

NOW HEAR THIS!

by Ray C. Stedman

In our last study we left our hero, Jeremiah, sweltering in Egypt, an old man. He had preached to the nation of Judah for forty years, and had watched it crumble and slide morally and politically until at last it succumbed to the power of Babylon. He saw Jerusalem captured, the temple burned, the king's house destroyed, the king captured, his eyes put out, and the people led into captivity in Babylon -- except for a remnant that stayed in the land. Among this remnant Jeremiah ministered. But it too apostatized and went down to Egypt. There in Egypt, according to Jewish tradition, Jeremiah died, a martyr at the hands of his own countrymen.

The book of Jeremiah closes with a series of messages addressed to the nations around Israel. With this we conclude our studies. When, as a teenager, he was called to be a prophet, God said to him, "See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down," {Jer 1:10a RSV}. Now we see Jeremiah sending messages to the various nations around Israel regarding their destinies. There are three such collections of messages to the nations in the prophets. Isaiah has one -- many of them to the same nations addressed by Jeremiah. Another is found in Ezekiel. All three taken together comprise a tremendous amount of Scripture, about 603 verses altogether, longer than many of the books of the New Testament. Yet I wonder how many Christians could pass an exam on what God has said to the nations through these great prophets?

Jeremiah begins with Egypt, where he himself was living at the time he compiled this series, and ends far to the east in the land of Babylon, across the Euphrates River. As we look at this section together we will see once again that truth in the Scriptures comes to us at several levels of understanding and application. First there is the historical, or national, or political level of understanding this passage. These prophecies have to do with actual nations. God has said various things about them. Four of them he says will endure throughout time, and at the end of their history God will restore their fortunes and bless them. Those four nations are still existing today, and have in fact awakened from the dust of centuries and come to life again in these last few decades. Of two other nations nothing is said of ultimate blessing, but they still remain today, though no blessing is promised them. And three of these nations God specifically says shall disappear from the face of the earth. They have long since been lost to history.

There is another level at which this truth can be understood. On the historical level these nations come and go as God wills. But this address to the nations can also be understood as symbolizing, or typifying, forces at work within us. We will see this as we go through the account.

These nine nations fall into three groups, each with extremely significant application to each of us. That is how we will approach them.

We will begin with Chapter 46, where we have Jeremiah's word to Egypt, comprising two messages he gave on two different occasions.

The word of the Lord which came to Jeremiah the prophet concerning the nations. About Egypt. Concerning the army of Pharaoh Neco, king of Egypt, which was by the river Euphrates at Carchemish and which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon defeated in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah: {Jer 46:1-2 RSV}

This takes us back to the year 605 B.C., when Nebuchadnezzar first came up against Judah. He was met by the armies of Egypt at the city of Carchemish on the Euphrates River, and there one of the great strategic battles of all history was fought. Until then, Egypt had been the most powerful nation of the day, but Babylon broke the power of Egypt at that place. Here Jeremiah is describing that battle in advance -- how long in advance we do not know. He describes in very vivid terms the advance of the Babylonian army, the clash of these conflicting forces, the terrible battle that ensued, and the final defeat of Egypt. We will not take time to cover these verses, but you can read them for yourself. The language is very beautiful.

However, in the midst of this a characterization is made of Egypt, and we do not want to miss that. In the Scriptures Egypt is a picture of the world and its influence upon us. Egypt was a place of tyranny and bondage for the people of Israel. They were under the yoke of a wicked and severe king who enslaved them and treated them cruelly. Yet strangely enough, after they escaped, it was the place they always fondly remembered and wanted to return to. They remembered the food, the comfort, and the ease of life in Egypt. So this has always stood as a picture of the lure of the world to the believer -- to think as it thinks, to react as it reacts, to seek your own satisfaction and pleasure and enjoyment instead of living for the glory of God.

Now, when I refer to "the world" I am not talking about people, nor about doing any specific so-called "worldly" thing. That is not what worldliness is. Worldliness is an attitude of life that causes you to think of living only for your own pleasures and enjoyment. That is what Egypt symbolizes in Scripture. The character of Egypt is described for us in Verses 7-8:

**"Who is this, rising like the Nile,
like rivers whose waters surge?
Egypt rises like the Nile,
like rivers whose waters surge." {Jer 46:7-8a RSV}**

Every spring the Nile River rises and overflows its banks, and this restores Egypt. The prophet uses this as a picture of the way the world comes at us -- in surges and waves. We think we have it licked, but pretty soon it will come at us again. Repeatedly, again and again throughout our lifetime as believers on our spiritual pilgrimage, the world rises to afflict us and to lure us, and seeks to betray us and get us back into bondage again.

But there is another message here about Egypt, Verses 13-24, delivered by Jeremiah after he had gone into exile in Egypt. Here he describes the forthcoming invasion of Egypt by Nebuchadnezzar, which took place after Jeremiah's death. In accordance with this prophesy, Nebuchadnezzar came down into Egypt and took over the land. In the midst of this prophesy is another characterization of Egypt, Verse 17:

**"Call the name of Pharaoh, king of Egypt,
'Noisy one who lets the hour go by.'" {Jer 46:17 RSV}**

Isn't that a strange name to give somebody? In other words, "the noisy one who likes to kill time". That is the characterization of Egypt -- and the world. It is one of the ways we can recognize the world: it loves noise, because it does not want to stop and think. And it loves to kill time, is always seeking ways to pass the time. Just this week I clipped an editorial from Christianity Today:

Picture, if you will, some solar ray suddenly causing all radios, cassette players, stereo sets and televisions to stop working. Trembling hands impatiently twirl dials, adjust knobs, flip switches. Eyes are dilated with fear. Breathing comes in spasms. Marx was wrong. Religion isn't the opiate of modern man; incessant sound is. We'll listen to anything to avoid silence -- long pointless talk shows, boring conversations, round-the-clock news, and even rock and country music. We like sound because it blocks out the despairing cry of our own souls, as well as the still, small voice of God. But we need occasionally to take God's hand and journey into the fearful land of silence. It can be both painful and healing with the presence of the One who is able to still the despairing cry, and give us a new song of thanks.

Yes, that is the world. It comes at us constantly, trying to get us to think only in terms of immediate pleasure and indulgence, and forgetting that it leads to slavery and bondage. So God punishes Egypt -- that is the message here.

Yet, on a national level, a strange word is said in Verse 26:

"I will deliver them [Egypt] into the hands of those who seek their life, into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and his officers. Afterward Egypt shall be inhabited as in the days of old, says the Lord." {Jer 46:26 RSV}

This undoubtedly is a reference to the end times when, after having lost its national standing and slept for

centuries, Egypt has awakened, and is now a sovereign nation again. So God promises to spare Egypt. And in a similar message in Isaiah 19, God even says that eventually Egypt is going to be healed, and that he will bless them and call them his people.

In Chapter 47 we have a message to a nation very closely associated with Egypt -- the Philistines. Do you remember your Bible stories about how the Philistines were always coming up against Israel? Goliath, whom David slew, was one of the Philistine warriors. These people lived along the southern coastline of the land of Palestine. In fact the name, "Palestine," comes from the word, Philistine. They were always the enemies of Israel. Many scholars feel that originally they came from Egypt and occupied Phoenicia, or Lebanon, as we know it today.

The Philistines were in the land, but they were the enemies of God. Thus they are a symbol, or type, of the worldling who claims a place in the land of promise, i.e., a nominal Christian who is nevertheless the enemy of true faith. They are also a picture of those same attitudes in our own lives and hearts -- the tendency to want to enjoy the blessing of God in a given area of our life, but without any heart commitment to him regarding that area.

Philistia is promised destruction:

**The word of the Lord that came to Jeremiah the prophet concerning the Philistines, before Pharaoh smote 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 hoofs 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." {Jer 47:1-4a RSV}**

Here is the advance of the Babylonian army, which meant the end of the nation of the Philistines.

**"For the Lord is destroying the Philistines, the remnant of the coastland of Caphtor."
{Jer 47:4b RSV}**

And so this nation perished, never to emerge again among the nations of the world as a sovereign people.

Beginning in Chapter 48 we have another group of nations coming before us. Egypt and Philistia represent the world in its enmity against us as believers. Now we have five nations -- Moab, Ammon, Edom, Damascus, and Kedor, or Arabia -- that represent something else. The link between them is that all five are somehow related to Israel. Thus they picture for us what the Bible calls "the flesh" -- that part of our nature which is inherent in us, to which we are related, from which we cannot escape. Yet it is the enemy of faith, the enemy of our lives, an inner enemy.

Moab and Ammon occupy all of Chapter 48 and the first six verses of Chapter 49. We will not attempt to read it all, but here is a description of the character and of the downfall of these nations. Moab and Ammon were the sons of Lot by his own daughters. In that terrible story of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, when Lot and his daughters fled from the city, we are told that later they got him drunk so that he would lie with them and they could conceive by him. Moab and Ammon settled in what is the present land of Jordan -- Moab to the east of the Dead Sea, and Ammon north of Moab. Chapter 48 opens with a very vivid description of the cities of Moab as they are assaulted one by one by the advance of the armies of Babylon. Then Verse 11 says,

**"Moab has been at ease from his youth
and has settled on his lees; [That is, he is resting on his rear end, his buttocks -- "lees"
is much more polite!]
he has not been emptied from vessel to vessel,
nor has he gone into exile;
so his taste remains in him,
and his scent is not changed." {Jer 48:11 RSV}**

Moab happened to be off the beaten track. Therefore the conquerors who passed through this land century after century left Moab alone. It had never been attacked, had never been "emptied from vessel to vessel", from conqueror to conqueror, as the prophet says here. It had never had its mouth go dry with fear. That is what "his taste remains in him" means. And "his scent is not changed" means he had never sweat with terror, thus changing his odor. Moab had never known attack like this, so it was complacent, confident, proud, and self-satisfied. Moab therefore is a picture of the flesh in its confidence, its cocksureness. "Everything is well, nothing is going to go wrong." This pictures for us that attitude within us. But God says,

"Therefore, behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I shall send to him tilters who will tilt him, and empty his vessels, and break his jars in pieces. Then Moab shall be ashamed of Chemosh [their god], as the house of Israel was ashamed of Bethel, their confidence." {Jer 48:12-13 RSV}

Bethel was the place where Israel had worshipped two golden calves. God says he is going to disturb the confidence of Moab, is going to tilt him by the power of another nation. The reason is given in Verses 29-30:

**"We have heard of the pride of Moab --
he is very proud
of his loftiness, his pride, and his arrogance,
and the haughtiness of his heart.
I know his insolence, says the Lord;
his boasts are false,
his deeds are false." {Jer 48:29-30 RSV}**

Whenever you feel that way about yourself, it is Moab attacking you, just as the Moabites constantly attacked Israel. You are contending with this continual enemy of God -- the arrogance and insolence of the flesh. But eventual judgment is to fall upon them, nevertheless, as a nation, and finally there is this promise, Verse 47:

**"Yet I will restore the fortunes of Moab
in the latter days, says the Lord." {Jer 48:47a RSV}**

Thus we have seen Jordan emerge as a nation in our own time.

Connected with Moab is Ammon, to the north. The present capital of Jordan is Amman. Typologically, Ammon stands for the same as Moab, but with one addition: it is more aggressive, more warlike than Moab. It represents that insolence and arrogance which preys upon the spirit within us. Yet the promise to this nation, along with Moab, is this: Chapter 49, Verse 6:

"But afterward I will restore the fortunes of the Ammonites, says the Lord." {Jer 49:6 RSV}

Therefore as a people and a nation they still exist in the world.

In Verses 7-22 we have the prophecy against Edom, which occupied the land south of the Dead Sea. For many centuries its capital was Petra, that beautiful city carved out of red rock. Edom was a descendant of Esau, the twin brother of Jacob. In Scripture, Esau is always a picture of the man of the flesh, especially as the flesh opposes and is contrary to the Spirit. "Jacob have I loved," God said, "Esau have I hated," {cf, Mal 1:2-3}. And in the book of Galatians, Paul contrasts these two: "For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other," {Gal 5:17 RSV}.

In Chapter 49, God promises to eliminate this nation completely. Look at Verses 8-10:

**"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 came 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." {Jer 49:8-10 RSV}**

True to this word, the nation of Edom passed from the stage of history long before the time of our Lord. It lost its national standing and disappeared in the dust of the centuries, never to emerge again.

The last two nations in this group are given from Verse 23 on: first Damascus, and then Kedar, which is another name for Arabia -- the Bedouin tribes who inhabited the desert areas of what is now called Saudi Arabia. Nothing is said of ultimate promise to these nations, although they are permitted to continue. But judgment is visited upon them -- Damascus first, and then the Arabian nations, who were descended from Ishmael, the half-brother of Isaac, son of Abraham. Thus they too are related to Israel. In vivid language the prophet describes the destruction as the armies of Babylon come up to Damascus, Verses 25-26:

**"How the famous city is forsaken,
the joyful city!
Therefore her young men shall fall in her squares,
and all her soldiers shall be destroyed in that day, says the Lord of hosts." {Jer 49:25-26 RSV}**

The Arabian tribes also are afflicted, Verse 29:

**"Their tents and their flocks shall be taken,
their curtains and all their goods;
their camels shall be borne away from them,
and men shall cry to them, 'Terror on every side!'" {Jer 49:29 RSV}**

Thus these nations are judged by God. Typologically, they represent the restlessness of the flesh. These were nomads who lived in tents and moved about from place to place, so they typify the restlessness of our natures, and the power to upset and disarrange us which that restlessness creates within us. Wherever these nations appear in Scripture, that is what they stand for. One of the clues to understanding the Word of God is to see yourself whenever you read about these nations. We can understand how we operate, as we see it in the national lives of these people. Thus the marks of the flesh are judged.

The last two nations are associated -- Elam and Babylon. Elam is given to us in the closing words of Chapter 49, beginning at Verse 34. At this time it was one of the provinces of Babylon, and yet it is singled out here by Jeremiah as meriting a very significant word from God. The reason is given in Verses 34-35:

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;" {Jer 49:34-35a RSV}

Elam is characterized by a bow, which is called the "mainstay" of Elam. A bow, of course, is a symbol of the ability to strike and injure at a distance. Typologically, it stands for what Paul calls "the fiery darts of the

wicked one" {Eph 6:16} which are hurled at us, the evil thoughts and imaginations which come unbidden into our hearts and minds -- sometimes when we least expect them. You kneel to pray, and you are appalled at the evil thought which suddenly possesses your mind. What is that? One of the fiery darts of the wicked one. Just when you are rejoicing in the blessing of God, some stupid, silly doubt suddenly possesses your heart, and you wonder whether you are really a Christian or not. What is that? Another of the fiery darts of the wicked one, the bow and arrows of Elam which are the mainstay of this enemy of God. But God pronounces judgment upon this. Nevertheless, on the national level, note Verse 39:

"But in the latter days I will restore the fortunes of Elam, says the Lord." {Jer 49:39 RSV}

Elam today is the land of Iran, or Persia, and has emerged again as a sovereign nation, according with this word.

Chapters 50 and 51, two of the longest in the book, are devoted to the destruction and overthrow of Babylon. I hardly need comment on what Babylon stands for. Everywhere in Scripture it is a symbol of the great enemy of God, called in Revelation "that old serpent the devil" {cf, Rev 12:9}, especially as the devil uses false religious authority to claim earthly standing, prestige, and power. That is Babylonianism.

Do you remember where Babylon began? In the tower of Babel, after the Flood. And why did men erect the tower of Babel? The Genesis account says, "...in order that they might make a name for themselves," {cf, Gen 11:4}. Babylonianism is the attempt to gain some prestige or status in the eyes of the world by the use of religious authority. You can see that it has permeated every religious group, every denomination, every church. Every religion in the world seeks that. We struggle with Babylonianism right here at Peninsula Bible Church. Any time we long to be known around the world, to exercise particular prestige in our community, that is Babylonianism at work. It has seized whole systems of religion so that these systems seek to gain great authority, to be known as princes and kings and powers in the world today. It all began with the tower of Babel.

Babel was where they erected a tower in order to ascend into the heavens and become like God. And under Nimrod it became the mother of harlots and the abominations of the earth. That is, it became the fountainhead of idolatry and began to export these ideas all throughout the world. If you want to study this more fully, I suggest you read Alexander Hisslop's book, *The Two Babylons*, tracing how these foul ideas began in Babylon and spread throughout the whole earth.

The prophet predicts the historical overthrow of the city by the Medes and the Persians, beginning at Verse 2 of Chapter 50:

**"Declare among the nations and proclaim,
set up a banner and proclaim,
conceal it not, and say:
'Babylon is taken,
Bel [Baal] is put to shame,
Merodach [Marduk, another name for Baal] is dismayed.
Her images are put to shame,
her idols are dismayed.'**

"For out of the north a nation has come up against her, which shall make her a land of desolation, and none shall dwell in it; both man and beast shall flee away." {Jer 50:2-3 RSV}

Just as Babylon itself was the great destructive power against Judah, so Babylon's turn must come. Out of the north, the Medes and the Persians will come against Babylon and overthrow this great kingdom. Despite its tremendous walls, its vast palaces, its ornate hanging gardens, its huge size, and its great armies -- the greatest power of the world of that day -- at the very height of its power God declares that it shall be totally lost to sight. Even its site would be lost to men. It would be "a desolation, and none shall dwell in it."

In Verses 4-5 we read of the return of the Jews to the land of Judah:

"In those days and in that time, says the Lord, the people of Israel and the people of Judah shall come together, weeping as they come; and they shall seek the Lord their God. They shall ask the way to Zion, with faces turned toward it, saying, 'Come, let us join ourselves to the Lord in an everlasting covenant which will never be forgotten.'" {Jer 50:4-5 RSV}

Thus they came back from exile, into the land. But Babylon's overthrow is going to be total. Look at Verses 12-13:

"... your mother [i.e., the mother of all harlotry] shall be utterly shamed, and she who bore you shall be disgraced. Lo, and shall be the last of the nations, a wilderness dry and desert. Because of the wrath of the Lord she shall not be inhabited, but shall be an utter desolation; every one who passes by Babylon shall be appalled, and hiss [or whistle] because of all her wounds." {Jer 50:12-13 RSV}

Verses 39-40:

"Therefore wild beasts shall dwell with hyenas in Babylon, and ostriches shall dwell in her; she shall be peopled no more for ever, nor inhabited for all generations. As when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah and their neighbor cities, says the Lord, so no man shall dwell there, and no son of man shall sojourn in her." {Jer 50:39-40 RSV}

The book of Daniel tells us that King Belshazzar made a great feast, inviting all the lords of Babylon to the palace. As they were reveling in drunken debauchery, a hand appeared and wrote on the wall. Do you remember that dramatic incident? The king trembled, and Daniel was called in to interpret the writing. And Daniel told him that that night the kingdom would be taken from him. And that night Darius the Mede led his armies into Babylon, and the kingdom was overthrown. There is a reference to that in Verse 43 here:

"The king of Babylon heard the report of them, and his hands fell helpless; anguish seized him, pain as of a woman in travail." {Jer 50:43 RSV}

So the great city was overthrown, and was so completely demolished that the site was abandoned and never rebuilt. The dust of the ages covered it over, and for centuries the actual site of this great city was lost, so that men did not even know where it was. It was only at the beginning of the present century that its site was unearthed, and once again the walls and vestigial remains of the city are coming into the light of day. But as God said, it had become a desert and a desolate place. The empty mounds beside the Euphrates River bore eloquent testimony to the truth of the Scriptures. Verses 31-32:

"Behold, I am against you, O proud one, says the Lord God of hosts; for your day has come, the time when I will punish you. The proud one shall stumble and fall, with none to raise him up, and I will kindle a fire in his cities, and it will devour all that is round about him." {Jer 50:31-32 RSV}

There are many who say that Babylon must be built again -- you can read this in some of the books which are in circulation today -- because of the prophecies in the book of Revelation that refer to Babylon. But you need to note that the reference there is to "Mystery Babylon the great," {Rev 17:5 KJV}. So this is not the actual, literal city, but that for which Babylon stands -- the idolatrous practices and the blasphemous assumption of

power by religious authority. That is what is going to be destroyed, as the book of Revelation says. Yet here in Chapter 51, we are given a description of the destruction of this actual city, and this is picked up and used again in the book of Revelation. You can see that John borrows these words, beginning at Verse 6:

**"Flee from the midst of Babylon,
let every man save his life!
Be not cut off in her punishment,
for this is the time of the Lord's vengeance,
the requital he is rendering her.
Babylon was a golden cup in the Lord's hand,
making all the earth drunken;
the nations drank of her wine,
therefore the nations went mad.
Suddenly Babylon has fallen and been broken;
wail for her!" {Jer 51:6-8a RSV}**

And so the great city perished. But God has this final word to say, beginning at Verse 59:

The word which Jeremiah the prophet commanded Seraiah the son of Neriah, son of Mahseiah, when he went with Zedekiah king of Judah to Babylon, in the fourth year of his reign. Seraiah was the quartermaster. [That is, Seraiah went down to Babylon as an ambassador from Judah.] Jeremiah wrote in a book all the evil that should come upon Babylon, all these words that are written concerning Babylon. And Jeremiah said to Seraiah: "When you come to Babylon, see that you read all these words [You see, Babylon has heard this.] and say, 'O Lord, thou hast said concerning this place that thou wilt cut it off, so that nothing shall dwell in it, neither man nor beast, and it shall be desolate for ever.' When you finish reading this book, bind a stone to it, and cast it into the midst of the Euphrates, and say, 'Thus shall Babylon sink, to rise no more, because of the evil that I am bringing upon her.'" {Jer 51:59-64a RSV}

This is the end of the words of Jeremiah. The final chapter is an historical summary appended by another hand, recounting the fall of Jerusalem and the ultimate restoration of King Jehoiachin in the city of Babylon.

What is the message of this book to us? We have gone through it, and have watched this prophet in his struggles with the ways and the workings of God, and have seen our own struggles reflected there. What is the great message which abides in this book? Surely it is contained in these messages to the nations. Here are groups of nations which symbolize the enemy arrayed against us -- the devil -- and the two channels through which he attacks us -- the world, and the flesh. And God's Word says that God is adequate for all of them. Faith in a living God can overcome the world, can beat back the deceitfulness of the flesh, and can overcome the roaring, lion-like qualities of the devil in our life, so that we can stand -- God's man, God's woman -- free in the midst of the bondage of this age.

Babylon shall sink and never rise again. In the closing chapter of Romans, Paul promises that God shall come and crush Satan under our feet {cf, Rom 16:20}.

May that be our experience *now* -- in these days!

These are forces with great power, bringing to pass all the terrible things recorded in our daily newspapers. But by faith we can walk in the midst of them.

That is God's message in the book of Jeremiah.

Prayer:

Thank you, Father, for the faithfulness of your word. Forgive us the many times we have doubted it to the point of acting upon our doubts instead of our faith. Deliver us from that. Teach us to stand, to be Jeremiahs -- faithful to you in this day of declension and moral

dissolution. Forgive us, Lord, of all the evil in our own lives and hearts. Help us to walk before you, knowing that you are tender and compassionate, forgiving and loving, able to make us to stand. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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