

Jeremiah's Prophecies Against Babylon, Continued

Jeremiah 51

Jeremiah 51:1-10 – *“Thus says the Lord: “Behold, I will raise up against Babylon, against those who dwell in Leb Kamai, a destroying wind. ² And I will send winnowers to Babylon, who shall winnow her and empty her land. For in the day of doom they shall be against her all around. ³ Against her let the archer bend his bow, and lift himself up against her in his armor. Do not spare her young men; utterly destroy all her army. ⁴ Thus the slain shall fall in the land of the Chaldeans, and those thrust through in her streets. ⁵ For Israel is not forsaken, nor Judah, by his God, the Lord of hosts, though their land was filled with sin against the Holy One of Israel.” ⁶ Flee from the midst of Babylon, and every one save his life! Do not be cut off in her iniquity, for this is the time of the Lord’s vengeance. He shall recompense her. ⁷ Babylon was a golden cup in the Lord’s hand, that made all the earth drunk. The nations drank her wine; therefore, the nations are deranged. ⁸ Babylon has suddenly fallen and been destroyed. Wail for her! Take balm for her pain; perhaps she may be healed. ⁹ We would have healed Babylon, but she is not healed. Forsake her, and let us go everyone to his own country; for her judgment reaches to heaven and is lifted up to the skies. ¹⁰ The Lord has revealed our righteousness. Come and let us declare in Zion the work of the Lord our God.”*

Background Notes

In Jeremiah 50, the big question about the lengthy prophecy of judgment against Babylon was: Has this prophecy been fulfilled? We said that it was partially fulfilled when the Medes and Persians took over Babylon in 539 BC. But much of this prophecy against Babylon waits to be fulfilled with the destruction of “End Time Babylon,” as predicted in Revelation 17-18. When Babylon was taken over by the Medes and the Persians in 539 BC, the city was not destroyed like Sodom and Gomorrah (Jeremiah 50:40). It was not a bloodbath and total destruction of the land as predicted in Jeremiah 51:1-10. And at that time the Jewish people did not have to flee Babylon to save their lives and escape destruction (v6). In fact, Cyrus, the Persian king, issued an edict in 539 BC that permitted the Jews to return home to Jerusalem in peace. Babylon’s sudden fall, because of “intoxicating all of the earth” with her immorality and idolatry (v6-8) sounds very much like the destruction of End Time Babylon that is described in Revelation 18.

For further background, look at the last six verses of this chapter: *“So Jeremiah wrote in a book all the evil that would come upon Babylon, all these words that are written against Babylon. ⁶¹ And Jeremiah said to Seraiah, “When you arrive in Babylon and see it, and read all these words, ⁶² then you shall say, ‘O Lord, You have spoken against this place to cut it off, so that none shall remain in it, neither man nor beast, but it shall be desolate forever.’ ⁶³ Now it shall be, when you have finished reading this book, that you shall tie a stone to it and throw it out into the Euphrates. ⁶⁴ Then you shall say, ‘Thus Babylon shall sink and not rise from the catastrophe that I will bring upon her. And they shall be weary.’”*

In 593 BC, Seraiah (the brother of Baruch, Jeremiah's scribe) traveled to Babylon with King Zedekiah on some official business. Jerusalem was still standing, but a number of Jewish captives were already in Babylon. Seraiah was to read the prophecy of Babylon's judgment from a scroll that Jeremiah gave him. Then he was to tie a stone to it and throw it into the Euphrates River as an object lesson of the future fall and sinking of Babylon.

Doctrinal Points

1. God can employ any "club" He chooses to accomplish His purpose.

Jeremiah 51:11-23 - *"Make the arrows bright! Gather the shields! The Lord has raised up the spirit of the kings of the Medes. For His plan is against Babylon to destroy it, because it is the vengeance of the Lord, the vengeance for His temple. ¹² Set up the standard on the walls of Babylon. Make the guard strong. Set up the watchmen. Prepare the ambushes, for the Lord has both devised and done what He spoke against the inhabitants of Babylon. ¹³ O you who dwell by many waters, abundant in treasures, your end has come, the measure of your covetousness.*

¹⁴ The Lord of hosts has sworn by Himself: "Surely I will fill you with men, as with locusts, and they shall lift up a shout against you." ¹⁵ He has made the earth by His power; He has established the world by His wisdom, and stretched out the heaven by His understanding. ¹⁶ When He utters His voice— there is a multitude of waters in the heavens: He causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth; He makes lightnings for the rain; He brings the wind out of His treasures." ¹⁷ Everyone is dull-hearted, without knowledge. Every metalsmith is put to shame by the carved image; for his molded image is falsehood, and there is no breath in them. ¹⁸ They are futile, a work of errors; in the time of their punishment they shall perish.

¹⁹ The Portion of Jacob is not like them, for He is the Maker of all things, and Israel is the tribe of His inheritance. The Lord of hosts is His name. ²⁰ "You are My battle-ax and weapons of war: for with you I will break the nation in pieces. With you I will destroy kingdoms; ²¹ with you I will break in pieces the horse and its rider. With you I will break in pieces the chariot and its rider; ²² with you also I will break in pieces man and woman; with you I will break in pieces old and young; with you I will break in pieces the young man and the maiden. ²³ With you also I will break in pieces the shepherd and his flock; with you I will break in pieces the farmer and his yoke of oxen; and with you I will break in pieces governors and rulers."

In verse 20, God's war club or battle-ax was either the Medes and Persians in general, or the Persian king, Cyrus, in particular. The historical fulfillment of this prophecy was specifically in view in these verses, because the Medes were mentioned in verse 11. The Medes and the Persians would overrun Babylon like locusts (v14). Nothing can stop God's war club because He is the all-powerful, sovereign Creator, and the God of Israel. The God of Israel was not like the powerless gods and idols of Babylon (v15-19).

In Isaiah 10:5, the Lord referred to Assyria as the "rod of My anger." God had used Assyria as His rod to discipline the northern kingdom of Israel, and God used Babylon as His rod in disciplining the southern kingdom of Judah. But now

God's club would be the Medes and the Persians, who would shatter and destroy nations and kingdoms, including Babylon (v22-23).

As God used pagan nations as His war clubs to accomplish His purpose in the past, so today He can use **any** club He chooses to accomplish His purpose. He can use cruel dictators and atheistic nations on the world stage, or public officials and corrupt politicians locally. God can employ **any club He chooses** to accomplish His purposes.

2. God can destroy any club He chooses that acts against His people.

Notice in verse 24 why Babylon was being destroyed: *"And I will repay Babylon and all the inhabitants of Chaldea for all the evil they have done in Zion in your sight," says the Lord.* Babylon was to be destroyed because of the evil they had done against God's people. The destruction of Babylon described in verses 25-26 would be so complete that it definitely looks ahead to the complete fulfillment of this prophecy in the last days. Babylon was not torn down and burned by the Medes and the Persians in 539 BC - but it will be in the End Times.

²⁵ *"Behold, I am against you, O destroying mountain, who destroys all the earth," says the Lord. "And I will stretch out My hand against you, roll you down from the rocks, and make you a burnt mountain.* ²⁶ *They shall not take from you a stone for a corner nor a stone for a foundation, but you shall be desolate forever," says the Lord.* The Medes and the Persians had other kingdoms as allies when they took over Babylon (v27-32). Again the mention of complete desolation and burning shows that this prophecy has not yet been completely fulfilled - but it will be in the End Times. Revelation 18:9-10 says that the smoke of Babylon's burning will be seen for miles!

Verse 33: *"For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: "The daughter of Babylon is like a threshing floor when it is time to thresh her. Yet a little while and the time of her harvest will come."* Babylon had been a war club in God's hands, but now she would be "threshed" and destroyed by the Medes and Persians. The war club of Babylon would be destroyed by the war club of Persia because of their acts against God's people (v34-40): *"Therefore thus says the Lord: "Behold, I will plead your case and take vengeance for you. I will dry up her sea and make her springs dry. ³⁷ Babylon shall become a heap, a dwelling place for jackals, an astonishment and a hissing, without an inhabitant. ³⁸ They shall roar together like lions, they shall growl like lions' whelps. ³⁹ In their excitement I will prepare their feasts; I will make them drunk, that they may rejoice, and sleep a perpetual sleep and not awake," says the Lord. ⁴⁰ "I will bring them down like lambs to the slaughter, like rams with male goats."*

Verses 41-44 provided a further description of the fall of Babylon (called by a code name Sheshach v41). The Persian troops would come in like a flood (v42), and the high and thick defensive walls of Babylon would be to no avail (v44). God's people were told to leave Babylon because of the coming destruction under God's wrath (v45-48). Here again we look beyond the return from captivity in 538 BC to the final destruction of Babylon under the wrath of God, when both heaven and earth rejoice (Revelation 16:19).

Again we read that Babylon would be destroyed for her acts against God's people, both past and present (v49-51). Babylon was to fall for slaying Israel and because "strangers" entered and defiled the sanctuary or the holy places of the Lord's house. Babylon's anti-Semitism and desolation of God's holy Temple would be judged.

It doesn't take much insight into history to see the proof of our doctrinal point: God can destroy any club He chooses that acts against His people. Think of the horrors of Nazi Germany, for example, and the anti-Semitism of modern Iran. Their sin will be judged. God can destroy any club He chooses that acts against His people!

Practical Application

Remember the rise and fall of Babylon!

Jeremiah 51:53-58 - *"Though Babylon were to mount up to heaven, and though she were to fortify the height of her strength, yet from Me plunderers would come to her," says the Lord.* ⁵⁴ *The sound of a cry comes from Babylon, and great destruction from the land of the Chaldeans,* ⁵⁵ *because the Lord is plundering Babylon and silencing her loud voice, though her waves roar like great waters, and the noise of their voice is uttered,* ⁵⁶ *because the plunderer comes against her, against Babylon, and her mighty men are taken. Every one of their bows is broken, for the Lord is the God of recompense. He will surely repay.* ⁵⁷ *"And I will make drunk her princes and wise men, her governors, her deputies, and her mighty men. And they shall sleep a perpetual sleep and not awake," says the King, whose name is the Lord of hosts.* ⁵⁸ *Thus says the Lord of hosts: "The broad walls of Babylon shall be utterly broken, and her high gates shall be burned with fire. The people will labor in vain, and the nations, because of the fire; and they shall be weary."*

Remember the rise and fall of Babylon! The history of Babylon has cycled between rising under man's pride and falling under God's judgment. Look at verse 53: *"Though Babylon were to mount up to heaven."* Does that phrase ring a bell? Think of mankind's pride displayed at the tower of Babel, when they tried to build a ziggurat reaching up to heaven. God brought their efforts down with the confusion of languages.

And look at verse 58: *"Thus says the Lord of hosts: The broad walls of Babylon shall be utterly broken."* The ancient Greek historian Herodotus said that the walls of proud Babylon were twelve feet thick, and that several chariots could drive abreast on top of the wall! But where is that glory and strength now?

When we think of the rise and fall of the future End Time proud and idolatrous Babylon (that is described more fully in Zechariah 5 and Revelation 17-18), we should be humbled – and we should be warned about our own national and personal problems with pride.

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