessings have not been realized because of spiritual opposition to **ADONAI** and His covenant people **Isra'el**. From the days of the prophets, **Amos** speaks to us, saying: **Here is what ADONAI says, "For Gaza's three crimes, no four - I will not reverse it - because they have exiled a whole population and handed them over to Edom; I will send fire to the wall of Gaza, and it will consume its palaces (Amos 1:6-7).** Hamas continues to make a big mistake and should take heed to this ancient warning.

Nevertheless, with every warning of judgment from **God**, there is also a way of escape. **Isaiah** predicts a day when there will be acceptance, cooperation and true shalom between **Gaza** and **Isra'el** (see the commentary on **Isaiah Eg - Blessed Be Egypt, Assyria and Isra'el**). This beautiful prophetic word predicts the restoration of the famous *Via Maris*, or Highway of the Sea that connected all three countries during the biblical period. This Highway of Shalom will be opened once again when all the parties receive the word of Adonai and are reconciled to each other in the messianic Kingdom. The *Via Maris* runs right through **Gaza**. So from the perspective of the TaNaKh, bright days are ahead. The television news and commentators seem rather pessimistic, but for believers there is a bright ray of hope on the horizon. For now we pray and work for peace among all peoples. Yet the ultimate **hope, the blessed hope (Titus 2:13), will be the shalom of Yeshua as the coming Messiah.**²¹⁸