

Judah After Israel's Fall (725-585 BCE) *Jeremiah's Judgment Against Egypt*

Readings: *Jeremiah 46:1-28; 47:1-7*

Reflections:

- These prophecies about Egypt deal with a number of different times Egypt was engaged with war. God is comforting Israel by using Jeremiah to explain exactly what was going to happen through one of their greatest enemies.
- The first prophecy opens with a wonderful insight into those that find themselves going directly against the will of God. Jeremiah's tone is sarcastic. "Go ahead and do everything thing you want to get ready and look good, because none of it is going to matter. God is taking you down!" His words are frightening: "...there is terror on every side. The swift cannot flee nor the strong escape." It feels like a nightmare where you are trying to escape a terrible monster and your feet just won't move.
- Jeremiah makes it very clear: the day of battle "belongs to the Lord, the Lord Almighty (or the Lord of Armies) – a day of vengeance ...on his foes. ...you multiply remedies in vain; there is no healing for you. The nations will hear your shame; your cries will fill the earth. One warrior will stumble over another; both will fall down." Talk about a terrible image of destruction and defeat. We should notice that even within this prophecy the outworking of God's judgment has an element where enemies of God destroy each other. One stumble but takes two down. It shows God's ultimate power and sovereignty.
- The following prophecy about Nebuchadnezzar who is about to attack Egypt is really an expansion of this first prophecy. The same vision is simply clarified with greater detail. The images of the enemies of God attacking to destroy his enemies are very powerful. "Egypt is a beautiful heifer (or cow), but a gadfly (better translation: 'a swarm of stinging flies') are coming against her from the north." Ouch! This is a picture of complete helplessness and pain. "Egypt will be like a fleeing serpent." What an image of the fearful retreat of evil. "...they will come against her with axes like men who down trees. They will chop down her forest." Again this displays complete powerlessness to stop the invading forces. "...they are more numerous than locusts (a swarm of locusts), they cannot be counted." We return to the first image. What seems small and powerless, when it comes in vast numbers makes

even the strongest helpless to stop their advance. God is making it clear, these enemies are under his judgment.

- God wants to reassure the remnant who will be true to him, “Do not fear...do not be dismayed...I will surely save you...” “Jacob will again have peace and security, and no one will make him afraid. Do not fear ...for I am with you.” “I will discipline you but only with justice...” Here we see God being clear about his use of redemptive punishment (or consequences) for Israel but even in the midst of that he wants the nation to know the security of his presence. In the story of what doesn’t work, this punishment against those that sin will one day be placed on a chosen one of God. As Isaiah states, “The punishment that brought us peace was upon him.” (Isaiah 53:5)
- The final prophecy about Egypt deals with the Philistines before Egypt attacks them. The images again are terrifying. The sound of hoofs, the rumbling of chariot wheels. “Fathers will not turn to help their children; their hands will hang limp.” A swinging sword that will not rest. What is shocking is that although the images of destruction and terror are so vivid, the story of Israel reminds us that such completely dangerous consequences still ultimately fail to restrain people from doing evil. It is like those who know that smoking will ultimately result in them dieing of lung cancer, one of the most horrible ways to die, yet they continue to do it even though they know the ultimate outcome. Again this reminds us that anger, punishment and pain ultimately don’t change the human heart. It is only through God working in people’s hearts to change them from the inside out through his mercy, grace and power of his Spirit. One day all of these enemies who are destroying each other will be sent apostles of Christ who will bring to them Good News of God’s love and salvation. God will love his enemies through Christ and his church.