



# The **Fiery** Bones

Jeremiah 20:9

---

Text

Jeremiah 47:1-7

Topic

God's judgment against the warlike Philistines is personified as a sword that Jeremiah has a conversation with

Title

*"Talk to the Sword Hand"*

Introduction

When Indiana Jones encountered the sword-wielding man in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, he wasted no time pulling his revolver and shooting his skilled but inferiorly armed adversary.

Superior weaponry is usually the decisive factor in any altercation.

Our text in Jeremiah is a prophecy against the Philistines. They were an age-old adversary of the Jews. At one point in their early history, Israel was oppressed for a period of almost 200 years by the Philistines.

One reason for their subjection was that the Philistines always seemed to have superior weaponry. They were skilled in crafting iron into weapons when Israel was still using bronze. When the Israelites fought the Philistines it was like bringing a sword to a gunfight.

God often used the disparity between the Philistine weaponry and Israel's to show Himself strong on their behalf. For example, in the Book of Judges we are introduced to a man, Shamgar, who singlehandedly killed 600 Philistines wielding only an oxgoad (3:31).

Another time we read that Samson killed a thousand Philistines with the jawbone of a donkey (Judges 15:15).

During the reign of King Saul the Philistines came against the Jews with "thirty thousand chariots and six thousand horsemen, and people as the sand which is on the seashore in multitude" (First Samuel 13:5). The only Israelites who had any weapons at all were Saul and his son, Jonathan. Nevertheless the Jews routed the Philistines when God caused confusion in the enemy camp.

Which brings us to the greatest Philistine encounter of all time - David versus Goliath. Armed with only his sling, it was the power of God that gave David the victory over the 9' 9" tall Goliath who was armed to the teeth.

Superior weaponry was indeed the decisive factor in those altercations, but it was superior *spiritual* weaponry wielded by the man of God.

That will be our point of contact and interest with this ancient prophecy against the Philistines. I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Weapons Are Being Fashioned Against You - To Plunder You, but #2 Weapons Have Been Furnished To You - To Prosper You.

## #1 Weapons Are Being Fashioned Against You - To Plunder You

(v1-7)

The final chapters of Jeremiah are a series of prophecies against the nations surrounding Israel. Some we are familiar with - like Egypt and the Philistines. Others are more obscure.

Little is known about the origins of the Philistines except what is contained in the Bible. They were a seafaring people who came to Canaan from Caphtor (Genesis 10:14), generally identified with the island of Crete in the Mediterranean Sea.

The early Philistine settlements in the land of Canaan took on a new significance when five cities - Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron, Gath, and Gaza - and the areas around them were occupied by the Philistines in the 12th century BC. Probably all of these except Ekron were already in existence when the sea peoples conquered them. These five Philistine cities formed a united political unit.

The Philistines began to attack the Israelites in the 11th century BC. In Samuel's time the Philistines captured the Ark of the Covenant in battle. Although the Ark was recovered later, the Philistines continued to occupy Israelite settlements (First Samuel 10:5).

The threat of the Philistines prompted Israel's demands for a king. But even under Saul the nation was still menaced by the Philistines - a threat that ultimately resulted in Saul's death.

The Philistines were infamous for their production and consumption of alcoholic beverages, especially beer. Ancient Philistine ruins contain numerous breweries and wineries, as well as countless beer mugs and other drinking vessels. Samson's wedding feast, recorded in the book of Judges, illustrates the Philistine practice of holding week-long drinking parties.

In the end, the Philistines were assimilated into the surrounding Canaanite culture. They eventually disappeared from the biblical record and from history altogether.

Today, the word Philistine is occasionally used as an insult. Salman Rushdie received death threats and was forced into hiding when his fourth novel, *The Satanic Verses*, was said to insult Mohammed. When India banned the novel in 1988 Rushdie wrote an open letter to the Indian Prime Minister calling him a Philistine.

The seven verses in this chapter describe God at war with this war-like people. He used other nations as His sword - notably Egypt and Babylon.

Jeremiah 47:1 The word of the LORD that came to Jeremiah the prophet against the Philistines, before Pharaoh attacked Gaza.

To the original hearers this was a prophecy. History bears it out as accurate.

The Bible is the only book that proves 100% accurate in its prophecies. Of the 2500 or so prophecies in the Bible, over 2000 of them have already been fulfilled. Can there be any reasonable doubt the remaining prophecies will be fulfilled?

Jeremiah 47:2 Thus says the LORD: "Behold, waters rise out of the north, And shall be an overflowing flood; They shall overflow the land and all that is in it, The city and those who dwell within; Then the men shall cry, And all the inhabitants of the land shall wail.

Although verse one mentioned Egypt, verse two seems to indicate a different enemy. Since this enemy comes from "the north," scholars identify it as Babylon.

Jeremiah 47:3 At the noise of the stamping hooves of his strong horses, At the rushing of his chariots, At the rumbling of his wheels, The fathers will not look back for their children, Lacking courage,

It would be 'every man for himself.' It's pretty bad when you are willing to abandon your own children in order to effect your escape. That's true terror.

The Babylonians would prove to be a superior army with more and better weaponry. Let's face it, when your victory depends on weapons alone, you'd better have the best ones.

Jeremiah 47:4 Because of the day that comes to plunder all the Philistines, To cut off from Tyre and Sidon every helper who remains; For the LORD shall plunder the Philistines, The remnant of the country of Caphtor.

The soldiers may have come from Babylon but they were the instrument of the Lord. He was exercising His prerogative to judge and destroy a nation that refused to repent and do good.

History can only be truly studied and understood as the story of God's redemption of the human race. It is God who establishes nations and sets their boundaries - all with the plan to bring Jesus into the world through the nation of Israel. Every other aspect of history is subordinate to the one great fact that mankind needed a Savior and God provided him by becoming a man Himself.

Jeremiah 47:5 Baldness has come upon Gaza, Ashkelon is cut off With the remnant of their valley. How long will you cut yourself?

Voluntary "baldness," that is. It meant they cut off their hair and beards as a sign to everyone they were mourning.

"Ashkelon is cut off" means that city was destroyed. Any survivors "cut" themselves, literally, as a sign of extreme grief.

Jeremiah 47:6 "O you sword of the LORD, How long until you are quiet? Put yourself up into your scabbard, Rest and be still!

Remember the phrase, "talk to the hand?" *Jeremiah talks to the sword!* He personifies the sword of the Lord's judgment and asks it to sheathe itself.

Don't pass over this too quickly. The Philistines were enemies of Israel for most of their existence in the Promised Land. Yet Jeremiah took no pleasure in their judgment; he would rather they turn to The Lord.

Jeremiah 47:7 How can it be quiet, Seeing the LORD has given it a charge Against Ashkelon and against the seashore? There He has appointed it."

It's as if the sword answered and said, "I am the instrument of God's judgments, and He has given me a commission against Ashkelon, and against the sea shore; all the coast where the Philistines have their territories. The measure of their iniquities is full; and these God hath appointed me to destroy."

God is longsuffering, not willing that any should perish but that all would come to Him for the forgiveness of their sins. His longsuffering waits... and waits... and waits.

But it also comes to an end and, when it does, His judgment is sure and swift.

There are no Philistines today; not any literal ones, that is. As long as we are in these bodies of flesh, on this earth whose god is the devil, weapons are being formed to plunder us and, in that spiritual sense, it can seem like God's people are still facing Philistines with superior weaponry.

As long as we are in these bodies of flesh, on this earth whose god is the devil, weapons are being formed to plunder us and, in that spiritual sense, it can seem like God's people are still facing Philistines with superior weaponry.

A great deal of the New Testament presents the Christian as a soldier in a fierce spiritual battle against supernatural foes. We read of principalities and powers, rulers of the darkness of this age, spiritual hosts of wickedness in heavenly places (Ephesians 6:12).

The devil emits fiery darts. The apostle Paul called his thorn in the flesh, "the messenger of Satan," sent to buffet him (Second Corinthians 12:7). The devil goes about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.

Remember the lesson of the Philistines:  
Your spiritual weaponry is always superior.

Pastor and Bible teacher Ray Stedman once wrote, "It is time we who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ accept the fact that life is warfare, and that we are engaged in a life-and-death struggle. The forces we face are not flesh and-blood enemies, nor are they human agencies. But they are as real as any enemy who ever wielded a sword, a gun, or a flame-thrower. Our enemy is legion a deadly pantheon of spiritual hosts of wickedness. Though invisible, these forces are utterly dedicated to our destruction."

Are you afraid? Maybe Yoda was right when he said, "*You will be!*"

Or will you? Not really because no weapon fashioned against you, as the child of God, can plunder you. Remember the lesson of the Philistines: Your spiritual weaponry is always superior.

#2 Weapons Have Been Furnished To You,  
To Prosper You

My first thought was to compile an inventory of the spiritual weaponry available to us.



The first to come to mind is, of course, the Bible, the Word of God - called the sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17). It has no equal against our foes. If you want to see it in action all you need to do is read the account in the Gospels of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness. Weakened physically by fasting, The Lord masterfully wielded the Word of God, answering each of the devil's temptations with Scripture set in its proper context.

Someone remarked, regarding the Bible, that you can't unsheathe someone else's sword; you must have it personally strapped on. It's an encouragement to read and study the Bible for yourself.

Having said that, although we should be as proficient as possible in the Word, whatever you know is always superior to your spiritual enemies and is sufficient to prosper you against them.

We'd next list prayer in our arsenal. It's been said that the devil trembles when he sees the weakest saint upon his or her knees. It's been said that the Christian army marches on its knees.

When you read the description of the Christian as a soldier who has put on the armor of God (Ephesians 6), the first thing you read after the armor is "praying always." Someone has said that "A believer who has accepted the armor of God but does not pray, is just a person who is all dressed up with no place to go."

At some point while inventorying spiritual weaponry you begin to encounter things you wouldn't normally list as weapons. Listen to this passage translated in the ESV:

2Corinthians 6:4 but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities,

2Corinthians 6:5 beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger;

2Corinthians 6:6 by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love;

2Corinthians 6:7 by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the **weapons of righteousness** for the right hand and for the left;

Do you normally think of "calamities" as a spiritual weapon? They are when you meet them in the power of the grace of God by the assistance of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

"Righteousness" is living right before God; not being perfect, but choosing obedience. It includes all the things listed in these verses and more. Each of them is said to be a weapon.

Do you normally think of "calamities" as a spiritual weapon? They are when you meet them in the power of the grace of God by the assistance of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

I often point to a ministry like *Samaritan's Purse* as an example of this. Whether it's their annual *Operation Christmas Child* that sends gift boxes to children all over the world or their mobilization of help after disasters, they show Christ's compassion in calamities and with the Gospel storm the gates of Hell, freeing those held prisoner by the devil and bringing them to Jesus.

When we do think of some of these things as weapons, we tend to think of them as somewhat puny. I mean, give me a healing any day over "afflictions" if you want to reveal real power, right?

In the first *Men in Black*, Will Smith's character is excited when he first sees the arsenal of weaponry available to him. K shows him the rifle-like series 4D atomizer but then hands him a tiny, palm-sized gun - the noisy cricket. He's disappointed but later understands it carries quite a wallop.

God is going to mostly distribute to us noisy crickets as weapons. Why? They make it most obvious that the power is His; they bring the most glory to Him.

You know what all this amounts to? **You are God's spiritual weapon.** It's not that you have weapons at your disposal; that's true. You *are* God's weapon. You are weaponized to walk through this world.

Think back to our example of "calamities." The disaster isn't God's weapon; your righteous response to it is the weapon as you bring the Gospel to bear upon the situation.

We read the Word and pray and put on the armor of God. That's our part; being ready. We must leave it to God to choose the weapon or weapons most appropriate to the situations we find ourselves in.

If a healing will bring God the most glory and effect the greatest good, a healing will come. But we need to honestly admit that when Jesus was on the earth, miracles didn't necessarily bring the glory to God. When, for example, Jesus called Lazarus back from the dead, far from bringing glory to God, the religious leaders sought to kill both of them.

Endurance, afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love; truthful speech, and the power of God. That's God's arsenal.

And **you** are His weapon to defeat the darkness of this age, to further the kingdom of God, to rescue those that are perishing.