

HAFTORAH OF SIDRA : אב

*This week's Haftorah is taken from Sefer Yirmiyohu,
Chapter 46, verses 13 — 28*

1. Last week's Haftorah was the prophecy of Yechezkel concerning the punishment of the Egypt of his day. In the same way that the Egypt in the time of our Deliverance deserved punishment, declared Yechezkel, so too does the Egypt of a thousand years later also deserve punishment — for pretty much the same reasons. This week's Haftorah is the same warning to Egypt but this time proclaimed by the Prophet Yirmiyohu. (Yirmiyohu and Yechezkel were contemporaries.)
2. One of the important lessons that we learn from this Haftorah (and last week's, too) is the fact that HaShem oversees the affairs of all of humankind and holds all the nations of the world to account. When, therefore, they transgress the code of behaviour that HaShem has commanded for all Mankind, He brings punishment upon the guilty nation. Sometimes the punishment will atone for the offence and that particular nation will survive for HaShem has yet a purpose for that people in His world. But other times it can be that the offending nation has shown such derision and disdain for HaShem's law and has so deliberately rebelled against His Word that it is decreed that that nation shall be destroyed utterly. Having no further purpose in HaShem's plan, they are then overtaken by others and simply cease to exist as an independent folk.
3. The code of behaviour that HaShem has commanded for all Mankind is the No'achide Code, known as "the Seven Mitzvos of the Benei No'ach," originally commanded to the ancestor of all Mankind, Oddom HoRishon. These Seven Mitzvos comprise six prohibitions, as follows: **[1]** Idolatry (but non-Jews are permitted to worship anybody they want to so long as they also acknowledge HaShem as the Supreme G-d of all gods); **[2]** Blasphemy, or to show any disrespect to HaShem; **[3]** Murder or any unlawful killing; **[4]** Gratuitous cruelty against any live creature; **[5]** Immorality; **[6]** Stealing (which includes the prohibition of any kind of deliberate cheating or unfair trade) and **[7]** the positive command to have institutions of justice and courts of law and order to enforce this very Code.
4. Generally speaking, most civilized nations do follow the No'achide Code (more or less) or at least claim to do so (as can be seen from the fact that offences against the Code are still newsworthy). If there have been transgressions against HaShem's Law, He is merciful and allows punishment to wipe the slate clean. In our Haftorah, since Egypt had not offended against HaShem's law to such an extent that they deserved oblivion, they would suffer banishment from their country and their land would lie desolate but the Egyptians will be permitted to return after some forty years of exile.
5. There is another offence for which HaShem punishes the nations of the world and that is when they maliciously harm His Chosen Nation, the Jewish People. Egypt in the time of our Haftorah was guilty of this too and because of the harm that they did to the Jewish People, HaShem told His prophets to proclaim the punishment of Egypt at the hands of Nevuchadnetzar, the king of Babylon.
6. The other lesson that we are to learn from this Haftorah is that as the People of HaShem, who know that HaShem is the Sovereign and Ruler of all Mankind, we are to make it our business to see how HaShem is in charge of world events. Wars don't just happen. Natural disasters don't just happen. Revolutions don't just happen and economic downturns don't just happen. When we see one nation being conquered by another, when we see the decline and fall of an empire, it is our duty to see in these events the Hand of HaShem and to seek the message that is being communicated and apply the lessons to our own lives.