

the location of God's salvation (see comments in *Minor Prophets*, Butler, pub. College Press, Obadiah 17; Joel 2:28—3:21). "Zion" is the N.T. church (cf. Heb. 12:22). Of course, the climax of this salvation will not come for some 600 years after Cyrus—but what is 600 years viewed from Jehovah's perspective? Less than a day! For the believer who by faith sees all things from God's perspective "redemption draweth nigh." Not only salvation, but glory!

QUIZ

1. Where did the gods Bel and Nebo have their origin?
2. Who carried these gods off on the backs of animals?
3. Give four reasons men should be able to know that idols are not gods.
4. To what extent are the people of Israel rebelling against God's purposes?
5. How emphatic is this text on the sovereignty of God?
6. Where is "Zion"?

b. CONQUERING THEIR GOVERNMENTS

TEXT: 47:1-15

- 1 Come down, and sit in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon; sit on the ground without a throne, O daughter of the Chaldeans: for thou shalt no more be called tender and delicate.
- 2 Take the millstones, and grind meal; remove thy veil, strip off the train, uncover the leg, pass through the rivers.
- 3 Thy nakedness shall be uncovered, yea, thy shame shall be seen: I will take vengeance, and will spare no man.
- 4 Our Redeemer, Jehovah of hosts is his name, the Holy One of Israel.
- 5 Sit thou silent, and get thee into darkness, O daughter of

- the Chaldeans; for thou shalt no more be called The mistress of kingdoms.
- 6 I was wroth with my people, I profaned mine inheritance, and gave them into thy hand: thou didst show them no mercy; upon the aged hast thou very heavily laid thy yoke.
- 7 And thou saidst, I shall be mistress for ever; so that thou didst not lay these things to thy heart, neither didst remember the latter and thereof.
- 8 Now therefore hear this, thou that art given to pleasures, that sittest securely, that sayest in thy heart, I am, and there is none else besides me; I shall not sit as a widow, neither shall I know the loss of children:
- 9 but these two things shall come to thee in a moment in one day, the loss of children, and widowhood; in their full measure shall they come upon thee, in the multitude of thy sorceries, and the great abundance of thine enchantments.
- 10 For thou hast trusted in thy wickedness; thou hast said, None seeth me; thy wisdom and thy knowledge, it hath perverted thee; and thou hast said in thy heart, I am and there is none else besides me.
- 11 Therefore shall evil come upon thee; thou shalt not know the dawning thereof; and mischief shall fall upon thee; and thou shalt not be able to put it away: and desolation shall come upon thee suddenly, which thou knowest not.
- 12 Stand now with thine enchantments, and with the multitudes of thy sorceries, wherein thou hast labored from thy youth; if so be thou shalt be able to profit, if so be thou mayest prevail.
- 13 Thou art wearied in the multitude of thy counsels: let now the astrologers, the star-gazers, the monthly prognosticators, stand up, and save thee from the things that shall come upon thee.
- 14 Behold, they shall be as stubble; the fire shall burn them; they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame: it shall not be a coal to warm at, nor a fire to sit before.
- 15 Thus shall the things be unto thee wherein thou hast labored: they that have trafficked with thee from thy youth shall

wander every one to his quarter; there shall be none to save thee.

QUERIES

- a. How did God “profane” His inheritance? (v. 6)
- b. Why did Babylon say, “I will not sit as a widow . . .”?
- c. Who are the “monthly prognosticators”?

PARAPHRASE

Babylon, you may be a virgin in respect to foreign invasion, but you will come down from your delicate luxury and your face will be rubbed in the dirt. From haughtiness to humiliation you will come because Jehovah has commanded it. No longer will you sit upon the throne of the world like a queen. You, O Chaldea, will be forced into a humiliation like the lowliest slave-girl. You will be subjected to the worst degradation, shame and toil. You are going to be exposed for what you really are, Babylon, a shameful, wicked nation. I, Jehovah, will see that vengeance is done upon you and no man will stop Me. Yes, Babylon, our Redeemer is Jehovah of hosts, the Holy One of Israel and He is sovereign. Jehovah says to Babylon, You will be dumbfounded with grief and anguish when I judge you. No more will you be the center of world attention—the darling of the nations. I was angry with My people, says the Lord, so I allowed My possession to be captured by this pagan, wicked Babylon. But you, Babylon, did not show them any mercy or kindness; even the elderly you despised and persecuted.

In addition, O Babylon, you have said, I shall be the darling of the world forever. You have not given heed to the warnings of history or conscience and therefore you do not recognize that you are headed for destruction. So now pay attention to this you sensuous city, secure in your wicked wealth and power. You may say to yourself that you are sovereign of the universe

and there is no other people or nation that will ever bring you down; you may think you will never know the bereavement of a widow or of a mother having lost her children. However, this is exactly the kind of fate you will suffer. In spite of all the hocus pocus of your magicians and soothsayers you will become as destitute and bereaved as a widow and a mother who has lost all her children. This will come upon you because you have trusted in your apparent ability to do as evilly as you please and get away with it. You have said, There is no power higher than I, to whom I must give account. You have become too sophisticated and wise for your own good. Your wisdom has led you to an arrogant self-delusion and to believe you are sovereign ruler of all creation. Because of this attempted usurpation of Jehovah's sovereignty, judgment shall come upon you which you will not, with all your magicians, be able to "charm" away. Destruction is going to come upon you and you cannot pay the price to take it away. You are going to be a wasted, desolate place with such suddenness it will be beyond human understanding or explanation.

Go on using your hocus pocus magic charms by the thousands, like you have since your nation's beginning, if it is the only thing you have to ward off the destruction that is sure to come. You have had so many magicians and such a complex system of magic that most of your people have grown tired of it all. But go ahead, let the astrologers, (those who study the stars) and horoscope-casters arise and save you from the judgments predicted upon you if they are able to do so! Soon it will be apparent to all that they are powerless as stubble which is so easily and quickly consumed by fire. They will, like straw in a fire, be gone almost instantly. They will not even be around long enough to provide an afterglow like the coals of a wood fire. How quickly shall all that disappear for which your generations have expended their energy and wages. In the end all those upon whom you relied for military and financial assistance since your beginning shall desert you. Your allies will not help you; they will not want to have anything to do with you lest they suffer the same destruction. There is not anyone who can save you!

COMMENTS

v. 1-6 **ABASED**: Babylon is going to come down from its pinnacle of world rulership. In fact, she is going to lose her identity as a nation altogether. The Hebrew word *bethulath* is translated virgin. It probably refers to the idea that Babylon (from her conquest of Nineveh about 612 B.C. until being conquered by Cyrus 539 B.C.) never suffered foreign invasion. She was untouched until Cyrus spoiled her.

The words *raccah* and *'anuggah*, translated *tender* and *delicate* probably emphasize the luxuriousness of Babylonian life; *raccah* literally means *effeminacy* and *'anuggah* means *pleasure, luxury, sport*. They are descriptive of the indulgent, immoral wickedness of Babylon. From her position as pampered, indulged, haughty queen of the world she would be dethroned and abased. She would become like the lowliest servant-girl doing the most humiliating tasks. Grinding meal is the hardest, most menial task for women slaves. Removal of the veil and stripping off the train means to take off the clothing of a lady of leisure and put on the clothing of a common slave. Uncovering the leg and passing through the rivers probably pictures a slave-girl rolling up her garments to walk across streams and rivers bearing burdens for her master. Slaves were simply the property of their owners and could be treated anyway the owner desired. Most of them, especially women, were treated shamefully. When sold in the slave market they were undressed and their bodies exposed, more to humiliate them than anything else. Jehovah is going to expose Babylon for what it really is. The whole world will see Babylon naked, without all the false luxury and haughtiness she arrogated to herself. God will spare no man—no human being on the face of the earth will deter Jehovah from His humiliation of Babylon.

Verse four is a pause of praise on the part of the prophet. It is like those digressions of the apostle Paul in Ephesians and Romans. The sovereign program of God's redemption for Israel elicits spontaneous testimony from Isaiah to Babylon that the Redeemer of Israel is Jehovah (Covenant-God) of hosts,

the Holy One of Israel. The testimony also serves to show the contrast between Israel's God and the gods of Babylon. Israel's God would raise her out of humiliation to glory (through the Servant-Messiah to come), while Babylon's gods would be impotent to save them from going from glory to humiliation.

When Babylon's degradation comes at the hand of Jehovah she will sit silently dumbfounded. Her shameful humiliation by the conquering Medes and Persians was totally unexpected and incomprehensible from a human point of view. She was the one upon whom the spotlight of the world was focused; but her prominence will soon be gone—all will be darkness for her. She shall no longer be the queen of the world. The Hebrew word *gevereth* is translated *mistress* but it does not mean *mistress* in the sense of a "kept woman" or a fornicator. *Gevereth* means *mistress* in the sense of *royalty*, hence, a *queen*. The proper name *Gabriel* comes from the same root. The wealth and luxury and power of Babylon was almost unbelievable. No other empire before had exerted such influence on the world. But it would all disappear suddenly because she opposed and humiliated the covenant people of Jehovah.

God has been talking of mighty Babylon, but suddenly the little nation of Judah moves into the center of the picture. The center of history is God's covenant people not the mighty empires which seem to dominate the world. God's people strayed from their messianic destiny and incurred the holy wrath of God. He allowed profane Babylon to swallow up Judah for a proper period of chastening. But even profane and pagan people are subject to certain moral standards before the Absolute God (cf. our comments in *Minor Prophets*, Amos ch. 1-2, pub. College Press). The obvious standards of humane treatment were not observed toward the Jews, especially toward older people. Babylon apparently ignored the commonest laws of reasonableness and mercifulness (cf. Rom. 1:18f) written on the consciences of most human beings (cf. comments on verse ten below). Therefore Jehovah will judge her. One should read Isaiah ch. 13-14; Jeremiah 50-51; Daniel 1-5 in connection with these verses.

v. 7-11 ABUSED: Babylon boasted that she would be *gevereth* (mistress) or queen forever. She never gave a thought to the warnings of conscience or the lessons of history. Those who will not learn from history are doomed to repeat it! She seemed unaware of the natural law all around that whatever is sown is eventually reaped. She did not seem to consider where such haughty disregard for humaneness and mercy might lead. The failure of tyrants and dictators to learn where cruelty and immorality ends is almost incredible! It was difficult for most of the world of the 1940's to believe Adolph Hitler was ignorant that the atrocities of the Third Reich would lead to self-destruction. But Hitler "did not remember the latter end thereof" and slaughtered over six million people in his concentration camps which eventuated in degradation and partitioning of Germany which it had never known before.

Aediyinah is from the Hebrew root '*adan* and means *voluptuousness, pleasurable, luxurious, sensuous*. It is the same root from which we get *Eden* (Gen. 2:8, etc.). One only has to read Daniel ch. 5 to understand that Babylon was characterized by its bent to pleasure. The kings of Babylon apparently had as their goal the satisfaction of their every pleasure. Wealth, wine and women gave them security. They used their wealth to build gold-plated gods and temples; a massive city with huge, thick walls; hanging gardens and banquet halls; then retired to admire the work of their hands and revel in the sensuous luxury of it all. They told themselves "this is great Babylon. . ." (cf. Dan. 4:28-30). All the world, even the majority of the Jewish people, stood in awe of mighty Babylon. The world expected Babylon to exist forever. Certainly Babylon herself never expected to mourn like a widow or a mother who has lost her children. She anticipated eternal reveling and gaiety and luxury. Apparently the emperors of Babylon decreed themselves to be gods (cf. Isa. 14:12-14), and believed themselves to be invincible (much like Adolph Hitler, centuries later). But the real Sovereign of the world, Jehovah, predicts that exactly what Babylon said could never happen would happen suddenly and fully. The haughty and satiated Babylonians

would one day mourn and grieve like a woman who has lost her husband and a young mother whose children have died tragic deaths. Their affliction would be without warning and in full measure. One day on top of the world; the next day devastated and conquered by the Persians. Babylon fell in one night! (cf. Dan. ch. 5). Babylon was noted for its multitude of astrologers and sorcerers. She was famous for her magic. No other nation since has been as prolific or elaborate in its cultivation of such sorcery. Babylon's whole culture, political, economic and religious was built around its astrologers and enchanters and wise-men. In spite of this elaborate and long established system of pseudo-science and religion, Babylon would fall. Her "star-gazers" would not be able to work magic or charm away the judgment of Jehovah.

Babylon trusted in its wickedness. There is a false sense of autonomy and sovereignty that comes as a result of deliberately practiced wickedness. That is what the devil promised Eve in the Garden of Eden (" . . . in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil . . ."). Professing to be wise, they became fools. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie. They refused to have God in their knowledge (cf. Rom. 1:22-32). Babylon trusted in her cruelty and cunning and decided she could do as she pleased and no one could stop her. She believed she was sovereign. There was no One to whom she could be held accountable ("None seeth me . . ."). This wicked exercise of power seared Babylon's conscience—it perverted her reason. She went against the most fundamental revelation of nature itself (that there is a divine power higher than man to whom man is morally responsible—cf. Rom. 1:18-21) and denied the existence of God.

But judgment (evil) will surely come upon haughty Babylon. She will now know the *shakherah* (dawning) of it. This probably means (in keeping with the context) she will not "be able to conjure away" or able to keep it from coming by all her incantations and sorceries. There are three different Hebrew words used to describe the judgment: *ra'ah* (break in pieces,

calamity, evil); *hovah* (mischief, or, literally, yawning—utter destruction); *sho'ah* (deserted, wasted, desolation). These words give a graphic description of the process of Babylon's judgment. It will come *suddenly*. Daniel; ch. 5, records that Babylon's overthrow came in *one night!* It was completely unexpected! First she was broken, then came the destruction and to this day there is only a deserted waste place where once mighty Babylon stood. The fall of Babylon is inexplicable except as one understands the prophecy of God by Isaiah!

v. 12-15 ANNIHILATED: Jehovah now challenges Babylon to call upon the full force of its massive and complex system of sorcery, astrology and magic to save it. The ancient peoples not only worshiped the stars, but many of them built their political and economic structures on a "science" of star-gazing and horoscope casting. These pseudo-sciences were elaborately constructed and Babylon was more prolific than all the ancients. Determining things from the motions of the stars was not something Babylon merely toyed with. She had built her whole national identity on this from her very beginning. She went to war or sued for peace on the basis of what the stars "said." She crowned emperors or deposed them only after casting a horoscope. She conducted business and built buildings and practiced the healing arts by interpreting dreams, saying incantations and practicing sorcery. So, if Babylon had any resource greater than any other empire of the past (Egypt, Assyria, etc.) it would be her star-gazing. If she was to prevail against the God of Israel her elaborate system of astrology would have to stand up. The many hours of study devoted to astrology, the voluminous writings of the wisemen and the staggering (and sometimes repulsive) amount of time consumed to practice all the hocus pocus involved wearied the general populace. There is evidence that even emperors became exasperated at the sham of it all (cf. Dan. 2:1-12). The Hebrew word *modiy'iyim* (prognosticators) is from *yada'* (to know, perceive, discern) and the word *khadashim* means, new moons or months. The position of the moon was a determining factor in the Babylonian system of astrology.

But none of this shall save Babylon! Even this great, elaborate pervasive system of astrology shall be as vulnerable as dry wheat stubble thrown on a fire. It will go up in smoke, suddenly. Nothing will be left of it. Wood thrown on a fire leaves coals and lasts long enough to provide warmth. But poof, like stubble, Babylon and all her star-gazers will be gone! So much for all the years of toil and energy invested in Babylon's elaborate system of astrology! All those *sokherayik* (traveling merchants) who "trafficked" with Babylon were interested only in financial gain. As long as they were making profit from trading with Babylon they were her friends. But when she needed assistance against her enemies they "wandered to their own quarters," not wishing to suffer the judgments coming upon her. They have merely taken advantage of Babylon and have no genuine concern for her no matter how glibly they may have dealt with her when she was alive and prosperous. It was predicted that the magnificent Roman empire of the apostle John's day would come to the same despicable ruin (cf. Rev. 17 and 18). Rome would say in her heart she was a "queen" and not a "widow." Rome would be burned with fire. The merchants of the earth would mourn Rome's demise because it would mean financial loss for them (not that anyone was genuinely concerned for Rome's fall). Thus "Babylon" is used as a symbol, a type, of the Roman empire (Rev. 14:8; 17:5; 18:2, 10, 21, etc.).

Babylon fell! Great and sudden was her fall! It was totally unexpected! During a night of drunken revelry and carousing by the emperor (Belshazzar), his noblemen and concubines, Cyrus the Persian marched in on a dry river bed (whose waters had been diverted by Cyrus) and Belshazzar was slain. For further details see *Daniel*, by Butler, pub. College Press, pg. 200-208. Rome's fall was not quite so sudden, but it fulfilled the predictions of John just as certainly as Babylon's fall fulfilled the predictions of Isaiah and Jeremiah. And just as certainly, all human governments must ultimately fall and give way to the kingdom of God for whom the new heavens and the new earth are to be created.

QUIZ

1. Why is Babylon called a "virgin"?
2. What is meant by calling Babylon the "mistress" of kingdoms?
3. Why may Babylon be judged accountable for knowing that she was headed for judgment by her actions?
4. In what did Babylon place her trust?
5. Describe the fall of Babylon?
6. How did those who had traded with Babylon react to her downfall?

4. SOVEREIGN IN WISDOM, CHAPTER 48

a. PROOF

TEXT: 48:1-8

- 1 Hear ye this, O house of Jacob, who are called by the name of Israel, and are come forth out of the waters of Judah; who swear by the name of Jehovah, and make mention of the God of Israel, but not in truth nor in righteousness.
- 2 For they call themselves of the holy city, and stay themselves upon the God of Israel; Jehovah of hosts is his name.
- 3 I have declared the former things from of old; yea, they went forth out of my mouth, and I showed them: suddenly I did them, and they came to pass.
- 4 Because I knew that thou art obstinate, and thy neck is an iron sinew, and thy brow brass;
- 5 therefore I have declared it to thee from of old; before it came to pass I showed it thee; lest thou shouldest say, Mine idol hath done them, and my graven image, and my molten image, hath commanded them.
- 6 Thou hast heard it; behold all this; and ye, will ye not declare it? I have showed thee new things from this time, even hidden things, which thou hast not known.