

Day of Vengeance (Jeremiah 46:1–28)

A Word Concerning the Nations

By Pastor Jeff Alexander (11/1/2020)

Introduction

God, who is King and Judge of nations, knows those who will not acknowledge or take notice of Him, and He will call them to account.

Chapters 46–50 are the Lord’s words concerning those nations, particularly those involved with Judah at the time of the Babylonian Captivity. He begins with Egypt because they were of old Israel’s oppressors and of late their deceivers when they put confidence in them. God was avenging Josiah’s death by Pharaoh Neco. Egypt should have this pride of place because this arrogant people represented false hope and trust in human devices.

I. A little history

Chapter 46 focuses on two events with respect to Egypt.

1. Egypt’s control over Judah.

Pharaoh Neco II (or Necho), of the Saite Dynasty and the son of the pharaoh who founded the dynasty (663–609 BC), ruled in Egypt from 609–595 BC. He is the subject of verses 1–12.

King Josiah of Judah opposed Neco as he was passing through Israelite territory to aid Assyria. Josiah was killed in the ensuing battle at Megiddo in 609 BC (2 Kgs. 23:28–30). On his return from Assyria, Neco asserted Egyptian control over Judah by deposing Josiah’s successor, Jehoahaz, and replacing him with another son of Josiah, Jehoiakim (2 Kgs. 23:31–35). After the Battle of Carchemish, Jehoiakim remained a loyal vassal of Egypt until 605 BC, when Nebuchadnezzar took control of the area. Neco was able to keep Nebuchadnezzar out of Egypt in 601 BC, but Neco’s role in the politics of Syria-Palestine was finished (2 Kgs. 24:7).

2. Egypt’s defeat under Nebuchadnezzar

Pharaoh Hophra (589–570 BC) began to rule Egypt shortly after the Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem (586 BC). The Lord warned the Judean remnant left in the land that they must remain in the land and serve the Chaldeans. He earnestly charged them, “*Do not go to Egypt*” (42:19).

The second oracle describes Nebuchadnezzar’s invasion of Egypt (Joel 3:19–21).

II. Terror on Every Side

The first 12 verses of Chapter 46 describe the defeat of the Assyrian army and its Egyptian allies by the king of Babylon at the Battle of Carchemish, a city in northern Syria in 605 BC.

1. Egypt proudly marched out, confident in their supposed overwhelming strength. They knew nothing of God’s truth (Prov. 21:30, 31).
2. The marching army is compared to the surging and powerful Nile, swollen by additional troops from Africa and Greece, nevertheless dashed to defeat on the banks of the Euphrates (vv. 7, 8). Egypt’s intention to conquer and grow great was met with humiliating defeat (compared to a sacrifice, v. 10 and a wounding for which there is no balm for healing, v. 11).

They revealed their true state behind the façade of bravado—their *cowardice*. They took to inglorious flight when they came to the engagement. God knew them: “*Wherefore have I seen them*” (vv. 5, 6), despite all their apparent strength and expressions of bravery and resolution. They made a

shameful retreat (v. 13). *“The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong”* (Ecc. 9:11). Valiant men are not always victorious.

III. A Play on A Royal Name

The second oracle (14–26) warns of the Babylonian attack on Egyptian territory itself.

1. The alarm of war was sounded in Egypt to their great amazement (v. 14). The Jewish refugees, or rather fugitives, had planted themselves in contempt of God’s command (44:1) and would discover what a sorry shelter Egypt was likely to be for them.
2. The mercenary forces of other nations hired by the Egyptians to guard their borders is foretold (v. 15). How could they withstand their fate when the day of their calamity came, the day in which God visited them in His wrath? Here they are compared to fatted cattle because of their wantonness in pleasure, which made them unfit for hardship, and, thus, they turned back and would not stand, fleeing to their respective countries.
3. They complained against Pharaoh, whose cowardice or bad management they blamed for their defeat (v. 17). The saying in v. 17 is a play on Pharaoh Hophra’s name and alludes to his miscalculations in the Babylonian campaign: *“Call the name of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, ‘Noisy one who lets the hour go by.’”* Pharaoh, king of Egypt, was all noise (v. 17); he could intimidate others and talk big of the mighty things he would do, but that is all. He brought nothing good to pass.
4. The King of kings, whose name is the Lord of hosts, and before whom the mightiest kings on earth, though gods to others, are but as grasshoppers, has sworn vengeance on them (v. 18). He and his army shall come against Egypt with axes, as hewers of wood (v. 22), and the Egyptians shall be no more able to resist them than the tree is to resist the man that comes with an axe to cut it down.

IV. Comfort and peace

1. There is a very remarkable promise of restoration for Egypt (26b; cf. Is. 19:23–25). God is not the God of judgment only but also of salvation, ultimately for the whole world.
2. The oracle against Egypt is followed by a word of comfort for the scattered people of Judah (vv. 27, 28). In God’s judgment of the nations, a restoring for them is declared (repeated from 30:10, 11).

What Can We Take Away?

Thoughts on the passage from Matthew Henry:

1. Let the wicked of the earth tremble; they have cause for it. Fear not, O my servant Jacob! and be not dismayed, O Israel!
2. The wicked of the earth shall be put away like dross and not be looked after anymore. God’s people, on the other hand, in keeping with their being saved, will be called out and gathered from the far corners of the earth. They shall be redeemed, and even though they are held in captivity, they shall return.
3. The wicked is like the troubled sea when it cannot rest: they flee when none pursues. Jacob, being at home in God, shall be at rest and at ease, and none shall make him afraid. At what time he is afraid he has his God to trust.
4. The wicked have no clear vision of God. Wherever God’s people are, He is with them, a very present help.
5. A full end shall be made of the nations, as Egypt and Babylon, that oppressed God’s Israel. Mercy shall be kept in store for the Israel of God: they will be corrected but not cast off. Their correction shall be in measure, in respect of degree (how much) and continuance (how long).