

Tell a story
Haftara Bo
by Julie Zhuk on 2022-12-28

Comments

Egypt was told to prepare her army for war. She was going to be defeated by Nevuchadnetzar and she would be exiled. There was no hope for her victory and G-d would punish Egypt. After their exile the Egyptians would return to their land. In the previous haftara, Yechezkel had predicted that Egypt would be defeated by Nevuchadnetzar. Yirmiyahu, another prophet had a message in this haftara that deals with the same subject. Yirmiyahu also gives additional reasons for Egypt to be punished. In parsha Bo, Egypt in the haftara are punished for committing atrocities against the Jewish people. Parsha Bo will describe the plague of locusts that happened to the Egyptians. There is a reference to locusts in the parsha and in the haftara as well. Towards the end of the parsha of Bo, the Jewish people had set out on their journey of freedom from Egyptian bondage, they went towards Israel. The haftara concludes with the Jewish people being liberated from their period in exile. G-d predicted the future for Yirmiyahu, He told him that Nevuchadnetzar, king of Bavel was going to come and smite the land of Egypt. Yirmiyahu, foretold that Nevuchadnetzar's army would invade Egypt, and defeat her. The people living in Egypt would be sent into exile, Yirmiyahu's words came true within the twenty-seventh year of Nevuchadnetzar's time in power. When the Babylonian army invaded Egypt and defeated Pharaoh Necho. It was proclaimed in Egypt and announced in Migdol, which was a Egyptian city and let it be heard in Nof and Tachpanches cities.

These were the capital cities and Nof is Memphis. Meaning that Nevuchadnetzar would come and smite the Egyptians. G-d said, stand fast and prepare your weapons for yourself, Pharaoh. Nevuchadnetzar's sword has already devoured countries around Pharaoh. Yehuda has fallen and you are slated to be punished next! The prophet was actually warning Egypt here. He was warning Egypt that Nevuchadnetzar was going to attack and destroy yet, unless the Egyptians would be willing to do teshuva and then they would be defeated. The haftara of Bo stresses a few things. One is winning or losing a war isn't contingent upon having strength or military advantage of one army over the other. G-d brings victory to the side He considers that needs deserving of it. Men naturally who don't believe in G-d are going to be ignorant of Torah and will attribute the outcome of their wars to natural causes. Let us examine some historical cases that will illustrate this example. There was the time of Yehoshua attacked Ai, the second city in the conquest of the land of Canaan, the Jewish army was defeated and despite the fact that Ai was militarily insignificant, G-d had explained to Yehoshua the reason why the Jews were defeated. There was a grave sin that had been committed in his midst and there was an investigation that revealed Achan, from the tribe of Yehuda. He stole some of the spoils from the previous war. Stealing those spoils was not allowed, they were meant only for G-d. When the stolen property had been returned and the sinner was executed, G-d told Yehoshua he now had time to prepare once more for war. He told Yehoshua to not be afraid because G-d would be on his side. G-d would have given the king of Ai, together with his land and his people into your hands.

In the next haftara, we will read about G-d granting the prophetess Devora victory over the mighty Canaanite king named, Yavin. She was righteous and observed to win even though she

was considered inferior since she was not part of the army. King Shaul was threatened by an attack coming from the Philistine army. King Shaul started shaking out of fear, he paid a clandestine visit to a woman who practiced what was called necromancy. He had requested to bring up the prophet Shmuel from his grave. He wanted to ask Shmuel to predict the outcome of the war, it was strictly forbidden to do this by the Torah. Shmuel, did tell Shaul that he had transgressed greatly, and he would lose this war and fall in the war as well. There are some next verses mentioned that carry the same theme, the past tense takes place, even though the verses predict a war that has yet to happen. The prophet sees the future with the certainty of past history. There is a question in this haftara why was each of the mighty war heroes swept away by the enemy? The Midrash answers us that He couldn't stand because G-d had pushed him away. The Zohar tells us that Egypt's guardian was an angel. Egypt was doomed because the guardian angel in Heaven lost power due to all of Egypt's evil ways. G-d made the Egyptians to stumble, also each of Egypt's allies had joined his friend. They would say the words, let's get up and return to our people and what they called their birth-place. They wanted to go before the oppressive sword of Nevuchadnetzar. All of a sudden Egypt's numerous allies were no longer impressed with Egypt's might. They wanted to desert her, the answer comes in the verse 46:17. The Babylonian army or maybe even in Pharaoh's own army, the soldiers started to say how Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, is but a noise! They were talking about how much Pharaoh boasted that he would overcome the Babylonian army and they were meaningless. Pharaoh had passed up the appointed time for starting the war and that was because he was a coward.

Pharaoh lacked courage. He had other reasons for delaying the war. He had magical predictions, these were "unlucky hours" for him and he waited for them to pass. Even though he postponed the war, things didn't improve and he didn't stay lucky. He was leading the Egyptian people blindly. They all believed that Nevuchadnetzar wouldn't dare to invade their country. Yirmiyahu asserted that they were highly mistaken. The next verse starts out with G-d saying, "As I am alive, swears the King, Whose Name is G-d of all hosts, as surely as Mount Tavor stands among the mountains and Mount Carmel among the mountains by the sea, both being firmly positioned in their locations." G-d claimed that he, Nevuchadnetzar would in fact come into Egypt and he wouldn't leave without defeating it. The King, Whose Name is G-d of all hosts, would show that He had the final say. Pharaoh wouldn't have the last say, even if he thought he could claim divinity. Rabbi Elazar HaKappor taught that in the future era the batai knesios and batai midrashos that are outside of Israel would be transplanted to the Holy Land. We are getting this information from the verse in Yirmiyahu 46:8. It talks about Tavor being fixed among the mountains and Carmel was able to travel across the sea. Originally these two mountains were outside of Israel. Mount Tavor located in Bais Ailim and Mount Carmel in Aspamia. When G-d was about to give the Torah. Both of these mountains had desired to be chosen as the site for the great event and to this end, the angel that appointed over mountains started moving them towards Mount Sinai. G-d still rejected them and chose to give the Torah on Mount Sinai. Mount Tavor and Mount Carmel, were recompensed for their disappointment by being uprooted from their locations and being replanted in Israel. Later on, there were special events that took place about these mountains. The Jews went to Tavor and were miraculously saved in the time of Devorah. She was a prophetess. In the next haftara on Carmel G-d's unity was proclaimed during the time that Eliyahu was alive. That is in the haftara of Ki Sisa. These two mountains had been moved to Israel just because of their intense desire to have Torah taught on them even for a short time.

This was all during the giving of the Torah, then the batai midrashos, the houses of constant Torah study, would certainly be transplanted to the HOly Land. G-d says to prepare ourselves such objects, it is required for wandering, daughter of Egypt. Egypt's capital, Nof, would become desolate and lonely without having anyone in it. Egypt had been like a beautiful calf, death was coming from the north. It was coming from Bavel; it was coming for sure. Nevuchadnetzar would come and cut Egypt into pieces. The Egyptian empire can be described as a "beautiful calf," because Egypt had been highly developed in agriculture. It enabled its nobles to live in riches and splendor. The future of this pampered calf was cleared beyond doubt; it was head for the slaughterhouse. Egypt was destined to be destroyed by Nevuchadnetzar. Maybe the prophet, used the simile of a calf to remind us that Egypt had once worshiped the bull. At the same time, the previous haftara made fun of Pharaoh in a way of calling him a crocodile, where he had been venerated in Egypt. The next verse mentioned is also in the past tense, but it refers to future events that would take place. The nobles and mercenaries as well in their midst as like calves were kept in a stable for fattening. They didn't possess the courage characteristic of nobility, because they also turned and fled together. They didn't stand up against the enemy, for the day of their downfall had come upon them, it was finally the time of their punishment. Egypt would cry out and be like the serpent's, the Midrash explains how as soon as G-d cursed the snake in Gan Eden by saying, "You must crawl on your belly," angels were flying down and chopped off its feet. At this point, the serpent had uttered such a piercing scream. It had a really loud outcry and the whole world heard it. The prophet here was foretelling that the Egyptians would be screaming as well. Their defeat would be penetratingly bitter. They would realize they would never regain the same kind of power they had before. The imagery of woodchoppers is continued in the next verse. The Babylonians would cut down Egypt's forest, that was G-d's plan. The Egyptian's soldiers were numerous as trees in a forest, but they would be destroyed. The Babylonian army couldn't be measured because it was too large. It was like an army of locusts, you just couldn't count how many there were. The daughter of Egypt would be put to shame, she would be given into the hand of a northern nation, known as Bavel. Bavel was geographically situated north of Egypt.

The term for "north" was meant as the direction fo Heaven where there Divine punishment came from. G-d the host of hosts, known as the G-d of Israel, had said that he would punish the multitude of No (Alexandria), Pharaoh, Egypt and its gods, as well as the kings that were ruling its districts. Just like G-d said He would punish Pharaoh, He would also punish those who put trust in him. The last phrase refers to the Jews who trusted in Pharaoh. In this verse, G-d calls Himself the G-d of hosts the G-d of Israel. This title is indicating that G-d would repay Egypt for the numerous evil things she had once inflicted upon he Jewish people throughout the ages. Egypt had a record for causing the Jews to go through hardships. Egypt's name itself was Mitzrayim and it denotes oppressor from the root words tyrant and hardship. There are some examples of the tragedies which caused Egypt during the reign of the kings. During the first three years of Shlomo's son (Rechavam) being in power over the kingdom of Yehuda, the Jews there were acting righteously. By the fourth year, things changed and the Jews started to worship idols. The people of the kingdom of Yehuda had been known to be tzaddikim, G-d decided to punish them right away, we learn from the haftara here that it follows the rule of G-d cleansing the people He loves and those who are close to Him. He does this through fast and severe punishment, by the fifty year of Rechavam being in power, G-d allowed for the king of Egypt known as Shishak to invade the kingdom of Yehuda. His army was vast; it compromised 1500 chariots and 60,000 riders. This king of Egypt, Shishak was easily able to take over the fortresses of Yehuda and he entered Jerusalem triumphantly. The Egyptian soldiers stole from their Jews all of their wealth, they emptied the treasury of the Bais Hamikdash as well as the royal coffers; even King Shlomo's world-famous throne and the golden shields worn by the royal

palace guards that were carried away. After the invasion happened, King Shlomo had to replace them with copper shields. This was G-d's way of punishing the Jews measure for measur, they preferred to serve idols instead of submitting to G-d Himself and His ruling. It was for this, that G-d made sure the Jews were subjugated to a foreign king. The treasures that King Shishak stole had been inherited by the Jews from their ancestors who were redeemed from when they were in slavery back in Egypt. When they forsook G-d's ways, He caused the wealth to leave the Jews and go back to Egypt. That was how it was originally, Egypt had all that wealth to begin with.

Yoshiyahu was one of the righteous kings of Yehuda and he removed every symbol of idolatry that he found. He found this throughout the land, it was in temples, statues or trees. He was completely unaware that his subjects kept serving idols in secret. When Pharaoh Necho, King of Egypt asked him to grant the Egyptian army a way through Israel in order to confront their enemy, Yoshiyahu refused. He was reasoning that G-d had promised in the Torah that if the Jews were to be righteous, no foreign soldiers would go through the land. The prophet, Yirmiyahu advised Yoshiyahu to grant Pharaoh Necho's request. Yoshiyahu stood his ground, he wouldn't hear of it. There was a war that started at Meggido, the members of King Yoshiyahu's generation weren't as worthy as their counterparts in the time of King Chiszkiyahu. He had been miraculously saved from the hands of Assyria. The Jewish army had been defeated and Yoshiyahu was mortally wounded by the enemies' arrows. When Yoshiyahu was dying, he was able to recognize G-d's justice. Yoshiyahu's death had been accepted by G-d like a sacrifice on the altar, the name Yoshiyahu means a gift to G-d. G-d had ultimately avenged Yoshiyahu's death by delivering Pharaoh Necho into the hands of Nevuchadnetzar. G-d said He would give the Egyptians into the hand of those who seek their lives: into the hand of Nevuchadnetzar, king of Bavel and his servants. After that forty years went by and Egypt returned from exile. Egypt was living in her own land again as in the days of old. In the previous haftara, last week before Bo, the prophet Yechezkel had prophesied that after forty years would go by, Egypt was going to be more resettled by her own people. Egypt would never regain her former greatness though. Yirmiyahu confirmed this prophecy and the Midrash tells us that Egypt had been punished a total of three times.

There was the time when Pharaoh's butler related his dream to Joseph and he mentioned "a cup" three times. Pharaoh's cup was in my hand meaning in G-d's hand. G-d was the one who took the grapes and squeezed them into Pharaoh's cup and put the cup in Pharaoh's hand. These three cups were alluding to the three measures of punishment where the Egyptians would get payback for their evil ways. These evil ways were three separate times. During Mose's time, Egypt was smitten with the Ten Plagues. Then there was the time during Pharaoh Necho's reign, Egypt was defeated by the army of Nevuchadnetzar. Lastly, Egypt would be punished in the time of Mashiach, this would also include those nations who inflicted any suffering on the Jewish people. This last one has not happened yet, it will when the Mashiach comes. G-d does not allow any act of wickedness against the Jewish people to go unpunished. The Roman government had made a decree for the execution of a famous Rabbi Yehuda HaNachtom. There was a Jew by the name of Ben Kufya, he managed to smuggle himself into the courtroom and arrange that another man should be executed in place of Rabbi Yehuda HaNachtom. This crime had been reported to the Roman officials. They apprehended Rabbi Yehuda HaNachtom and Ben Kufya, both of these men were put to death. In the future, G-d was going to avenge the blood of Rabbi Akiva and other martyrs. G-d would also demand to get justice for the blood of Rabbi Yehuda HaNachtom and Ben Kufya. At this point, the haftara comes to a close. It ends with two verses that bring the Jewish people a sense of comfort. If the Egyptians can be assured of having a future to return to their land again, the

Jewish people will be promised a comforting reward as well. G-d told his servant Jacob, to have no fear. This was meant for the Jewish nation as well to have no fear, in the end G-d promised to rescue the Jews. Even if they are far from the land of Israel, unlike the Egyptians who were close to their own home. The Jewish people's offspring were from the land of wherever they were being held captive. G-d wanted the Jews to know that their forefather Jacob, would be at ease and repose. He would be in a state of tranquility and no one will disturb him or the Jewish people. This was a promise made to the Jewish people, they were to return from all of their areas of being in exile. There were four of these, there was a four-fold expression for peace in the verse mentioned here. The Jewish nation will be at ease after the Babylonian exile is over. The Jews will repose after the Persian exile and they will be tranquil after the Greek exile. No one will disturb the Jews after the Edomite exile, which is our present exile currently.

Jacob wanted to know from G-d why this last exile was so urgent and important for the Jews to go through. The Midrash tells us that it was G-d who actually said those words, do not fear, My servant Jacob. When Jacob was sleeping, he had a dream where he saw a ladder that extended into heaven with angels that were going up and down. The vision was symbolizing the four different future exile that Jacob's descendants would go through. Jacob was able to see into the future, it was an endless exile and it was the last one. Jacob felt very despaired at the time, that was when G-d reassured him and said to have no fear and that He G-d, will be the one to terminate the last exile. The next verse talks about how sometimes it seems in our present exile the Jews are so far gone that they will G-d forbid, be lost forever. G-d reassures the Jews that He will still rescue us. That's why G-d says to not have fear, He told his servant Jacob that He is with us. G-d says that even if He will make an end of all the nations among whom He caused, He will not make an end of us Jews. He will chastise the Jews, we surely do deserve this, for our many transgressions. At the same time, G-d does not believe in destroying the Jewish people completely as He does feel the other nations need to be destroyed. The keywords in this verse is G-d saying He is with us. G-d's Presence is with the Jewish people even when they are in a period of exile, as a result our survival is assured. Jews shouldn't infer that G-d has automatically forgiven us for our many transgressions. The verse from before tells us that the sufferings of being in a period of exile, was to cleanse the Jews and spare them from being completely annihilated. The Midrash singles out a particular suffering that stands us in good stead. G-d says, "the nations of the world harvest their fields from end to end. G-d plans to make an end of them. For the Jewish people, they keep the mitzva, they don't reap their field to the end. They leave a corner for the poor. In this honor G-d will never make an end of them. G-d deals with people measure for measure. He always has, there have been times when the Jews commit a variety of transgressions. Somehow, they usually don't neglect the mitzva of giving charity or leaving a part of their harvest or their money for those who have even less. Jews are always willing to share their possessions, so G-d will not insist on claiming what is rightfully His. He will deal differently with the Jewish people than the other nations. He doesn't wish to destroy the Jews. He sends hardships their way to awaken their minds to do teshuva.

A famous Rabbi named Pappa, had gone up some steps, when he lost his footing and almost had a brutal fall. For him, this was a Heavenly hit that he was deserving of getting the death penalty. He asked himself if it was possible of being guilty of having desecrated the Shabbat or of serving idols. He reached out to a Rabbi Chiya, who suggested to him that he might have referred to a well-known incident where a paper, who was begging from door to door was sent away without any contribution from Rabbi Pappa. Rabbi Pappa was in charge of a certain charity fund, when he was asked why he didn't give any charity, he said there was no need. His man collected charity from individuals. This was when Rabbi Pappa was told he should have

given a small donation. For now, people may refuse his request since they will assume that he received a share from his fund. Someone could end up starving. The last two verses of the haftara are powerful sources of comfort for the Jews being in exile now. Unfortunately, there are so many people who have assimilated with the non-Jews and the level of spirituality has gone down. Despite all of this, Yirmiyahu's prophecy assures us that our nation's restoration will happen for sure.