

Jeremiah

Chapter 46

Judgment on Egypt

The word of the LORD that came to Jeremiah the prophet concerning the nations. 2 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: 3 “Prepare buckler and shield, and advance for battle! 4 Harness the horses; mount, O horsemen! Take your stations with your helmets, polish your spears, put on your armor! 5 Why have I seen it? They are dismayed and have turned backward. Their warriors are beaten down and have fled in haste; they look not back—terror on every side! Declares the LORD. 6 “The swift cannot flee away, nor the warrior escape; in the north by the river Euphrates they have stumbled and fallen. 7 “Who is this, rising like the Nile, like rivers whose waters surge? 8 Egypt rises like the Nile, like rivers whose waters surge. He said, ‘I will rise, I will cover the earth, I will destroy cities and their inhabitants.’ 9 Advance, O horses, and rage, O chariots! Let the warriors go out: men of Cush and Put who handle the shield, men of Lud, skilled in handling the bow. 10 That day is the day of the Lord GOD of hosts, a day of vengeance, to avenge himself on his foes. The sword shall devour and be sated and drink its fill of their blood. For the Lord GOD of hosts holds a sacrifice in the north country by the river Euphrates. 11 Go up to Gilead, and take balm, O virgin daughter of Egypt! In vain you have used many medicines; there is no healing for you. 12 The nations have heard of your shame, and the earth is full of your cry; for warrior has stumbled against warrior; they have both fallen together.” 13 The word that the LORD spoke to Jeremiah the prophet about the coming of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon to strike the land of Egypt: 14 “Declare in Egypt, and proclaim in Migdol; proclaim in Memphis and Tahpanhes; say, ‘Stand ready and be prepared, for the sword shall devour around you.’ 15 Why are your mighty ones face down? They do not stand because the LORD thrust them down. 16 He made many stumble, and they fell, and they said one to another, ‘Arise, and let us go back to our own people and to the land of our birth, because of the sword of the oppressor.’ 17 Call the name of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, ‘Noisy one who lets the hour go by.’ 18 “As I live, declares the King, whose name is the LORD of hosts, like Tabor among the mountains and like Carmel by the sea, shall one come. 19 Prepare yourselves baggage for exile, O inhabitants of Egypt! For Memphis shall become a waste, a ruin, without inhabitant. 20 “A beautiful heifer is Egypt, but a biting fly from the north has come upon her. 21 Even her hired soldiers in her midst are like fattened calves; yes, they have turned and fled together; they did not stand, for the day of their calamity has come upon them, the time of their punishment. 22 “She makes a sound like a serpent gliding away; for her enemies march in force and come against her with axes like those who fell trees. 23 They shall cut down her forest, declares the LORD, though it is impenetrable, because they are more numerous than locusts; they are without number. 24 The daughter of Egypt shall be put to shame; she shall be delivered into the hand of a people from the north.” 25 The LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, said: “Behold, I am bringing punishment upon Amon of Thebes, and Pharaoh and Egypt and her gods and her kings, upon Pharaoh and those who trust in him. 26 I will deliver them into the hand 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, declares the LORD. 27 “But fear not, O Jacob my servant, nor be dismayed, O Israel, for behold, I will save you from far away, and your offspring from the land of their captivity. Jacob shall return and have quiet and ease, and none shall make him afraid. 28 Fear not, O Jacob my servant, declares the LORD, for I am with

you. I will make a full end of all the nations to which I have driven you, but of you I will not make a full end. I will discipline you in just measure, and I will by no means leave you unpunished.”

46:1–51:64 Chs. 46–51 consist of a series of prophecies against the nations (see Isa 13–23; Eze 25–32; Am 1–2; Zep 2:4–15). They begin with Egypt (ch. 46) and end with Babylonia (chs. 50–51), the two powers that vied for control of Judah during Jeremiah’s ministry. The arrangement of the prophecies is in a generally west-to-east direction. (CSB)

Undated oracles. The Creator and Lord of the universe made known the course of history through Jeremiah, whom He called to be a prophet to the nations and to whom He gave authority over nations (1:5, 10). The oracle declaring what Jeremiah prophesied against all the nations in 25:13–38 is expanded in chs 46–51. Jeremiah’s oracles are grouped in consecutive chapters, as in Is 13–33; Ezk 25–32; and Am 1:3–2:3. (TLSB)

Chs 46–49 Proclaims Egypt’s supremacy over lesser states (Philistines, Moabites, and Ammonites) stretching from the land of the Nile to the distant northeast and its defeat by the Babylonians. (TLSB)

Ch 46 Egypt’s fight with Babylon for world dominion occurred after the liquidation of the Assyrian Empire in 612 BC. Pharaoh Neco succeeded in reducing Judah to a vassal state for four years after killing King Josiah at Megiddo. However, Pharaoh Neco was no match for Nebuchadnezzar. Neco’s crushing defeat in 605 BC, which was caused by the Lord (v 25), comes at Carchemish (vv 1–12). Nebuchadnezzar’s invasion of the land of the pharaohs is the subject of a second scintillating poem (vv 14–24). A few lines in prose pick up the prophecy of this invasion (vv 25–26). God directs each nation’s rise and fall in order to establish His kingdom through a chastened, restored servant—Israel (vv 27–28). (TLSB)

46:1 *The word of the LORD... concerning.* This is a general title to the following collection of prophecies, written concerning different nations, which had less or more connection with the Jews, either as enemies, neighbors, or allies.

nations. To whom Jeremiah was called to prophesy. (CSB)

This verse serving as a superscription of a series of prophecies directed against various foreign peoples. (Kretzmann)

46:2 *Neco.* Ruled Egypt 610–595 B.C. *Carchemish.* See 2Ch 35:20; Isa 10:9. The name means “fortress of Chemosh” (chief god of Moab; see 2Ki 23:13), as clarified by the Ebla tablets. (CSB)

Nebuchadnezzar. Egypt’s defeat by Babylonia at Carchemish was one of the most decisive battles in the ancient world, ending Egypt’s agelong claims and pretensions to power in Syro-Palestine. (CSB)

fourth year of Jehoiakim. 605 B.C., the first year of Nebuchadnezzar’s reign (see 25:1). (CSB)

46:3 *Prepare.* Spoken to the Egyptians in sarcasm (see, e.g., Na 2:1; 3:14). (CSB)

buckler and shield – The smaller protecting shield was called a buckler. The large shield was big enough for a person behind which the entire body could be hidden. (Kretzmann)

advance for battle – It is a description picturing the preparations for battle, with a call to battle which enlivens the narrative. (Kretzmann)

46:4 *horses.* Egypt was a prime source for the finest horses (see 1Ki 10:28). (CSB)

put on your armor. But now the prophet sees the army, which was so eager for the attack, most miserably defeated. (Kretzmann)

46:6 *stumbled and fallen* – The prophet sees their defeat so vividly that the tottering and falling are accomplished facts before his eyes. A second scene of battle is now painted, more detailed, more concrete than the first. (Kretzmann)

46:7–8 *rivers whose water surge.* In the northern Egyptian delta, where the Nile branches out into numerous streams. (CSB)

46:8 *rise and cover the earth.* The same metaphor is used of Assyria in Isa 8:7–8. (CSB)

cities. The Hebrew for this word is in the singular but is used as a generic plural (“city” is generic also in 8:16). (CSB)

Such was the proud boast of Egypt in relying on its own strength. (Kretzmann)

46:9 *advance.* Horses rearing back with impatience. (Kretzmann)

Drive furiously, O charioteers! See Na 2:4. (CSB)

As in uncontrollable anger (Kretzmann)

Lydia. Put and Lydia were mercenaries in the Egyptian army. (CSB)

The Egyptians recruited hired soldiers (v 21) from these countries. Cush (Ethiopia) was situated on the Upper Nile south of Aswan. Put (variant spelling Pul) and Lud were African territories west of the Nile Delta. (TLSB)

These mercenary troops being chosen for their skill in using this weapon of defense in battle. (Kretzmann)

46:10 *day of vengeance.* The Egyptians belonging to this class, not only for the killing of Josiah and the subsequent humiliation of Judah, but since ancient times. (Kretzmann)

sword shall devour. Filled to the point of being surfeited (to feed or supply to fullness or excess, to satiate). (Kretzmann)

drink its fill of their blood... holds a sacrifice. Battles are often compared with sacrifices. (CSB)

46:11 *Virgin Daughter of Egypt.* A personification of Egypt.

Many medicines... no healing for you. The statement is ironic in the light of Egypt’s reputation for expertise in the healing arts. (CSB)

46:12 *stumble ... fallen.* This was in the confusion of headless flight. It is a most vivid description of the utter defeat which would strike the Egyptians by God’s counsel, for His judgment invariably finds His enemies. (Kretzmann)

46:13 *Nebuchadnezzar ... strike the land Egypt.* In 568–567 B.C., long after the battle of Carchemish. (CSB)

46:14 *Migdol*. Likely served as an outpost on the border between Judah and Egypt. Sites excavated in the region included Greek and Egyptian pottery, leading the excavator to propose that the Judean kings had hired mercenaries to supplement their forces. (TLSB)

Memphis and Tahpanhes. These were the regions along the northeastern boundary and in Memphis, the capital of the northern part of the country. (Kretzmann)

around you – The Phoenicians, Philistines, Ammonites, Moabites, and Edomites, all prostrated by the arms of the Chaldeans. (ACC)

46:15 *mighty ones*. The Hebrew for this word is not the same as that for “warrior” in vv. 5, 9, 12. It is lit. “strong ones,” often referring to powerful animals (“stallions” in 8:16; 50:11; “steeds” in 47:3; Jdg 5:22). In Ps 22:12; 50:13; 68:30; Isa 34:7 the Hebrew word is translated “bulls.” (CSB)

Cf Ps 103:20; Is 34:7 (“mighty bulls”); Ps 22:12 (“Many ... strong bulls”). Apis is the name of the sacred bull worshiped in Egypt. (TLSB)

thrust them down. The Hebrew for this phrase is translated “Apis has fled” in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the OT). Apis was a bull-god worshiped in Egypt, especially at Memphis (see v. 14). An alternative translation of v. 15 would then read as follows: “Why did Apis flee? Why did your bull [many manuscripts have the singular form] not stand? Because the LORD pushed him down.” (CSB)

The king with all his mighty men was powerless against the attack of the Lord, against the punishment meted out by Him through the Chaldean king. (Kretzmann)

46:16 *said to another*. See vv. 6, 12; lit. “He will make many stumble.” (CSB)

They will say, ‘... let us go.’ The mercenaries in Pharaoh’s army will decide to return to their homelands. (CSB)

Thus the confederates and mercenaries of Egypt would make ready to save their own lives in the general destruction. (Kretzmann)

46:17 *noisy one*. In Isa 30:7, Egypt is called “the Do-Nothing.” (CSB)

Pharaoh Neco’s pompous declaration of military prowess turned out to be empty braggadocio. (TLSB)

who lets the hour go by. After the battle of Carchemish (see v. 2), Nebuchadnezzar returned to Babylonia on learning of his father’s death. Egypt failed to press its advantage at that time. (CSB)

46:18 *as I live*. The supreme Ruler of the universe, in a most solemn oath by His own life. (Kretzmann)

King. God is called “King” also in 8:19; 10:7, 10; 48:15; 51:57. (CSB)

one. Nebuchadnezzar. (CSB)

Tabor ... Carmel. Two prominent mountains in Israel. (CSB)

46:19 *Prepare yourselves baggage for exile*. Echoed in Eze 12:3. (CSB)

They were to get ready vessels and containers for food on the journey into exile. (Kretzmann)

Egypt. Lit. “Daughter of Egypt.”

became a waste. Judah is so described in 2:15; 9:12. (CSB)

Such being the fate of the proud capital according to the judgment of God upon it. (Kretzmann)

46:20 *heifer.* Perhaps an ironic reference to Egyptian bull-worship. (CSB)

biting fly. Nebuchadnezzar. Insects are often used to symbolize an attacking enemy. (CSB)

46:21 *calves.* They were provided with the best of everything, in order to keep them favorably inclined. (Kretzmann)

time of their punishment. When God would visit His anger upon them. (Kretzmann)

46:22 *serpent.* Often used by Egyptian pharaohs as a symbol of their sovereignty. (CSB)

Hissing from her thicket as she hears some one approaching. (Kretzmann)

her enemies ... like those who fell trees. As the human forest of Egypt would be hewn down, she would flee with a noise as that of rustling leaves, weakly hissing out her protest, but without power effectually to resent it. (Kretzmann)

46:23 *more numerous than locusts.* Here an invading army is compared to locusts. In Joel 2:11, 25 locusts are compared to an invading army. (CSB)

46:24 *people from the north* – The Chaldean hordes. (Kretzmann)

46:25 *Amon.* The chief god of Egypt during much of its history. Wicked King Manasseh may have named his son after the Egyptian deity (see 2Ki 21:18; 2Ch 33:22). (CSB)

Thebes. The capital of Upper (southern) Egypt (see Eze 30:14–16). (CSB)

46:26 *Egypt shall be inhabited as in the days of old.* † Cf. 48:47; 49:6, 39. Egypt would join the many nations of the Messianic kingdom which will be enabled to “go up to the mountain of the Lord.” SB)

46:27–28 Repeated almost verbatim from 30:10–11. (CSB)

46:27 God’s plan will preserve Israel against the upheavals of international politics. (TLSB)

Jacob shall return. The remnant of Israel’s descendants. (TLSB)

46:28 *I will discipline you* – for the visitation of the Lord is intended to lead men to repentance. All this is figurative of the one great deliverance by which the Lord saved His people from all their enemies and established His Church of the New Testament. (Kretzmann)

Ch 46 God declares that He will use Egypt’s defeat by Babylon as a pattern for further military losses. Egypt, however, will survive. Added to this prophecy of destruction is a note of comfort for the Judean

exiles in Babylon: God will discipline, but not completely destroy, them. God created the world and rules it, administering His righteous justice according to His will. At all times, and through all things, God works for the salvation of His people. Even in the midst of His discipline, God preserves a faithful remnant, out of which came Jesus Christ—His long-promised Messiah. • Help us, O Lord, to keep faith when chaos and warfare erupt. Amen. (TLSB)