

Oracle Against the Nations (Jeremiah 46-49)



A. Introduction

When we study the fall of Jerusalem there is a sense of unreality – too far away and so long ago. Yet the church needs to study biblical history because the same God is dealing with the nations today.

1. The calling of Jeremiah

- i. *'See, I have this day set you over the nations and the kingdoms. To root out and to pull down, to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant.'* (1:10) Not only did Jeremiah predict the future events but his words produced the future events. This is the function of prophetic words (c.f. Is 55:11). Jeremiah's words brought about Jerusalem's fall and restoration as well as the destiny of the nations. This is the power of God's word on our lips.
- ii. Through Jeremiah God's word not only came to Jerusalem but through Jerusalem to the nations. It was the blueprint of how the God of Jeremiah would deal with the rest of the world (C.f. Amos 1-2; Is 13-23; Ezk 25-32; Zeph 2:2-15). Jeremiah 46-51 is not about Israel, but the world. All the nations of the world will be judged by God for their own sins against God and against Israel, and against each other.

2. Five Truths about God in prophecies – God of the OT Prophets is the God of the NT

- i. *God is alive and real* – there are mysteries of God, but there is no myth. This is no fiction but fact.
- ii. *God is universal* – God is not confined to local or national boundaries He is not just the God of Israel, and He will judge all nations. We have a solemn duty to tell the nations about this God and His word.
- iii. *God is moral* – Right and wrong matter to God. He cares about justice and fairness. God can get happy or angry about the issues of justice and fairness.
- iv. *God is the Judge* – God punishes wickedness and evil. 'The Day of the LORD' is when He 'disciplines His own', but 'avenges the wicked.' Those who belong to Him, He will discipline. But those who don't will face ultimate destruction. *'Do not fear, O Jacob My servant, says the LORD, 'For I am with you; For I will make a complete end of all the nations...but I will not make a complete end of you. I will rightly correct you, for I will not leave you wholly unpunished.'* (Jer 46:27-28)
- v. *God is historic* – God is actively involved in history. He controls history. It is HIS STORY. God is the God of war and the Lord of hosts. God brings 'sword' against the nations He disciplines and judges (c.f. 46:10, 47:6-7; 48:2). Very few nations grow in character during the time of affluence and peace, and the nations that forget God and become complacent are inviting other nations to invade them. God calls men such as Cyrus and Nebuchadnezzar, 'My servant.' God uses political empires as His instruments to do His will.

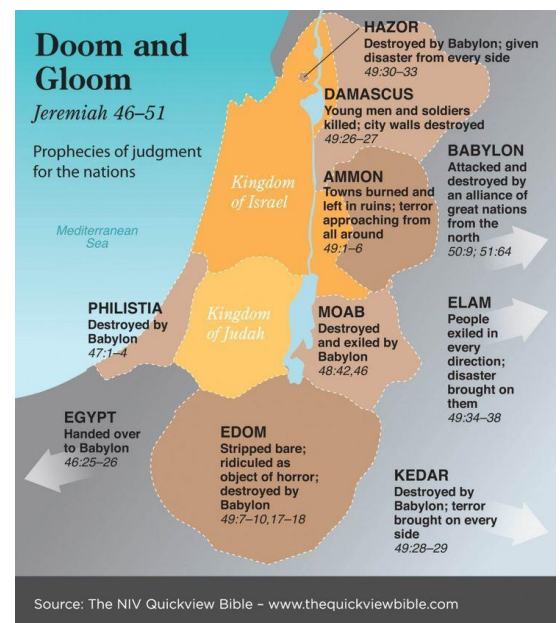
B. Oracles Against the Nations

These chapters have some of the finest Hebrew poetry in the Old Testament. They follow the fertile crescent from Egypt in the southwest to Babylon in the northeast.

1. Egypt (46:1-26)

- i. *Defeat in Carchemish (46:1-12)* – Egypt was the greatest world power in the ancient civilisation until Jeremiah prophesied against it. They had the Great Pyramid of Giza, etc. What went wrong? (a) They oppressed Israel. No other nation caused so much suffering to Israel as Egypt did. (b) They thought they were 'gods.' They thought it was their right to 'take over the world.'

Egypt's powerbase was firmly rooted in the southern part of the fertile crescent at the Nile river. It guaranteed all year-round bumper harvest! It was the modern equivalent of unlimited oil.



In 609BC Pharaoh Neco II (ca. 610-595BC) marched north to conquer the then known world – the fertile crescent stretching from the Nile to the upper Euphrates – to northern Syria. On the way Neco slew the young king Josiah in Megiddo (609BC, 2 Kings 23:29). Jeremiah says, *'You arose like the Nile in the time of the flood, flooding the fertile crescent of surrounding nations...You said, 'I will go up and over the earth...''* (46:7-8). Egypt kept on marching north until they settled down in Carchemish. There they said, *'Now our borders stretch from the Nile to Carchemish.'*

Within one year in 605 BC, the battle of Carchemish took place (Lit. fort of Chemosh, the Moabite) where the Egyptian army suffered a severe blow when they were trapped between the Chaldean army and the Euphrates river. Egypt's allies - Ethiopians, Libyans, Lydians – were also heavily beaten down (46:9). Jeremiah prophesied about this battle as the turning point in ancient world history, similar to the 'D-Day' in WWII. After the battle of Carchemish Egypt was never the same again. It was the day of the Lord's vengeance against Egypt for their pride and even possibly for killing Josiah (46:10). Jeremiah counselled the wounded Egyptians to go to Gilead for healing balm (46:11), but it would not help them to recover from their fatal wound. It was a jab at Egypt's famous medicine industry in the ancient world.

- ii. *Invasion of Egypt (46:14-24)* – Shortly after the victory at Carchemish Nebuchadnezzar returned to Babylon to succeed as king after his father Nabopolassar died in August 605BC. Immediately after his coronation, Nebuchadnezzar returned to subdue Judah, then moved on to Egypt 568-567BC. Jeremiah prophesied Nebuchadnezzar's invasion of Egypt would be unstoppable like the two tallest mountains, Mt Tabor (1,800 ft) and Mt Carmel (1,700 ft) towering over the plains of Megiddo where Josiah was killed.

The Egyptian god, Apis, the sacred bull would become nothing but worthless noise. (46:14-17). Bulls symbolised Pharaoh's strength. Aaron's golden calf was not his original idea (46:20-21). Jeremiah compared Egypt to a bull, a heifer stung by flies, and a hissing serpent surrounded by an army of axemen deforesting Egypt, etc. The Nile Delta was full of cattle and bulls. *'Your nation will be like a bull that had been attacked by the swarm of horse flies' 'You will be like a snake slithering away in shame because the army with axes coming to chop down your forest will leave you nowhere to run' (46:22).* Egypt who dreaded locusts, would be like a field invaded by the swarm of innumerable locusts (46:23).

Why? *'Your pride is your undoing and YHWH will punish all of your 'gods' which are nothing but idols. You who are so used to getting 'slaves' from other nations will go into exile as slaves.'* (46:19, 24). However, afterward, Egypt will be inhabited again (44:46). After these two defeats, Egypt was never the same again. Today Egypt is no longer a superpower, but it is inhabited again. Jeremiah spoke into motion the disciplining hand of the Lord upon Egypt.

2. [Philistia \(47:1-7\)](#)

- i. This prophecy is dated 'before Pharaoh attacked Gaza' (47:1) and conquered it in 609 BC. Philistia is located on a flat plain between the hills of Judea and the Mediterranean Sea. So, they feared flash floods that could suddenly come down from the Judean hills and swamp them. Also situated on the highway between Assyria and Egypt, they were vulnerable to attacks. So, they made a political pact with Tyre and Sidon up north so they would fight for each other in battles. Jeremiah prophesied to Philistia, *'I see the enemy coming upon you like the food from the plain cutting you off from the help from your allies, Tyre and Sidon. It will cause such panic that your fathers will run without even looking for their children.'* (47:2-4) Did it come true? When the Egyptian army returned, defeated in Carchemish by the larger foe, they swept through Philistia and plundered them. This is what motivated the fasting in Jerusalem back in ch 36. Whoever survived the Egyptian raid was decimated by the Babylonian armies that followed (604 BC). Babylonian prism in Berlin today records some details.
- ii. So terrible and complete was their destruction that Jeremiah calls on the sword of the LORD to be put back into its sheath but to no avail. The Lord commanded the complete destruction of Philistia (47:6-7) and they vanished forever. There is no surviving 'Philistines' today. The only thing left is the name 'Palestine' Arabs use today. Why did God judge them this way? Because they attacked Israel without mercy. Our attitude to God's people is our attitude to God. This is a solemn warning to the people living in Gaza today who are determined to destroy Israel.

3. Moab (48:1-47; c.f. Isaiah 15-16)

- i. *Moab's destruction (48:1-10)* – The plan of destruction for the two key cities, Nebo and Kiriathaim, would hatch from the city of Heshbon. Those who survive the destruction would be as rare as juniper trees in the desert. What is the reason for their destruction? 'Self-confidence in her riches' (48:7).

Chemosh, the Moabite god, will go into captivity. Chemosh is 'Ashtarte', the queen of heaven. *'Cursed is he who does the work of the Lord with 'slackness' (deceitfully). And cursed is he who keeps back his sword from blood.'* (v10) The Lord ordered a curse on whoever would not carry out His will against Moab who grabbed the Reubenites' land from Israel.

- ii. *Moab's complacency (48:11-17)* – Moab (Jordan today) was located between the Jordan River and the Dead Sea. Their relatively isolated location gave them undisturbed peace. Moab is compared to a spoiled child and unpoured wine (48:11). Wine had to be poured from vessel to vessel to filter out the dregs. God says, *'Moab, you are like the unfiltered wine, always at ease and comfortable, thus you are contaminated with depravity and have not matured.'* Too much blessing without being challenged for so long leads to complacency and moral laxity. Thus, they invited God's discipline as unpoured immature wine.
- iii. *Moab's pride (48:18-47)* - Jeremiah calls on the eleven other cities of Moab to humble themselves because the destroyer would come for their strongholds also. These cities would be like an insane drunkard who wallows in his vomit because of their arrogance toward the Lord.

Moab's pride is described as 'exceeding pride', 'loftiness', 'arrogance', 'haughtiness', and 'self-exaltation' (48:29). The Moabite wine was famous and sold overseas in international trade, but the Lord will cause their wine to fail (48:32-33) and break Moab like a vessel in which the owner has no pleasure (48:38). Moab's sins are summarised as complacency (v11-12), self-sufficiency (v14, 29-30), overwhelming pride (v26, 42), and idolatry (v46).

They would cease to exist as a nation because of her arrogance (48:42). Moab was conquered by Nebuchadnezzar, and the nation disappeared in 581BC. But it is inhabited today, *'Yet, I will bring back the captives of Moab in the latter days,' says the Lord (48:47).*

- iv. There are 2 types of punishment. (1) 'Corporal punishment' is reformatory. They survive and become better; (2) 'Capital punishment' is retributive. They do not survive. God uses both forms of judgment on the nations. Egypt and Moab would survive the disciplinary corporal punishment. But Philistia, Edom and Kedar would not. The punishment for God's people is reformatory. But the world will have retributive punishment on the day of the LORD.

4. Ammon (49:1-6) – north of Moab and Lot's descendants (Jordan today, Christianity is growing)

- i. *'Has Israel no sons? Has he no heir? Why then does Milcom inherit Gad?'* (49:1) Ammon took the territory of Gad. King Baalis played a part in murdering Gedaliah (40:13-41:15). Therefore, *'Rabbah will be a desolate mound, and Israel shall take possession of his inheritance.'* (49:2) Rabbah is the modern Amman, Jordan's capital city. *'Milcom shall go into captivity with his priests and princes together.'* (49:3) Milcom is Molech (19:5; Deut 12:31, Allah today?) Ammon was well stocked with an armoury, plenty of money, and pride. *'Why do you boast in the valleys, your flowing valley, O backsliding daughter? Who trusted in her treasures saying, 'Who will come against me?'* (49:4). But God will dispossess Ammon and give the land back to Israel.
- ii. Nebuchadnezzar invaded Ammon in 581BC and by the middle of the 6th century BC, and Ammon ceased to exist as an independent nation. Yet God would not make the full end of them but bring back the captives of Ammon (49:6). So, it is inhabited today.

5. Edom (49:7-22 C.f. Obadiah 1-9, Is 63:1-6) – Esau's descendants, Jacob's twin brother

- i. Pictures of Petra – rock (49:16). So impregnable was Edom's land that just a handful of men could defend it. They could just drop rocks from the hill on the narrow entry path between the rocks. On top of the mountains, they had acres of land. Their temple and magnificent buildings were carved into the solid red sandstone. Mt Seir stood 1,000 ft high where eagles nested, and one could see as far as the Red Sea. And highly lifted was also their pride, fierceness in battle, and their particular contempt for the Jews.

Although Moab, Ammon, Edom allied with Judah, Edomites assisted the Babylonians against Judah in 588-586BC (Ps 137:7-9). The Lord says, *'Your fierceness has deceived you, the pride of your heart, O you who dwell in the clefts of the rock, who hold the height of the hill!'* (49:16), so *'their overthrow will be like Sodom and Gomorrah.'* (49:18) Today, Bozrah, the capital city of Edom is a wasteland. The Babylonians destroyed them in their Transjordan conquest in 605BC. Today no one lives there.

- ii. Herod, the last remnant of the Edomite tribes, deserted Edom and came to Hebron (Idumea), and then to Jerusalem to settle there. His was a terrible family. The last member of Herod's family died, eaten up by worms. Yet there still is a future fulfilment. One more complete destruction of Bozrah is waiting to be fulfilled at the time of Jesus' return (c.f. Is 63:1-5). So extensive will be their destruction that the earth will shake at the noise of their fall and it would be heard at the Red Sea in Egypt (49:21).

6. [Damascus \(49:23-27 c.f. Is 17\)](#)

- i. Damascus was one of the most beautiful cities in ancient times. Two beautiful rivers, Avana and Pharpar (c.f. 2 Kgs 5:12) flow through Damascus from the mountains to the desert. Yet the beautiful city everybody knew and loved by God will one day burn down to the ground and uninhabited. Isaiah tells us why. Because they 'forgot the God of their salvation' and they 'plundered Israel' (Is 17:10, 14).
- ii. Damascus was re-inhabited after it was scorched. Apostle Paul was converted in Damascus on the 'Straight' street which is still there today. Yet, there remains a future fulfilment of the city's complete destruction. *'Behold, Damascus will cease from being a city, and it will be a ruinous heap.'* (Is 17:1)

7. [Kedar and Hazor – Arab tribes \(49:28-33\)](#)

These are Arab nomads, the descendants of Ishmael, Isaac's half-brother (Gen 25:12-18). Today these cities are lost somewhere under the sand dunes. God said, *'Let no man dwell in you forever.'* Why? *'...the wealthy nation that dwells securely.'* (49:31) Have they become proud and self-sufficient with no fear of God? Nations that forget God get destroyed. Nebuchadnezzar raided these Arab tribes in 599BC, a year before he began his invasion of the Holy land.

8. [Elam - the far east of the then known world: Southwest Iran \(49:34-39\)](#)

- i. This word came at the beginning of Zedekiah's reign in ~597BC. Elamites were famous for archery (Is 22:6) but the Lord would break their bow, the foremost of their might (49:1). He would scatter them across the nations as outcasts (49:36), cut off their evil ruling dynasty, and establish His throne in Elam (49:38). But in the last days, the Lord would bring back the captives of Elam and restore their fortunes (49:39).
- ii. Elam was defeated by Babylon whom God used to defeat all other nations. Iran was the most advanced and free nation in the middle east until the 70s when Shah (one of the richest men in the world) gave himself the title, 'King of kings, the Lord of lords,' and he and the nation began to collapse. Today Bushehr nuclear plants are located in Elam in the gulf stream area where the three tectonic plates meet. A great conflict is appointed in the future, but God will have His way in Iran. A revival taking place in Iran now.

C. Conclusion

1. Based on these prophecies what would God say to Australia? Two ways of looking at wars in history are : (i) Some nations were unlucky and taken by stronger powers. (ii) God is the universal God, and He judges all nations. Before they fell militarily, those nations fell to spiritual and moral degradation. God judges the spiritual and moral fall of every nation, and war is one way God brings down a proud nation to its knees.
2. The reasons for God's judgment on the nations are : (i) National pride, (ii) Idolatry and forgetting God, (iii) Persecuting Israel, God's people, (iv) Injustice and moral degradation. This is why Jesus said, *'There will be wars and rumours of wars.'* History is 'His Story'.
3. But God's word to His people Israel was, *'Fear not O My servant Jacob, for I am with you. I will make a complete end of all nations, but I will not make a complete end of you. I will rightly correct you, for I will not leave you wholly unpunished.'* (46:27-28) What about the Church of Jesus Christ? Jesus said, *'I will build My church and the gates of hades shall not overcome against it.'* God disciplines His people to reform them, but the rest of the world is marked judgement on the day of the Lord. (C.f. 1 Peter 4:17-18)