

NOTES ON THE PROPHECY AND LAMENTATIONS OF JEREMIAH

“The Weeping Prophet”

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CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

JEHOVAH'S WORD AGAINST THE NATIONS

Egypt, Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Edom, Syria, Arabia, Elam, and Babylon
(Chaps. 46-49)

Jeremiah's ministry to the rebellious men of Judah is now over. He is commissioned to announce the judgment soon to fall upon the Gentiles. When called of God to the prophetic office, he was appointed to be a prophet unto the nations (chap. 1:5). Accordingly, the Word of the Lord is now given through him concerning the various peoples surrounding the land of Palestine. Nine different nations are brought before us: we take them up briefly in the order given.

EGYPT

The entire forty-sixth chapter, with the exception of the last two verses, is devoted to declaring the judgments foreseen by the prophet, which have fallen upon this once rich and populous country. In Scripture, Egypt is invariably a type of the world, either as the oppressor or the would-be patron of the people of God. As such, its judgment speaks of that which is yet to fall upon the present guilty order of things, which first crucified our Lord and persecuted His followers to the death, but now seeks to take them under its protecting wing; thus nullifying that separation from its vanities which should have characterized the Church while waiting for an absent Lord.

In the chapter before us we have two distinct prophecies, uttered about eighteen years apart. The occasion of the first was the attempt made by Pharaoh-necho to invade the provinces of the king of Babylon, and to break his rising power. This is set forth in verse 2-12. It is a vivid apocalyptic description of the overthrow of the Egyptian forces by Nebuchadrezzar and his invincible armies. The date given is the same as for the preceding chapter. The Egyptians, **“discouraged and turned away back,”** were **“beaten down, and fled apace,”** not looking back, **“for fear was round about”** (vers. 4, 5).

Like the waters of a raging flood, the forces of Cush, Put, and Lydia (the various provinces subject to Pharaoh), led by the trained Egyptian troops, had thought to overflow the land of the Chaldeans; but they knew not that the Lord had raised up Nebuchadrezzar, and that the day of His vengeance upon Egypt had come, when, as a great sacrifice, they were to be offered up on

the banks of the Euphrates (vers. 6-10). Hope of relief was vain. "Many medicines" would fail to effect a cure. Egypt's hour of doom had struck. Her manifold iniquities had called down the Lord's vengeance (vers. 11, 12). All this was literally fulfilled in the overthrow of Pharaoh-necho's magnificent army.

The next section refers to a later judgment; and although no date is given, we gather, by a comparison with chaps. 43 and 44, that it was uttered by Jeremiah during the time when the remnant abode in Egypt, after the fall of Jerusalem. It sets forth prophetically the complete devastation of the land of Mizraim upon the defeat of Pharaoh-hophra, second after Pharaoh-necho, the last Pharaoh mentioned in the Bible.

He is known to have been a man of ignoble spirit, foolhardy and deceitful. In vain he sought to stand against the rising power of Nebuchadrezzar. His valiant men were to be swept away. "**They stood not, because the Lord did drive them**" (ver. 15). It should not be the might of Nebuchadrezzar that would insure him the victory, neither the pusillanimity of Pharaoh-hophra that would determine his defeat. The Lord of hosts, the God of battles, was about to destroy the Egyptians because of their impiety and idolatry. He it is who puts down one nation and exalts another. "**The most high ruleth in the kingdoms of men.**" This the victorious Nebuchadrezzar had also to learn for himself in due time.

Hence for Egypt, her gods and her kings, there could be no quarter. They had defied the living and true God. They must be brought low till they learn His power. Such was the sentence; and it has been fulfilled to the letter, as the centuries witness. Egypt, however, has not fallen to rise no more. In the last days grace shall be shown to it. "**Afterward it shall be inhabited, as in the days of old, saith the Lord**" (ver. 26).

In that day Judah also, together with the ten tribes denominated Israel, shall be delivered; and "**Jacob shall return, and be in rest and at ease, and none shall make him afraid**" (ver. 27). The Lord has never forgotten His chosen. He may make a full end of the nations whither He has driven them to correct them, but He will not utterly destroy them. They must be corrected; His holiness demands that they be not wholly unpunished, but His grace will yet secure their reestablishment in the land, and the enjoyment of His covenanted mercies.

Having pronounced the mind of the Lord as to Egypt, Jeremiah next gives His word in regard to

PHILISTIA

The Philistines dwelt on the western borders of the land of Canaan. They were originally of Egypt, and therefore, typically, would speak of unconverted men of the world taking a place as dwellers in the land of blessing and privilege - mere unsaved professors, who, while pretending to be children of God, are in reality the enemies of His truth and of His people.

Their temporal judgment predicted by Jeremiah, and literally fulfilled shortly afterwards, would set forth symbolically the more terrible judgment soon to fall upon the apostate class in Christendom of whom they are the type.

The seven verses of chap. 47 are devoted to this subject. The date when first uttered is not definitely stated, but ver. 1 informs us that it was “**before that Pharaoh smote Gaza,**” which would place it about the time of the first prophecy regarding Egypt. From the north “**waters should rise up;**” that is, the Babylonian armies should overwhelm them; while the power of Egypt in the south was also to be turned against them. Even the world hates a hypocrite.

Fear and anguish should take hold upon them; fathers and sons should be overwhelmed in the dreadful carnage. Tyrus and Zidon, Phoenician cities of Philistine origin, would have no power to help. It was the Lord who was about to destroy Philistia. The cup of the iniquity of this warlike and aggressive people was full. They must know the power of the Lord’s anger. “**The country of Caphtor**” is a general name for the entire strip of country which they had occupied since the days of Abraham and Lot. Caphtor is an Egyptian word, and plainly indicates the ancient home and lineage of these intruders in the land of promise.

“**Baldness is come upon Gaza**” indicates that this ancient city, for long in possession of Judah (Joshua 10:41; Judges 1:18; 1 Kings 4:24), had again fallen into the hands of its original occupants. It was devoted to destruction - so complete that it could be described as shaving city and people off the face of the ground; a figure frequently used by the prophets to signify utter desolation (Isaiah 7:20; Ezekiel 5:1, 2; Amos 8:10, etc).

As hair symbolizes the strength of dependence upon God (as in the example of Samson), and glory (as in the woman’s case), baldness indicates the absence of both. Philistia should be weak and helpless before her foes; her glory a mere memory, and her power departed.

Ashkelon, likewise, was to be cut off “**with the remnant of their valley**” (ver. 5). This, too, was one of the five cities of the lords of the Philistines in the days of Joshua. For location and the fertility of the surrounding country it was unexcelled. No doubt the desolations of Judah had permitted the Philistines once more to occupy it, but their season of repose should be brief. They must be broken and fall before the might of the armies sent against them by the Lord whom they had defied.

“**The sword of the Lord**” could not be quiet until its charge against Ashkelon had been fulfilled. That accomplished, it should be put into its scabbard. It is not that God authorized the numberless cruelties perpetrated by the armies of Pharaoh and Nebuchadrezzar, but He used them, in spite of all that was contrary to His mind, to wreak summary vengeance upon those who had so long been the oppressors and the enemies of His people. He is the Governor of the world, ruling among the nations; and it was true then, and it is true now, that “**righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.**”

The burden of Philistia ended, the prophet abruptly turns to

MOAB

The somewhat lengthy forty-eighth chapter is taken up with the Word of the Lord to these descendants of inglorious Lot and his wretched first-born daughter; as the next chapter deals in part with the woes to come upon the children of the younger.

Typically, these Moabites picture that large and careless class to-day who **“have a name that they live, and are dead,”** called in Hebrews 12:8 **“bastards, and not sons.”** illegitimately born, Moab was without claim to an inheritance in Israel, yet a near neighbor, dwelling upon the eastern shores of the Dead Sea. Lifeless, easy going profession is thus set forth. Such may glide on carelessly throughout life, partaking not of the chastisement of the Lord, which is for His own children; but judgment must come eventually.

The way of address to Moab in the opening verse is noticeable: **“Against Moab thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel.”** This brings out the close relationship of Moab and Israel. To none of the others in this group of nations does He introduce Himself as **“the God of Israel.”**

Woes are pronounced upon Nebo, the mountain of Moab from whose summit Moses viewed the promised land; Kiriathaim, called in Numbers 32:37 Kirjathaim; and Misgab, a fortified city of which little is known. In Heshbon, the city of *“devices,”* as its name means, **“they have devised evil against it.”** Madmen, that is, “dunghill,” shall become a scene of carnage. Horonaim and Luhith shall be spoiled likewise. **“There shall be no more praise of Moab”** (vers. 1-5).

The inhabitants are warned to flee and save their lives; to be **“like the heath in the wilderness”** (ver. 6), as it is not God’s purpose to utterly destroy them. The heath (literally, *“the naked tree”*) referred to, is a desert shrub, having an abundance of vitality; so much so, that if a part be torn from the parent bush and carried away by the wind, it will take root where it may fall. The application of the figure to the remnant of Moab is plain. Their seed abides today, and shall remain even in the Millennium. In chap. 17:6 the same figure is applied to the one who trusts in man, though there it is the nakedness of the plant to which attention is drawn.

Chemosh, the patron deity of Moab, was to be put to shame. He should go into captivity with his priests and his princes together. Upon every city the spoiler should come; for so the Lord had spoken (vers. 7, 8).

The only safety is in flight; for the Lord’s curse rested upon him who should do the Lord’s work of judgment negligently. It must be unsparing, and he who held back his sword from blood should be devoted to judgment himself (vers. 9, 10).

For a long season Moab had been permitted to go unpunished. The result was a settling down in haughty carelessness, with utter indifference to the abominations everywhere practiced. **“Moab hath been at ease from his youth, and he hath settled on his lees, and hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel, neither hath he gone into captivity: therefore his taste remained in him, and his scent is not changed”** (ver. 11). This condition can be no longer tolerated. The Lord is about to **“send unto him wanderers, that shall cause him to wander, and shall empty his vessels and break their bottles”** (ver. 12). The result shall be to destroy their confidence in Chemosh and to make them ashamed **“as the house of Israel was ashamed of Bethel their confidence”** - that is, of the calves set up by Jeroboam (ver. 13). It is evident that Moab’s destruction was not to be forever. Like Israel, they were to be punished in measure; but the discipline would eventually prove corrective.

In verse 14 to 25 the prophet sees in vision the advancing armies of the spoiler, and graphically portrays the alarm and final rout of the inhabitants of the cities of this interesting people.

“The horn of Moab is cut off” signifies that all his power was to be broken. In his pride he had **“magnified himself against the Lord,”** and gloried over Israel when their affliction came. **“He shall wallow in his vomit, and be himself in derision”** (vers. 26, 27).

Ere the besom of wrath shall come upon them, the dwellers in the cities are warned to flee to **“the rocks”** for safety. A remnant would thus be preserved. They are exhorted to **“be like the dove that maketh her nest in the sides of the hole’s mouth”** (ver. 28).

Pride ever goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. It was this abominable trait that particularly characterized these descendants of Lot. **“We have heard the pride of Moab, he is exceeding proud! his loftiness, and his arrogancy, and his pride, and the haughtiness of his heart”** (ver. 29).

Because he will not humble himself, he must be humbled - in the case of individuals as well as nations who fail to acknowledge Heaven’s rule. Upon all the land the hand of God shall fall; for it is His hand, though a heathen army be the instrument used. How fitting that he who prophesies such dire sorrow should do so with weeping and strong crying (vers. 30-34).

Idolatry will be made to cease in their cities, and **“There shall be lamentation generally upon all the housetops of Moab, and in the streets thereof,”** when the Lord has **“broken Moab like a vessel wherein is no pleasure”** (vers. 35-41). It is the same simile of the potter and the clay, used long before in regard to Israel (chap. 18). **“And Moab shall be destroyed from being a people, because he hath magnified himself against the Lord.”** This was his awful sin. How many, alas, have followed in his steps! For such, judgment is certain at last, though it may for a long time seem to slumber. When it falls, there shall be no escape. **“Fear, and the pit, and the snare,”** shall devour them all (vers. 42-46).

Thus Balaam’s prophecy was to be at length fulfilled, when the Lord should **“smite the corners of Moab”** (Numbers 24:17). **“Yet will I bring again the captivity of Moab in the latter days, saith the Lord. Thus far is the judgment of Moab”** (ver. 47). In the Millennium, when the Lord, in His own times, shall show who is that blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, Moab shall rejoice with His people, a remnant being spared to enter into the world-kingdom of our God and His Christ.

The burden of the neighboring kingdom of the

AMMONITES

is much briefer, the six opening verses of the next chapter giving it all.

As before noted, they descended from the younger daughter of Lot, and typically speak of practically the same thing as Moab, only that they might also suggest those who prey upon the true Church of God, like Simon Magus and his numberless kin.

They ever seem to have been a warlike people, and possibly had thus been considerably decimated, as we never find them occupying as large a place as the nation we have just been considering. Restless, predatory and nomadic, they did not possess the number of fenced cities, neither did they enjoy the high state of civilization characteristic of the Moabites.

From the first they were the enemies of Israel, even though Moses sought to placate them, and directed the people to “**distress them not**” (Deuteronomy 2:19), as in the case of Moab also.

In the times of Jeremiah they dwelt in several of the cities of Gad, and possibly also of Reuben and Benjamin; their own capital being Rabbath as of old, which was just across the border from Gad. Bold and fearless, but with no great cities, they could not be characterized by the pride of national glory that we have seen in Moab; but the indictment here brought against them is that she “**trusted in her treasures, saying, Who shall come unto me?**” They were thus independent of God equally with their more cultured neighbors.

In verse 1 the Lord asks, “**Hath Israel no sons? Hath he no heir? Why then doth their king inherit Gad, and his people dwell in his cities?**”

The Ammonites had taken advantage of the captivity of Israel and their manifold afflictions to enrich themselves, and to occupy the territory contiguous to their own land.

“**Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will cause an alarm of war to be heard in Rabbah of the Ammonites; and it shall be a desolate heap, and her daughters shall be burned with fire: then shall Israel be heir unto them that were his heirs, saith the Lord**” (ver. 2).

That is, the power of Ammon was soon to be broken, and Israel made once more to occupy the cities that had been wrested from them. This has already had a partial fulfilment. It will have a more complete one in the Millennium, when Israel shall dwell in his own land, with none to make him afraid.

Lamentation and mourning, the prophet declared, should take the place of Ammon’s proud boasting and conceit; for her king should go into captivity with the princes and priests, and their whole people that were spared from the sword should be driven out of their land, with none to “**gather up him that wandereth.**” Afterward, when the chastisement shall have been productive of blessing, the children of Ammon will be restored, as in the case of Moab (vers. 3-6).

Somewhat more lengthy is the prophetic word concerning

EDOM

The descendants of “**Esau, which is Edom,**” had ever been the enemies of the descendants of his brother Jacob. By comparing the short prophecy of Obadiah with the passage before us, the reader will get a full account of the sin and the doom of this high-handed race. In type, we have the flesh symbolized - ever lusting against the Spirit.

Hence there is no restoration for Edom. They were to be utterly cut off. Human wisdom could not avail to save this proud nation. All their counsels were in vain. **“The calamity of Edom”** was near at hand. God had decreed it. None of the men should be spared. Grape-gatherers leave some gleanings upon the vines. Midnight robbers do not utterly despoil those whom they wrong. But in the case of the children of Esau they would be utterly destroyed, so far as nationality is concerned (vers. 7-10).

It is touching to find in this connection the precious message that has been a source of untold comfort to many a tried saint in later days. **“Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve them alive; and let thy widows trust in Me”** (ver. 11). This was God’s gracious provision for the helpless and feeble even of Edom. How blessedly it tells out the real compassion of His heart! Judgment is His strange work. His holiness demands that sin be dealt with. In His righteous government the nations that have practiced iniquity must perish. But He forgets not the cry of the lowly; He ever remembers the poor and the needy. The widow and the fatherless have a special claim upon His love and mercy. Never was that claim pleaded in vain.

This is the only bright light in the dark picture of Edom’s woes. They could not go unpunished, but must assuredly drink of the cup of the Lord’s wrath. The surrounding nations’ were to be the instruments used to bring this about. Though Edom should make his nest as high as the eagle, the Lord would bring him down from thence, giving up his cities and fortresses to desolation. The ruin was to be as complete as that of Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities of the plains. Like a lion coming out from the swellings of Jordan, the enemy would rise up against the habitation of the strong till the heart of his mighty men became as the heart of a woman in her pangs (vers. 12-22). With this the prophet abruptly concludes. There is no word of recovery. It is a ruin complete and irrevocable, as Obadiah also testifies.

DAMASCUS

is next told of her impending doom. Already this once great city was being bereft of her glory, the Syrian empire paling before Nebuchadrezzar’s rising sun. Hamath and Arpad, famous in their day, were confounded. Evil tidings had reached them of the overthrow of the Syrian armies. **“There is sorrow on the sea; it cannot be quiet.”** The restlessness of the sobbing surf was but a picture of the state of their inhabitants. Damascus, waxing feeble, sought to flee; but **“anguish and sorrows have taken her, as a woman in travail”** (vers. 23, 24). It is too late to escape. The conqueror is at the door. **“Therefore her young men shall fall in her streets, and all the men of war shall be cut off in that day, saith the Lord of hosts.”** The city was to be burned, and the palaces of Ben-Hadad, Israel’s old enemy, destroyed (vers. 25-27). Thus briefly, in the space of five verses, does the prophet portray the downfall of one of the greatest powers of ancient times.

ARABIA

with its various tribes, is likewise apprised of Nebuchadrezzar’s purpose and ultimate victory. Kedar and Hazor are to be smitten. Fear shall be on every side. The flocks and herds of these pastoral people shall feed the conqueror’s armies. All their treasures shall be seized for a spoil:

“And Hazor shall be a dwelling for dragons, and a desolation forever: there shall no man abide there, nor any son of man dwell in it” (vers. 28-33). (The word for “**dragons**” means “*jackals*”).

These fierce Arabian tribes’ father was Ishmael, Abraham’s first-born, by Hagar. As outlined in Galatians, they picture those who, born after the flesh, seek to obtain a place of blessing through legal works, only to find that **“the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the free woman”** (Galatians 4:30).

ELAM

In the beginning of the reign of the unstable Zedekiah, the Word of the Lord had come to Jeremiah against the rising power of Elam, destined to play an important part in the history of nations, as an ally of the mighty kingdom of Persia, afterwards allied with Media, assuming an imperial place under Cyrus (ver. 34). It was at this time a Babylonian province (Daniel 8:2), though in years gone by it had flourished as an independent kingdom (Genesis 14:1-12). As being part of the prophet’s testimony to the nations, the burden of Elam is introduced here in connection with the preceding kingdoms and tribes.

The Lord was to **“break the bow of Elam, the chief of their might;”** and by means of the four winds He should scatter them toward every quarter of heaven, so that there should **“be no nation whither the outcasts of Elam”** should not come.

Dismayed before their enemies, they should know the fierce anger of the Lord, who would send a sword after them until He had consumed them. His throne should be set in Elam, when their king and princes should be destroyed. It is the same thing as in the case of Nebuchadrezzar; they should know that **“the heavens do rule”** (vers. 35-38).

This was fulfilled when the victorious Macedonians and their allies drove the luxurious Persian armies before them, under Alexander the Great. Yet between this time and the time when the prophecy was uttered, Elam rose from the position of an insignificant kingdom to an integral part of one of the mightiest empires the world had known, overthrowing the Babylonians and ruling the entire known world, with the exception of the feeble states of Europe. In God’s appointed time all her power availed nothing, and she became but another witness to the truth of prophecy.

There is hope in her latter end however, for the Lord has pledged Himself to bring again her captivity.

So we see the very same people existing to-day, despite the changes of the centuries; and in the coming kingdom of our Lord the remnant of Elam shall have a place, when the nations that are spared shall own Messiah’s benignant yet righteous sway (ver. 39).

Thus God had revealed **“things to come”** concerning the Gentile nations surrounding Immanuel’s land. From one to another the cup of His vengeance should be passed. Judgment began at the house of God, when Israel and Judah were given up to captivity. Their heathen neighbors rejoiced in their discomfiture. But they too must drink of that cup, and learn that

“those that walk in pride He is able to abase.”

Egypt and her daughter Philistia; together with Moab, Ammon and Edom, so closely related to Israel; as also Syria, Arabia and Elam, must all alike be swept with the besom of His wrath. Jeremiah foretold it long before it became a matter of history, as it has become since.

For one more nation He has a similar word - for the very power used to chastise Judah when she departed from the living God: Babylon must be destroyed when her iniquity has come to the full. But we reserve this for another chapter.

~ end of chapter 24 ~

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