

Haftarah Helper 5781: Bo

Zachary Beer (Nachshon Project Fellow, The City College of New York) and
Barry Kornblau (Rabbi, Young Israel of Hollis Hills-Windsor Park, Queens, NY)
Dedicated by the Holzer family to celebrate the Bar Mitzvah of their son, Moshe.

Jeremiah 46:13-28

Jeremiah prophesied to Judah and its people in a period of tumultuous national and international upheaval - before, during, and after God sent the Babylonian Empire under Nebuchadnezzar to destroy Judah and His Temple in 586 BCE. Jeremiah's prophecy which appears in his book just before the Haftarah (46:1-12) occurs decades before Judah's destruction. In it, Jeremiah declares that Egypt's northward imperial expansion will be turned back at the Euphrates River by Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians; so it was, in 605.

In his prophecy in the Haftarah, Jeremiah continues God's sanction of Babylon's destruction of Egypt. Speaking around the time of Judah's destruction, he asserts that Nebuchadnezzar's army, coming from the north, will destroy Egypt, its leaders, and gods; later, Egypt's exiled survivors will return home¹. The destruction is similar to God's destruction of Egypt in the Parashah. Jeremiah declares that God is punishing Egypt for its misdeeds; the Book of Kings² describes how Egypt mistreated Judah at that time. The prophet concludes by reassuring Judeans that despite the turmoil, God will ensure their survival, punish their oppressors, and return them to dwell peacefully in His land.

Haftarah Breakdown

Verses 13-19: God tells Jeremiah to declare in Egypt His firm plan to utterly destroy it and its king, whose time has passed in His eyes. Egypt's mighty men shall flee; its survivors shall be exiled abroad.

Jeremiah 46:19	ירמיהו מ"ו:י"ט
Pack your belongings for exile, you who live in Egypt - for Noph ³ will be laid waste, and lie in ruins without inhabitants.	כָּלִי גֹלָה עֲשֵׂי לְךָ יוֹשְׁבֵת בְּתִמְצָרִים כִּי־נֹף לְשִׁמָּה תִהְיֶה וְנִצְתָה מֵאֵין יוֹשֵׁב: (ס)

Verses 20-24: Like a fattened cow ready for slaughter and a forest ready to be cut down, Egypt and its hired soldiers will be destroyed. More numerous than a locust cloud, its conqueror shall come from the north.

Jeremiah 46:20	ירמיהו מ"ו:כ'
Egypt is a very fair heifer— a destroyer from the north is surely coming!	עֲגֵלָה יְפֵה־פִיָּה מִצְרַיִם קָרַץ מִצְפּוֹן בָּא בָּא:

Verses 25-26: The God of Israel declares that He is punishing Egypt by sending the Babylonians, from its north, to destroy it - though its exiles will eventually return to its land.

Jeremiah 46:26	ירמיהו מ"ו:כ"ו
"And I will deliver them into the hand[s] of those who seek [to end] their lives and into the hand[s] of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and into the hand[s] of his servants. Afterward, [Egypt] shall be inhabited again as in the days of old," says the Lord.	וְנָתַתִּי יָמַי בְּיַד מְבַקְשֵׁי נַפְשָׁם וּבְיַד נְבוּכַדְרֶאצַּר מֶלֶךְ־בָּבֶל וּבְיַד־עַבְדָּיו וְאַחֲרֵי־כֵן תִּשְׁכַּן כִּי־יָמִי־קִדְּםָה נְאֻם־ה': (ס)

¹ In last week's Haftarah, Jeremiah's contemporary, Ezekiel, prophesied similarly.

² See 2 Kings 23:29 -35.

³ Noph is the Hebrew name for the Egyptian city of Memphis.

Haftarah Breakdown (cont.)

Verses 27-28: Amidst the upheavals, God will protect his exiled people, Israel, and return them to dwell peaceably in His Land.

Jeremiah 46:27	ירמיהו מ"ז:כ"ז
And You, O My servant, Jacob, fear not; be not dismayed, O Israel! For behold, I will save you from afar, and [redeem] your seed from the land of their captivity. Jacob shall return, and be quiet and at ease; there shall be none to make him tremble.	וְאַתָּה אֶל-תִּירָא עַבְדִּי יַעֲקֹב וְאֶל-תַּחַת יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי הִנְנִי מוֹשֶׁעַךְ מִרְחֹק וְאֶת-זֶרְעֶךָ מֵאֶרֶץ שְׁבִיִּים וְשָׁב יַעֲקֹב וְשָׁקֵט וְשָׁאֲנָן וְאִין מִחְרִיד: (o)

Connections

The **poetic description of Egypt** in the poem **Maoz Tzur** is derived from verse 46:20 (above).

Maoz Tzur	מעוז צור
My soul was sated with woes; my strength had ended with sorrow. My life was embittered by hardship when subjected to the Heifer Kingdom (Egypt). With His great power, He brought forth the treasured one. The host of Pharaoh and all his seed descended like a stone in the watery deep.	רְעוֹת שִׁבְעָה נִפְשֵׁי בִּגְוֹן כָּחִי כְּלָה. חַיִּי מָרְרוּ בְּקוֹשֵׁי בְשֵׁבֶד מַלְכוּת עֵגְלָה. וּבִדְדוּ הַגְּדוּלָה הוֹצִיא אֶת הַסִּגְלָה. חֵיל פְּרָעָה וְכָל זֶרְעוֹ יִרְדּוּ כְּאֶבֶן בְּמַצוּלָה

Rabbi Moses Cordovero, one of the earliest Tzfat Kabbalists⁴, derives a practice that is part of a **mystical practice of connecting to God's Kingship** from the Haftarah.

Sefer Tomer Devorah 9	ספר תומר דבורה ט
To go into exile: ...He [should] exile himself from place to place for the sake of Heaven. Through this, he becomes a "chariot" for the exiled <i>Shechinah</i> [Divine Presence], and liken himself [to the <i>Shechinah</i> , as follows]: "Behold, I have exiled myself. Behold, all my [needed] items are with me. What does the honor of the Higher Realm do? The <i>Shechinah</i> was exiled, but her items are not with Her, as they were removed on account of exile!" Therefore, let him minimize his vessels with all of his ability, as Scripture (Jeremiah 46:19) states, "Pack your belongings for exile." Let him subdue his heart in this exile and connect himself to Torah - then the <i>Shechinah</i> will be with him. He [should also] banish himself by always removing himself from his residence, in the way that Rabbi Shimon and his colleagues would banish themselves, and occupy themselves with Torah.	לצאת גלות: ... יגלה ממקום למקום לשם שמים, ובזה יעשה מרכבה אל השכינה הגולה. וידמה עצמו הרי אני גליתי והרי כלי תשמישי עמי, מה יעשה כבוד גבוה שגלתה שכינה וכליה אינם עמה, שחסרו בסבת הגלות. ולזה ימעט בכליו בכל יקלתו כדכתיב (ירמיהו מו, יט): "כלי גולה עשי לך" ויכניע לבבו בגולה ויתקשר בתורה, ואז שכינה עמו, ויעשה לעצמו גרושין ויתגרש מבית מנחתו תמיד כדרך שהיו מתגרשים רבי שמעון וחבריו ועוסקים בתורה.

With emendations, biblical translations are by [Rabbi A. J. Rosenberg](#) and other translations are from [Sefaria.org](#).

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⁴ In the mid-1500s, a group of Kabbalistic thinkers lived in Tzfat. Among them were Rabbi Isaac Luria, known as the "Holy Ari"; Rabbi Joseph Caro, author of the Shulchan Aruch; Rabbi Shlomo Alkabetz, composer of Lecha Dodi; as well as Alkabetz's brother-in-law, Cordovero, mentioned above.