

Bo: Jeremiah 46:13-28



The Haftarah is the second of two prophecies against Egypt in chapter 46 of Jeremiah. In the first (46:1-12), Jeremiah declares that Nebuchadnezzar's Babylonian army would defeat Egypt at the Euphrates and halt its northward imperial expansion. This defeat occurred at the Battle of Carchemish in 605 BCE.

The Haftarah foretells further destruction of Egypt by Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon. With fearsome battle imagery, Jeremiah declares that God is punishing Egypt for its misdeeds. As in the Parashah, God's destruction of Egypt and its gods is entwined with the redemption of His people. These two prophecies against Egypt close with God's message for Israel and its exiles. Despite His complete destruction of the nations among whom they live, God will not completely destroy His people; He will return them to dwell peacefully in the Land.

The precise historical circumstances of the Haftarah and the reasons for Egypt's punishment are not clear. The prophecy may relate to the period when Egypt, on its way north to battle Babylon, defeated Judah and killed King Josiah in battle in 609. The Haftarah recounts God's punishment of Egypt for this and for Egypt's subsequent mistreatment of Judah for several years¹. Alternatively, Jeremiah may be prophesying Egypt's destruction for its contributions to Judah's destruction by Babylon in 586, or warning Judah's remaining inhabitants after the destruction not to escape Babylonian rule by fleeing to Egypt since it - and they - will soon be destroyed.²

Haftarah Breakdown

Verses 13-19: God tells Jeremiah that Babylon's Nebuchadnezzar will utterly destroy Egypt and its king. All Egypt should plan for a war during which its warriors will flee- and for its survivors' exile after Egypt's defeat.

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.	כְּלֵי גֹלָה עֲשֵׂי לָךְ יוֹשְׁבֵת בְּתַמְצָרִים כִּי־נָחַף לְשָׂמָה תִּהְיֶה וְנִצְתָה מֵאִין יוֹשֵׁב: (ס)

Verses 20-24: More numerous than a locust cloud, Egypt's conqueror shall come from the north. Egypt and its hired soldiers are like a fattened cow ready for slaughter and a forest ready to be cut down at God's command.

Jeremiah 46:20	ירמיהו מ"ו:כ'
Egypt is a very fair heifer. A slaughterer from the north is surely coming!	עֲגֻלָּה יָפֵה־פְנִיהַ מִצְרַיִם קָרַץ מִצְפּוֹן בָּא בָּא:

Verses 25-26: God is sending the Babylonians from the north to punish and destroy Egypt, its capital city of No (modern-day Luxor), its gods, its king, and those who rely on them. Its exiles will eventually return home to Egypt.⁴

Jeremiah 46:26	ירמיהו מ"ו:כ"ו
"I will deliver them into the hand[s] of those who seek [to end] their lives, 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.	וְנִתְּתִים בְּיַד מְבַקְשֵׁי נַפְשָׁם וּבְיַד נְבוּכַדְרֶאצַּר מֶלֶךְ־בָּבֶל וּבְיַד־עַבְדָּיו וְאַחֲרֵיהֶם תִּשְׁכֹּן כִּי־מִיָּקְדָם נֶאֱמַר־ה': (ס)

¹ See 2 Kings 23:29 -35.

² Da'at Mikra Ezekiel, p. 552.

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

⁴ This is likely the same return of Egypt after forty years of exile that Jeremiah's contemporary, Ezekiel, predicted in the year 570 in [last week's Haftarah](#).

Verses 27-28: God has punished His people with exile and is utterly destroying the nations where they live. Yet they must not fear: God is with them and will not utterly destroy them. They will return to dwell peaceably in the Land.

Jeremiah 46:27	ירמיהו מ"ו:כ"ז
You, My servant, Jacob, fear not! Do not dismay, Israel! For behold, I will save you from afar- your seed from the land of their captivity. Jacob shall return, and be quiet and at ease; none shall make him tremble.	וְאַתָּה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל עֲבָדֵי יַעֲקֹב וְאַל־תַּחַת יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי הִנְנִי מוֹשְׁעֶךָ מִרְחֹק וְאַתָּה יוֹרֵעַ מֵאַרְצָה שְׂבָיִם וְשָׁב יַעֲקֹב וְשָׁקֵט וְשָׁאֵג וְאִין מִתְרִיד: (ס)

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 (Israel). Pharaoh's host and all his seed descended like a stone in the watery deep.	רעות שקבעה נפשי בַּיָּגוֹן כְּחַי כְּלָה. חַי מָרְרוּ בְּקוֹשֵׁי בְּשֻׁעֵבֹד מַלְכוּת עֵגְלָה. וּבְיָדוֹ הַגְּדוּלָה הוֹצִיא אֶת הַסְּגָלָה. חַיִל פְּרָעָה וְכָל יָרְעוּ יָרְדוּ כְּאֶבֶן בְּמַצוּלָה

Rabbi Moses Cordovero, one of the earliest Tzfat Kabbalists⁵, derives from the Haftarah an ascetic practice of self-exile that is part of a **mystical process for connecting to God's Kingship**.

Sefer Tomer Devorah 9	ספר תומר דבורה ט
To go into exile: They explained a second [method of connecting to God's Kingship] in the Book of the Zohar (Vayekhel, 198b) that is very important. He [should] exile himself from place to place for the sake of Heaven and thereby become a "chariot" for the exiled <i>Shechinah</i> [Divine Presence]. He should imagine himself [as follows]: "Behold, I have exiled myself. Behold, my [needed] items are with me. [But] what would the honor of the Higher Realm do? The <i>Shechinah</i> was exiled, but her items are not with Her, as they were removed due to the 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 bind himself to Torah - then the <i>Shechinah</i> will be with him. He [should also] banish himself by always removing himself from his residence, just as Rabbi Shimon [bar Yochai] and his colleagues would banish themselves and occupy themselves with Torah.	לצאת לגלות: עוד שנייה פרשו בספר הזוהר (ויקהל, קצ"ח:) והיא חשיבה מאד- יגלה ממקום למקום לשם שמים, ובזה יעשה מרכבה אל השכינה הגולה. וידמה עצמו הרי אני גליתי והרי כלי תשמישי עמי, מה יעשה כבוד שגליתה שכינה וכליה אינם עמה, שחסרו בסבת הגלות. ולזה ימעט בכליו בכל יכלתו כדכתיב (ירמיה מו, יט): "כלי גולה עשי לך" ויכניע לכו בגולה ויתקשר בתורה, ואז שכינה עמו, ויעשה לעצמו גרושין ויתגרש מבית מנחתו תמיד כדרך שהיו מתגרשים רבי שמעון וחבריו ועוסקים בתורה.

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⁵ 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.