

# A Message Against Babylon

## 50:1-46 and 51:1-64

**DIG:** Just as Jeremiah said in Chapter 25, the prophet holds out the cup of wrath to Babylon. For what sins will she drink the cup (chapter 50:2, 11, 15, 24, 29, 32, 36; chapter 51: 9, 24, 44, 47, 49, 52; Habakkuk 1:6-11)? Which sins seem most despicable to you? Who will Ha'Shem use to punish Babylon (50:3, 9, 41, 51:11, 14, 27-28, 53)? What does that tell you about what it will take to knock this evil empire out for good? What will be the effect on the Babylonians themselves (50:2-3, 9-16, 21-27, 30-32, 35-40, 43-46; 51:1-4, 13-14, 20-23, 25-26, 29-33, 36-44, 52-58)? What will be the effect of all the nations of the world (50:2, 51:9, 27, 44 and 48)? How do you account for the different responses? Does Babylon point to anything else in prophecy beside itself (see Revelation 17-18)? If so, what future event might these chapters point to? Just because the LORD uses a nation or a person to carry out His plan, does that mean YHVH is pleased with them? Can you think of any other instances where God uses bad people to accomplish His will? What do these incidences tell you about ADONAI's power and plan?

These prophecies came in 594-593 BC during the eleven-year reign of Zedekiah

The exceptional length of this message as compared with the judgments pronounced upon other nations is explained by the prophet's deeper interest in Babylon as his country's conqueror. This explanation also accounts for the sharper and more vindictive tone. Jeremiah knew that Babylon was merely the agent designated by Ha'Shem for punishing his countrymen. Yet, as a patriot he could not but feel some hatred against the nation that destroyed his homeland; just as he had lamented his people's fate in spite of having prophesied that it was just retribution for their sins. His hatred found expression in his joy at Babylon's downfall, a joy further motivated by the conviction that it was well merited.

The **Babylonians** were the descendants of the semi-nomadic tribe of Kaldu (Akkadian) or Kasdim (Hebrew), and from it came the tribal name of the **Chaldeans**. The viewpoint of this prophecy is different than in the past where **Babylon** is pictured as being mighty and invincible. Now **Babylon** is viewed as being weak and vulnerable. **Yirmeyahu's** main prophecies are repeated. For example, he mentions that the attack will come from the north four times (50:3, 9 and 41, 51:48); eleven times the prophet refers to an assault against **Babylon**; nine times he alludes to the destruction of **Babylon**, etc. **God's** prophet repeats himself several times to make his point.

**Near historical prophecy:** **Nebuchadnezzar** died after a long rule from 605 BC to 562 BC (43 years), and when **he** died the hopes of a continued strong empire died with **him**. None of **his** successors came anywhere near **his** stature as a leader. For twenty three years, from 562 to 539 BC **Babylon** hung on. The reason **she** was able to do so for so long was because there was really no strong adversary on the horizon until 539 BC when Cyrus the Great captured **Babylon** (see the commentary on **Isaiah Ia - The Deliverance by Cyrus the Great**). His father, Cambyses I, was Persian and his mother, Mandane, was Median. In 549 BC Cyrus killed the Median king Astyages and founded the Medo-Persian Empire. The fact that monarchs used a personal name and a throne name was common in ancient times. This can be easily seen in the names of the Judean kings: Shallum (personal name) and Jehoahaz (throne name); Eliakim (personal name) and Jehoiakim (throne name); Mattaniah (personal name) and Zedekiah (throne name). This explains why the Bible lists Darius (personal name), rather than Cyrus (throne name) as conquering Babylon (**Dani'el 5:30**).

Cyrus united the Medes and the Persians into a unified nation and an unbeatable fighting force. Toward the end of September 539 BC, the armies of Cyrus, under the able command of Ogbaru, district governor of Gutium, attacked Opis on the Tigris River and defeated **the Babylonians**. This gave the Persians control of the vast canal system of **Babylon**. On October 10<sup>th</sup>, 539 BC Sippar was taken unopposed and Nabonidus, the feeble king of **Babylon** who had entrusted his kingship to Belshazzar, his corrupt son, fled for his life. Two days later, on October 12<sup>th</sup>, Ogbaru's troops were able to enter **Babylon** without a fight (**Dani'el 5:1-30**). The Greek historian Herodotus described how the Persians diverted (not dried up) the Euphrates River into a canal so that the water level dropped "to the height of the middle of a man's thigh," which thus rendered the flood defenses useless and enabled the invaders to march through the river bed and enter the city by night (Herodotus 1.191).

Cyrus was able to capture the city of **Babylon** without opposition. He is referred to in the TaNaKh as **the LORD's shepherd** and **the LORD's anointed** (see the commentary on **Isaiah Ic - This is What the LORD says to Cyrus His Anointed**), and was the only pagan ruler to be given those titles. In carrying out **God's** will Cyrus allowed subjugated peoples, including the Jews, to return to their homelands. However, **Jeremiah's** visions must have helped sustain the hope of the exiles through their decades of waiting.

In the end, the great empire was not the means of **YHVH's** attack, but the object of **YHVH's** attack. Babylon was no longer the shaper of the future, not the perpetual power with which to be reckoned, but only one more pretender to power who could not endure the ultimate power of **God**. At the end of the book of **Jeremiah** we are not left with **ADONAI** and **Babylon**, but only **ADONAI**.<sup>298</sup>

**Isaiah** and **John** deal with **Babylon** in other prophecies; hence, it is very important to understand the difference between a **near historical prophecy** and a **far eschatological prophecy**. The **Babylon** of the *Great Tribulation* will be a rebuilt **city** on the spot where ancient **Babylon** once stood, by the Euphrates River in the modern country of Iraq. The principles that we understand these to be **far eschatological prophecies** (**Isaiah Chapters 13, 14, 46 and 47; Revelation Chapters 17 and 18**) are first, that we **take them literally**, and secondly, that they have **never been fulfilled** and do not fit the **Babylon** of history.

**Babylon was not destroyed.** In fact, it became a major capital for the Persian Empire for two centuries. Alexander the Great, after conquering the Persians, made **Babylon** his primary capital. In fact, he died there. After Alexander's death, four of his key generals divided his kingdom, with Seleucus taking over Syria, **Babylonia** and portions of India.

The city subsequently underwent a gradual decay, even though the ruins remained occupied. Early in the first century AD a colony of merchants from Palmyra brought brief prosperity, but they left about 75 AD. Documents on clay tablets from a school for priests continued at least until 100 AD. Trajan, the Roman emperor, visited the city in 115 AD.

As recently as the 1800s the village of Hillah, containing over 10,000 inhabitants, stood on the site of ancient **Babylon**. In the last 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the German archaeologist Robert Koldewey conducted extensive studies at **Babylon** and the four Arab villages situated on the site. **Babylon** had been inhabited for some time even before his arrival. The great prophecies concerning the city of **Babylon** in **Isaiah** and **Jeremiah** have **never been fulfilled**.

As Joel Rosenberg writes in his blog ([https://flashtrafficblog.wordpress.com/2009/02/14/us-to-help-rebuild-city-of-babylon-in-iraq/February\\_14,\\_2009](https://flashtrafficblog.wordpress.com/2009/02/14/us-to-help-rebuild-city-of-babylon-in-iraq/February_14,_2009)), "Largely overlooked by the Western news media over the past few weeks was an enormously significant story. The government of Iraq is moving forward with plans to protect the archaeological remains of the ancient City of Babylon, in preparation for building a modern city of Babylon. The project, originally started by the late Saddam Hussein, is aimed eventually at attracting scores of "cultural tourists" from all over the world to see the glories of Mesopotamia's most famous city. What's more, the Obama Administration contributed \$700,000 towards 'The Future of Babylon Project,' through the State Department's budget." Officials hope Babylon can be revived and made ready for a rich future of tourism, with help from experts at the World Monuments Fund (WMF) and the U.S. embassy," reports Reuters. "The Future of Babylon' project launched last month seeks to 'map the current conditions of Babylon and develop a master plan for its conservation, study and tourism,' the WMF says. 'We don't know how long it will take to reopen to tourists,' said Mariam Omran Musa, head of a government inspection team based at the site. 'It depends on funds. I hope that Babylon can be reborn in a better image.'"

For many, I know the rebuilding of Babylon seemed like a far-fetched idea in the Bible. For many more, it seemed like a far-fetched idea in 2006, as well. But skeptics and cynics take note: now that the insurgency is dying down, the Shia-led government of Iraq is actually moving forward with this historic and prophetic project. They say Babylon will be "reborn." And they're right. It will be. Stay tuned.



Iraqi soldiers walk past a replica of the Ishtar Gate of Ancient Babylon, 135 km (85 miles) south of Baghdad, January 13, 2009. (Reuters photo)

Therefore, this extended prophecy from **50:1** to **51:64** blends both the **near** and the **far**. It is not unusual for either **Isaiah** or **Jeremiah** to switch back and forth between the **near historical** fall of Babylon in 539 BC by Cyrus the Great . . . and the **far eschatological** fall of Mystery Babylon at the end of the Great Tribulation, sometimes rapidly.