

Jeremiah 46:1-28 God's Worldwide Press Conference Falls Ch. AM 4/16/2023

As we return to our study of Jeremiah, let me review our knowledge of this book. The core of Jeremiah's message is the covenant. God's promise to care for us. And God's care for us can only be comforting in the context of God's ability to do it! We have seen in our study so far that both the covenant and the kingdom cannot be fulfilled in the form that they had taken so far. God's people were in exile, Jerusalem was destroyed, and the prophet Jeremiah had been taken to Egypt.

The people, kings, priests, and prophets did wrong, Jeremiah preached that they needed to repent, but they kept doing wrong. That cycle happened for 40 years. The people could not keep the terms of the covenant. There needed to be more. God's ability must be bigger than they had seen so far. Then God used Babylon like a paddle to chastise His people. Babylon invaded, destroyed the city, and took the people into exile. The people needed to trust God's bigger plan and accept God's method of death and resurrection. They needed to accept the death of going into exile, and the promise that there would be a resurrection after 70 years. There would be a homecoming.

That pointed us to the new covenant - the death of Christ in our place, the promise of a resurrection on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day, the fulfillment of the new covenant promises in the kingdom of God and the new covenant church, and the homecoming to heaven.

What is remarkable is that God has the same sort of message to the nations. You did wrong and need to repent. Without repentance, I will destroy. Even in destruction, there is hope for God's blessings. How do we know that God gave this hopeful message to foreign nations? Because Jeremiah was a prophet not just to Israel, but also to the nations. We are told that Jeremiah is a prophet to the nations in the beginning, middle, and end of the book; Jeremiah 1:5, and 25:13 and again here in 46:1. God gave a message to all nations through Jeremiah.

Later, we hear Christ's command to go and make disciples of all nations (Mt. 28:18-20). We realize that God has been doing this all along. Moses preached to Pharaohs of Egypt. Jonah preached to kings of Assyria. Daniel preached to kings of Babylon. Jesus preached to Pilate, a governor of Rome, and Paul preached to King Agrippa and appealed to Caesar. That does not mean Jeremiah had access to the pharaoh of his day, nor that we have access to the presidents of our day. Rather, Jeremiah's intended audience or readership was always first and foremost Israel, even this chapter 46. There is something that God wanted Israel to know about Egypt. Similarly today, God reveals His good news to the church, for the church to make known to the nations. The gospel is not spread by God Himself making a series of worldwide press conferences. The gospel is spread to the nations through God's missionaries!

The most recent study we had in Jeremiah was chapter 45, with Baruch. Baruch was a great defender of the messages of the Book of Jeremiah, and he was promised to have his life as a prize of war. Listen to the closing words from chapter 45, verse 5, what the LORD God said to Baruch, “...*I will give you your life as a prize of war in all places to which you may go.*” Contrast that to what is stated before it – that God would bring disaster on “all flesh” and also contrast that to what is stated after it – that God would bring disaster on many foreign nations.

Comfort for Baruch, who took God’s word seriously. Judgment for the rest of the world, that did not. God was about to disrupt all of the arrangements of power across the world.

In chapters 46-51, God gave messages to 9 foreign countries. What stands out is that the country of Babylon was God’s instrument of judgment on Judah for its sins, but then God called Babylon itself to account for its sins. God’s justice required that He punish sin wherever He found it. If God found sin in Israel, God must punish it, and if God found sin in another nation, God must punish it.

God is larger than the people of God ever imagined, and God is more holy and righteous than the people had understood Him to be.

In almost all of the prophets, God gave similar messages. Consider Isaiah, chapters 13-23, Ezekiel, chapters 25-32, Amos chapters 1-2, and here in Jeremiah, chapters 46-52. So, why do Bible students and even churches give such little attention to them? One reason is that they are difficult to study and understand, because they are about ancient events in foreign countries with foreign people whose customs are unfamiliar to us. A second reason is that the fierce vengeance makes today’s readers uncomfortable, because modern readers of the Bible are conditioned to think of God only as a God of love and forgiveness. A third reason is that Bible students do not give attention to these passages, is because they do not deal with God’s own country and people, so the passages seem irrelevant.

However, we can answer with 3 reasons why we benefit from giving our attention to passages such as this. First, it is very significant to be reminded that God’s moral laws are universally and internationally valid! God’s right and wrong are the same in any century, in any location. Second, God’s care and love for these nations is a mighty reminder to us to support our missionaries with all our hearts. Even when nations reject God, then God still desires to bless them. Third, when God’s Word is proclaimed, it is always effective to fulfill God’s intention. Over in Isaiah 55:11, “...*My Word that goes out from My mouth...will not return to Me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.*”

There was a pattern to these worldwide press releases. 1) God singled out a foreign country by name. 2) a specific sin was mentioned, often it was pride 3) punishment was announced, and God sent an enemy (often it was Babylon) who

would defeat that nation in a physical battle. 4) an surprising message of hope for certain countries was given out by God!

This leads to our main point. **God calls everyone to repent of misplaced hope (ancient example: hoping in Egypt). Christ is our only true hope who took the punishment we deserved, and gives us repentance and restoration!**

### **1. The Judge over everyone. (v.1-2)**

Chapter 46, verse 1 presents a statement from God introducing the unit of chapters 46-51. Even though 9 foreign nations will be listed, the point is that God is speaking to every country! Where to start?

Verse 2, “*about Egypt.*” God started with Egypt because Egypt in those days was the strongest country in the world. Egypt was seemingly invincible. And Egypt was bad. Egypt is a threat. Making an alliance with Egypt would be spiritually damaging. Trusting in Egypt was a deadly mirage. Another reason God started with Egypt is that there was history between God’s people and Egypt! When we say to Christians the word “Egypt,” all the story of Exodus chapters 1-15 comes to mind. “Let my people go.” So, before God would speak a good word to His people Israel, God would first speak a harsh word against the big bad threatening Egypt. All the Pharaohs from the time of Moses until this time in Jeremiah fall under the same negative symbolism. Egypt was the quintessential enemy of God and His people.

In our study of the Book of Jeremiah, we have noticed a pro-Babylonian bent. The people of Jerusalem were supposed to submit to the takeover by Babylon, and to not resist arrest and exile in Babylon. If the people of Jerusalem were going to be tempted to place their hope elsewhere than in God and God’s plan of using Babylon, then the biggest alternative to wrongly trust was Egypt. Sure enough, we have seen this in our study of the recent chapters 42-45, where a group of Jews ran away to Egypt, and took our prophet Jeremiah with them!

So here, in Jeremiah 46, God spoke in judgment against the country of Egypt. Egypt had dominated for a long time, but then had declined. The leader of Egypt at the time was a man named Neco, and he had the title Pharaoh. His army was near the River Euphrates at an area called Carchemish. In one of the most famous battles of the ancient world, Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon defeated Egypt. When? We are given the year from the perspective of Israel. “...*in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah...*” This phrase keeps coming up in the Book, like we keep studying the year 1776, when our country was formed or the year 1941, when our country was attacked. We would say the year was 605 BC, and it was one of the most the decisive battles of world history. This was when Babylon beat the mighty Egypt! This battle is described now.

**2. Egypt = a symbol of misplaced hope, without the ability to repent and be restored. (v.3-12)**

Verses 3-12 what would God say to Egypt?

First, we are curious about the Bible's use of shield and buckler, made familiar-sounding to us by Psalm 91:4, which here is listed in reverse order, buckler and shield. A shield was a large rectangle to protect the whole body of the soldier, and was worn on the right arm. The buckler was worn on the left arm, and was a puny circle in comparison, meant for the soldier to use to deflect one arrow or one spear. Here in verse 3, God told Egypt to get both ready, and to advance for battle.

Verse 4, harness and mount war horses, take your stations, polish spears, put on your armor. By means of a vigorous staccato-like language, Jeremiah captured the frenzied preparations for battle of the Egyptian army generals.

In verse 5, we suddenly skip over any description of the battle itself, and only get the aftermath of a disastrous defeat when the army of Egypt is running away. Verse 5 ends with a familiar phrase from the LORD God, "*terror on every side!*" which we saw back in chapter 20 of Jeremiah. By not describing the battle itself, there stands out a poetic contrast between verses 3-4 as over against verse 5. Despite the elaborate preparations of the mighty Egyptians, they suffered a humiliating defeat in which they were dismayed, turned back, beaten down, and fled in haste, not looking back. The formerly unbeatable Egyptians were now fleeing, and they could see no escape from the Babylonians in any direction!

Verse 6 reports that even the fastest horse from the army of Egypt could not flee fast enough to get away. No running warrior could escape. Even if they made it as far as the River Euphrates, it was there they would have stumbled and fallen.

Then in verse 7, the fleeing army of Egypt was compared to the annual rising of the waters of the river Nile in flood season. That annual irrigation of the whole land by the overflow of the Nile River was what turned Egypt from a desert to a fertile and fruitful land. Egypt had boasted that their army would flood the earth like the water of the Nile flooded their farms. In verse 8, because Egypt had boasted that they would conquer the earth in the same way that the waters of the Nile flooded the land, those statements were now used against them in the irony and agony of defeat.

Verse 9, we learn that Egypt was short of soldiers. So, extra warriors, horses and chariots had been hired from other places such as Cush, Put and Lud, in order to fight for Egypt. In fact, the borrowed troops made up most of the army of Egypt. But those extra hired troops, who assumed they would easily win, were in for a big surprise. In addition to the original Egyptian troops, and so all of the mercenaries would experience the vengeance of the LORD God. The reason for the defeat of Egypt? God. Not the strengthening of Babylon. Not the weakening of Egypt. Just God. This message is clear from verse 10, "*That day is the day of the LORD God*

*of hosts, a day of vengeance, to avenge Himself on His foes.”* God was against Egypt.

Also in verse 10 the sword of the LORD’s vengeance was described as a wild animal, that would devour its enemies until it was satisfied. Next, the slaughter of the Egyptians was described as a sacrifice that the LORD would offer, in the same place where in verse 6 they had stumbled and fallen, “...*in the north country by the river Euphrates.*” The fact that God Himself would offer a sacrifice shows that there was a religious meaning to this battle. It was spiritual. Egypt represented misplaced hope for God’s people, and so God was smashing all counterfeit hopes, as a call to everyone to repent and place their hope in God alone.

In verses 11, the phrase “*virgin daughter*” is usually a term reserved for God to use to refer to His own people Israel, but here is shockingly applied to the enemy Egypt. They are told to take medicine from the famous Gilead, in those days the equivalent of our Mayo Clinic, but no balm will provide healing. In verse 12, their shame was worldwide, their defeat was total, and their wound incurable. The message was that their defeat was certain, guaranteed by God Himself.

### **3. The looming attack from Babylon = God’s judgment. (v.13-24)**

In verse 13, there is an introduction to a second message of destruction to Egypt. Now we flashback to the time prior to the defeat of Egypt. We return to a previous moment when the army of Babylon had been approaching Egypt, in order to attack Egypt. From the perspective of Egypt, their enemy was at their border.

Verse 14, “*Declare in Egypt...stand ready and be prepared, for the sword shall devour around you.*”

Why? Was it because the army of Babylon was a stronger army? No!

Rather, the answer is clear in verse 15, “*Why are your mighty ones face down? They do not stand because the LORD thrust them down...(v.16) *He made many stumble, and they fell...*”*

Verse 16, the army of Egypt decided to flee from the battlefield back to their homeland for safety.

Verse 17, the army of Egypt started calling their leader ‘noisy’ or ‘a loud noise’ probably a pun on his name. They had concluded that the leader of Egypt was “all talk” and that when action was needed, he had missed the opportunity to adequately defend Egypt. In other words, if he had known that this battle was fighting against God, he actually should have turned to God Himself for mercy!

How did God treat Egypt, because they would not repent? Verse 18 God swore an oath “*as I live*” and in verse 19, pack your bags for exile!

Verse 20, Egypt was compared to a beautiful cow, and the enemy was compared to a horsefly that bites. This meant that the attack of Nebuchadnezzar was viewed as a painful but not fatal bite. But Egypt was wrong about that! In verse 21, the soldiers that Egypt hired to join their army had become pampered and

when the real war broke out, both the Egyptian soldiers and even the hired warriors ran away!

Verse 22, as the soldiers of Egypt were running away, it was humorously compared to the sound of a snake sliding away. A snake looks frightening only if facing you and hissing, but not so much when it is sliding away! The enemy would keep marching in force, and come against Egypt like woodsmen with axes cutting down all the trees of the forest, removing any remaining place for the runaway snake to hide! In verse 23, the enemy army of Babylon could cut down the whole forest, because Babylon had so many soldiers, like locusts, without number. In verse 24, Egypt would lose. It is the word raped. Remember, all this was the judgment from God against Egypt, the counterfeit hope. Smashed.

#### **4. God is calling everyone to repent; to those who do repent, God gives His words of comfort and restoration! (v.25-28)**

In verse 25, God was bringing punishment on Egypt. But at the end of verse 26, God gave an unexpected word of hope for Egypt! “...*Afterward Egypt shall be inhabited as in the days of old, declares The LORD.*”

After Babylon chased Egypt off the battlefield, you might expect that Babylon would next enter the land of Egypt and take them over entirely. Well, Babylon’s conquest of Egypt by Nebuchadnezzar in 568 was only temporary! Nebuchadnezzar’s troops did not destroy much of the land of Egypt, and soon Nebuchadnezzar fully withdrew from Egypt, without imposing control, and without leaving any troops behind! After the battle we just studied, God’s Word came true, “...*afterward, Egypt shall be inhabited as in the days of old, declares The LORD.*”

Since such a judgment followed by such a hope can be given to a pagan nation, how much more could a pattern of judgment followed by hope could there be for God’s own nation, God’s own people?

Listen to verse 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.*”

Since the humiliation of Egypt was not permanent, then Israel could take stronger comfort that their own humiliation and exile would be temporary!

And our last verse 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.*”

Since God had made a full end of Egypt, and yet was able to restore them, it seems like a scenario of death and resurrection, a scenario of judgment followed by hope and promise! Since this is possible for Egypt, why should not the same be

possible for God's own beloved people, even though His people are just as rebellious? What wonders does the LORD have stored up for the future?

We have this fulfilled when the LORD Himself came into the world.

### **Conclusion:**

1. Be a world Christian. God gave hope even to Egypt to repent and believe in the Christ of the new covenant! We tend to think that the events of ancient Egypt had nothing to do with Israel, and the events of Israel had nothing to do with Egypt. But God was supervising and controlling the events in Egypt in order to bless His people. Same today. God is over all nations in order to advance His kingdom, spread His gospel, build His church, and bless His people. Meanwhile, the runaway group of Jewish people who had fled to Egypt and had taken Jeremiah and his scribe Baruch with them, may have thought that they were preserving the kingdom of Judah, but they were refusing God's way. God's way was the only way that His people can survive. They must abandon their dream for the political outcome of their own hometown Jerusalem and their country of Israel. They must die to that old life, and let it be buried under the domination of Babylon for 70 years. Then, and only then, could the people of God arise out of the death of Babylon in the newness of resurrection life, and find a new and changed world. God's plan of death and resurrection is the only way. God's kingdom is not loyal to any one country's nationalistic dreams and hopes. Being a world Christian means you are not putting all of your hopes in your own country, and being overly-patriotic, while missing God's movements in His international kingdom. As world Christians, we have the courage to ask ourselves what the exiles in Babylon were facing – how can we trust God when He has allowed our beloved country to be dismantled? The answer is being a world Christian. To open our eyes to see the worldwide advance of God's kingdom, and to commit ourselves to accepting it and investing in it. We die to overly-patriotic overly-nationalistic passions that focus on the moral overhaul of a country. We accept that we have one foot in this world, and one foot in the kingdom that is from another world. We grieve the decline of our country, but we also joyfully invest in the kingdom of God, which is worldwide, robust, expanding and deepening. We place our hopes not in Egypt, not in Jerusalem, not in the USA, but in Christ alone, and that is what it means to be a world Christian. We are exiles here. Paul called us to have this perspective on our fellow Americans in Philippians 3:19-20, “...*their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like His glorious body, by the power that enables Him even to subject all things to Himself...*” We are exiles here. God's message to us is that God is bigger than Egypt, bigger than Babylon, bigger than Israel, bigger than America. We have a king. His name is Jesus. He has all the

power. We join the effort to tell this good news to our nation, and to all the nations. We are world Christians. That means we are people of God with a message for the whole world to hear. Jesus told us in Matthew 28:19, ‘Go...make disciples of all nations...’”

2. Do not fear. We believe in the Biblical summary of judgment to come, as written in the 1600s in the Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 33, “God hath appointed a day, wherein he will judge the world, in righteousness, by Jesus Christ, to whom all power and judgment is given of the Father. In which day, not only the apostate angels shall be judged, but likewise all persons that have lived upon earth shall appear before the tribunal of Christ, to give an account of their thoughts, words, and deeds; and to receive according to what they have done in the body, whether good or evil.” Okay, then How can I say the application of this sermon is do not fear? Two reasons from verses 27 and 28. a) The LORD will save us b) The LORD is with us. This is the God who would end the exile and bring His people Jacob home safely and keep them safe. This is the same God who will deal severely with the nations that caused exile. Because God has dealt with Egypt and controls Babylon, God has made the world a safe place for Israel. When the shepherd deals with the wolf, the whole hillside is a safe place for the sheep. What really were to fear was the wrath of God Himself, and not the early powers of Egypt or Babylon. But God’s wrath has turned away from us. Romans 5:9, “...we have now been justified by [Christ’s] blood, much more shall we be saved by Him from the wrath of God.” We do not fear because this is the God who used to be angry with us, but in Christ has justified us. We need not fear because this is the same God who ended our exile and gave us resurrection life in Christ Jesus through His death and resurrection for us all. There is no need for us to fear anything. We do not fear death, we do not fear wars, or attacks of any kind.

We do not fear, because we have the biding presence of God with us always. In verse 28, God said an astonishing thing. He said that God is with His people even in their exile in Babylon! We have the same promise to us in our exile in this world - the last words of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew are these, “*Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.*” (Mt. 28:20) We do not fear, because Jesus is with us by His Spirit and His Word. Colossians 3:3-4, “...*you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.*” There is no need to fear. We have died to dark fears of God being angry with us. We have died to dark fears of people and of military threats and random shooters. We have died to fears of the devil and all things demonic. We have died to fear of our own sins destroying us! Your life is safe and protected. Your life is hidden with the risen Christ. He is coming again. When He comes, we will appear with Him in glory. Do not fear.