

THE RIGHT TIME, OR THE OPPORTUNE TIME?

A Devotional Meditation on Bo (Go)

Exodus 10:1-13:16; Jeremiah 46:13-28; Luke 4:1-13

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The Exodus story is much more than a Jewish cultural memory. Even those who don't know the scriptures understand the basic outline of the story. When Egypt, the most powerful nation on earth, enslaved God's Chosen People of Israel, God sent Moses to bring the Israelites out of captivity. Their freedom came after Egypt was destroyed by the Ten Plagues Moses administered at God's direction. Thus God pronounced judgment on Egypt, which is summed up in this verse:

The LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, said:

"Behold, I am bringing punishment upon Amon of Thebes, and Pharaoh and Egypt

and her gods and her kings, upon Pharaoh and those who trust in him."

Jeremiah 46:25 (ESV)



Photo by Chandan Chaurasia on [Unsplash](https://unsplash.com/photos/8vYdW0p0t00).

Except that this verse isn't about Israel's Exodus from Egypt; it's about the judgment God rendered on Egypt 850 years later, during the lifetime of the prophet Jeremiah. So much of Israel's ancient history happened in those 8½ centuries: the 40 years of wandering the wilderness, the conquest of Canaan, the era of the Judges, the united Kingdom under Saul, David, and Solomon, and the time of the divided kingdoms of Israel and Judah. After all that, the world had come right back to the same place. By the time Jeremiah's prophetic career ended, both halves of Israel's Covenant People were scattered in exile, and God was ready to judge the nations that had enticed his people into rebellion and then dismembered them when that rebellion resulted in the removal of his protection.

We might think that the Egyptians would have learned the first time around that it's not wise to challenge God. Actually, they did. By the time Egypt had recovered from the Ten Plagues, Israel was established in the Promised Land and was on the way toward becoming a regional power and rival to the kingdom of the Pharaohs. Egypt became an ally of Israel during the reign of Solomon, but afterward capitalized on Israel's division to keep the rival kingdoms of Israel and Judah weak. After centuries of that, God finally pronounced judgment again, humiliating Egypt with the same Babylonian army that conquered Judah.

Egypt's humiliation didn't end there, and neither did its opposition to God's plan to bring final redemption to Israel, and through Israel to the nations. The Babylonians, Persians, and Greeks all dominated Egypt. After the division of Alexander the Great's empire, Egypt under the Ptolemies provided a haven for Jewish exiles, while using the

Jews and the land of Israel as pawns in their ongoing struggle against the Seleucids of Syria. Then came the Romans, who occupied Egypt and Judea for seven centuries until the Muslim Arabs conquered both.

As part of various Islamic caliphates, Egypt continued to be both a refuge for and an oppressor to the Jews, even into the modern era. When God's promised restoration of Israel happened in the 20th century, a newly-independent Egypt resumed its role as Israel's adversary. Even the treaty between the two nations in 1979 hasn't brought genuine peace. It's a fragile, cold peace that could turn into active hostility on short notice.

So why haven't the Egyptians learned that it's better to cooperate with God than to oppose him? That's a complicated question with multiple answers, any number of which could apply over the 3,500 years since the Exodus. One answer applies both on a national and an individual level. It concerns the activity of the Adversary we call Satan, who has always sought to derail the works of our Creator. The Gospels tell us he tempted Messiah Yeshua, who also had been a Jewish exile in Egypt. Yeshua withstood Satan's temptations, but Luke's account ends with this alarming note:

And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time.

Luke 4:13 ESV

It would be nice if the devil would leave us alone once we defeat his schemes, but that's not his way. He knows that individuals, communities, and nations eventually relax their vigilance, forget why it's important to be righteous, lose their way, and open themselves to his beguiling deceptions. That's why we are always in danger of repeating our history, even if we haven't completely forgotten it.

There is hope. God has already opened the way to redemption through the atoning work of his Son, Messiah Yeshua. Even Egypt has a place in the redemption, as Jeremiah's prophecy declares:

I will deliver them into the hand of those who seek their life, into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and his officers. Afterward Egypt shall be inhabited as in the days of old, declares the LORD.

Jeremiah 46:26 (ESV)

Jeremiah goes on to explain that the context of Egypt's restoration is Israel's final redemption. He says:

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.
Jacob shall return and have quiet and ease,
and none shall make him afraid.
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.

Jeremiah 46:27-28 ESV

By now we should understand that our eternal destiny as individuals is bound up in the destiny of Israel. Once we pledge allegiance to Israel's Messiah, we become part of his eternal Kingdom. It's the same with nations: those that align themselves with the Covenant Nation of Israel will survive and prosper, but those that do not will perish. All of us must undergo God's judgment, but in the end it will be made right. So then, we have a choice: we can position ourselves for final redemption at the right time, or wait for the devil to come along and have his way at the opportune time.