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Go Down, Sit in the Dust, Virgin Daughter of Babylon Sit on the Ground Without a Throne 47: 1-15

Go down, sit in the dust, virgin daughter of Babylon sit on the ground without a throne DIG: What does the picture of a queen reduced to slavery tell you about Babylon's past and future? Since Babylon was not destroyed, though literally conquered by Cyrus in a single day, what is the meaning of this image? What is the reason for this judgment (also see 10:12)? What does this say about God? What do you learn about the spiritual beliefs and practices of Babylon? What do you imagine they were doing as Cyrus came closer and closer? What will they inherit for all their activity? How does this highlight the truth proclaimed in Chapter 40, that there is no other God but the LORD? Of what value would this truth be for the exiles?

REFLECT: The Babylonians ignored God, mercy, and justice by hiding behind self-deification, pride, wealth, and magic. How do people today do these same things? What helped you see that these things could not be trusted? Might some of these still be tempting you today? How so? In our sophisticated and cynical age, why do you think most major newspapers faithfully print astrological information day after day? Have you ever been drawn to astrology or any other occult practice? Why? Do you think it is appropriate for believers to be involved in these things? Why or why not? During the 1950's and 1960's, many people predicted that the rise of science would lead to a decline in people's interest in the supernatural, yet the sales and use of occult books and devices has risen dramatically since then. What does that show you about people? What would it take to have an effective witness to someone involved in these practices?

Seventy long years had passed since **the first exiles** were deported from **Jerusalem** (see the commentary on **Jeremiah, to see link click Gu - Seventy Years of Imperial Babylonian Rule**). Life in **Babylon** was far from oppressive (**Jeremiah 29:4-7**), but there were **those** who could not satisfy **their** longing for **Yerushalayim** (**Psalms 137**). For **them**, the day of deliverance (**48:20-21**) could not come soon enough. But finally, it did come with

the lightning speed for which **Cyrus** was famous for. It was on all this that **Isaiah** meditated: the fall of **Babylon (47:1-15)**, and the call for **the captives** to go home **(48:1-22)**.¹⁷⁹

In October 539 BC, **Cyrus** advanced into lower Mesopotamia and, leaving **Babylon** until last, **he** conquered and occupied the surrounding territory. King Nabonidus of **Babylon** deserted **the city**, leaving **his** eldest son **Belshazzar** to rule as coregent. In anticipation of a long siege by **Cyrus**, Nabonidus had stored supplies to last for twenty years. The Euphrates River ran through the city from north to south, so the residents had plenty of water. But **Belshazzar** had a false sense of security because the Persian army was outside **Babylon's** mighty city walls. **They** had constructed an exterior wall and an interior wall to fortify it. They were among the seven wonders of the ancient world. The exterior walls were 56 miles long, 300 feet high, and 25 feet thick, with a deep moat that encircled the city. The interior walls were 75 feet high, with 250 towers that were 450 feet high. The city walls were so thick that two chariots could ride on top them side by side.



Not only was the Persian army outside the city walls, but it was divided. Half was stationed where the Euphrates River entered **Babylon** to the north and the other half was positioned where the river exited **the city** to the south. But the army dug a canal from the river and diverted the water north of **the city** into a lake nearby. Thus, the level of the river receded and the soldiers were able to enter by going under a sluice gate. Since those areas of the wall were apparently unguarded, once inside, the Persians were able to easily conquer it. Thus, the overthrow of **Babylon** took place **in a single day**, October 12, 539 BC. **Chapter 46** described the fall of **Babylonian** idolatry about two hundred years before it actually took

place. **The Babylonians, Judah's** captors, would become captives **themselves**. With this **God** brings an end to **His** long war with the idols of **Babylon**. In **Chapter 47 He** then turns to the fall of **the city of Babylon**.

First, we see the declaration of the fall of **Babylon** in **47:1-5**. The language of this poem is harsh, almost brutal. **Babylon** had lorded **her** power and wealth over the world as though it were somehow **her** right, but now **she** would come face-to-face with reality. The opening imperatives set the tone - they are tense and abrupt. **Go down, sit in the dust, Virgin Daughter of Babylon (47:1a)**. **Babylon** is called a **virgin** probably meaning that **her city** walls had never been penetrated. **The city** and the empire are depicted as a **Virgin Daughter**, someone who is young and used to luxuries, who has never had to face the harsh realities of life. Now, all that was gone forever. Although **Babylon** thought **herself** destined for a **throne**, **her** rightful place was in **the dust**. An act depicting great mourning (**Jonah 3:6**). **Go down, sit in the dust.**¹⁸⁰ She went from **throne** to **dust**, from pampering to poverty.

God then commanded **her** to **sit on the ground without a throne, Daughter of the Babylonians. No more will you be called tender or delicate** like a **virgin**. When the word **daughter** is used in the singular, it refers to an entire population. If the plural word *daughters* is used, it refers to the women of a particular nation. The population of the Chaldeans in the nation of **Babylon** that ruled the ancient world for seventy years will now be leveled to **dust. No more will you be called tender or delicate**, shielded from the realities of danger (**47:1b-c**). **The virgin daughter** will work like a slave girl. **Take millstones and grind flour; take off your veil**. Work at the **millstones** was considered the lowest form of slavery (**Exodus 11:5; Job 31:10; Matthew 24:41**). The ordinary hand-mill consisted of two circular stones from eighteen to two feet in diameter and about six inches deep. The lower stone, was usually heavier and a harder stone than the upper. The upper stone was a slightly concave surface, had a peg fixed in the middle. The upper stone, with a concave surface, covered the lid of the lower that was convex. There was a pivot that rose from the center of the lower stone, on which the upper stone revolved. Near the edge of the upper stone was a perpendicular stick or handle by which it is turned, and at the center is a hole for the pivot, and also for the grain to fall through upon the stone below. As servants of the conquerors, **they** would have to **grind the flour**.

Lift up your skirts, bare your legs, and wade through the streams (47:2). As a slave, the women could no longer wear the veil and long gown characteristic of upper-class women. After **Babylon's** fall, the thought that **her** beauty was too valued to be seen was ridiculous. There was no longer anything special about **her**. **She** would gather **up** her

skirts and bare her legs as **she** worked, probably in the irrigation ditches.

Your nakedness will be exposed and your shame uncovered. I will take vengeance.

The Hebrew word for **vengeance**, *naqam*, implies **Babylon's** downfall was **her** just reward. **God** declared: **I will spare no one (47:3)**. Many of **them** would be raped and abused. **The city** itself will be violated. This depicted the indescribable humiliation that **Babylon** was finally subjected to. **She** may have thought **she** was better than all the other nations, but **she** wasn't. **She** was just one more human nation, subject to the same discipline as any other.

Isaiah records **Isra'el's** sense of relief as a result of **Babylon's** defeat. **She** had mistreated **the Israelites**, but the day came when **she** was brought low. Seeing **God's vengeance** on **her** captors, **the Israelites** would praise **the LORD** for **they** realized that relief from their bondage would come from **God**, not themselves. As a result, **she** would call **ADONAI her Redeemer** (see my commentary on **Exodus Bz - Redemption**), **the LORD of heaven's angelic armies (CJB)**, **the Holy One of Isra'el** because **He** had judged that evil city and empire (47:4). **The beginning of knowledge is the fear of the LORD (Proverbs 1:7)**.

Sit in silence, go into darkness, Daughter of the Babylonians; no more will you be called queen of kingdoms (47:5). And the **virgin daughter** not only sits **in the dust**, **she** now sits **in silence** and goes **into darkness**. **The LORD** had used **Babylon** to judge **Judah**, but like Assyria **she** had abused **her** authority (**Habakkuk 1:6-11**). So **God** had pronounced **His** sentence upon the **daughter of the Babylonians**. **No more** would **she** be **called the eternal queen**, ruling over hundreds of lesser kingdoms subjugated by **the Babylonian** military. That would come to an end when **she herself** was subjugated.¹⁸¹ **Babylon's ill-treatment of God's people would be the cause of her humiliation.**

Next, the reasons for the judgment are given in **47:6-10**. **The LORD** addresses **Babylon**. There are **two reasons** why **He** was bringing about **Babylon's** judgment. **First, ADONAI judged Babylon because of her treatment of Isra'el**. **I was angry with My people and desecrated My inheritance; I gave them into your hand, and you showed them no mercy**. **God** made it very clear that the reason **Babylon** was able to take **His people** into captivity was because **He** allowed it and not because **Babylon** was so great. **God** had delivered **the Israelites** into the hands of **the Babylonians** because **they** had sinned against **Him**. **He** was judging **His own people**. **Even on the aged you laid a very heavy yoke (47:6)**.

But Babylon said: "I will continue forever - the eternal queen!" And **God** replied: **You did not consider these things or reflect on what might happen (47:7)**. **Babylon's**

claim to lordship over the earth gave **her** the idea that **she** could do as **she** pleased. But **she** went beyond the punishment that **God** had intended for **Isra'el** to endure. The prophet **Zechariah** spoke for **the LORD** when **He** said: **I am very angry with the nations that feel secure. I was only a little angry, but they added to the calamity (Zechariah 1:15).** **Zechariah** was a prophet after the **Babylonian** captivity and after the prophecies of **Isaiah** had already been fulfilled. Here **God** states that, yes, **I was angry with My people** and turned them over to the Gentile nations, **but they added to the calamity** because **they** went beyond the boundaries that **I** set for **them**. This was especially true for **Babylon**. It is true that **ADONAI** had commissioned **Babylon** to take **the Jews** into captivity, but she showed **no mercy** in doing so (**2 Chron 35 and 36**). So once again we have an example of **Genesis 12:3: I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse.** That is the first reason why **Babylon** would be judged.

Then secondly, ADONAI judged Babylon because of her self-deification. It was pride the brought **Babylon** down. Notice how **she** used the language of **God Himself**. **Now then, listen, you wanton creature, lounging in your security and saying to yourself, "I am, and there is none besides me" (47:8a).** **Isaiah** here paints a picture of thoughtless indulgence. **Babylon** assumed that wealth and position were **hers** by birthright. The private name of **the God of Isra'el** is **I Am** (see my commentary on [Exodus At - I AM Has Sent Me To You](#)). Also, throughout these sections of **Isaiah**, in **Chapters 40** through **46**, **God** says over and over: **I am the LORD, and there is no other; apart from Me there is no God (45:5).** This is the very thing that **Babylon** says of **herself**, **"I am, and there is none besides me."** What **God** claimed for **Himself (43:11, 44:6, 45:5-6, 14, 18, 21-22, 46:9)**, **Babylon** claimed for **herself**. Thus, because of **Babylon's** self-deification, judgment would come to **her**.

Because of **her** self-deification, **Babylon** was filled with self-assurance. **I will never be a widow or suffer the loss of children (47:8b).** Speaking figuratively of **her** desolation from defeat, **she** stated **she** would never be **widowed** or **childless**. **She** made no other provisions because **she** could not imagine it. **She** thought that whatever happened to other empires could never happen to **her**. **She** was different, **she** was special. But then **God** told **Isaiah**, that **she** would end up being both a **widow** and **childless** because **her** population would be slaughtered. **Both of these will overtake you in a moment, on a single day; loss of children and widowhood (47:9a).** **Babylon** and several other nations also fell in a single day (see [Gw - Then the Angel of the LORD Put To Death a Hundred Eighty Five Thousand Men in the Assyrian Camp](#)).

They will come upon you in full measure, in spite of your many sorceries and all

your potent spells (47:9b). The magical arts were highly cultivated in Babylon, but they were incapable of averting disaster. Sorceries translates *kesapim*, a word used in the TaNaKh here and **Second Kings 9:22, Micah 5:12 and Nahum 3:4**. It suggests seeking information about the future by using demons. The occult, and the demonic activity in such affairs had its beginnings in **Babylon** (see the commentary on **Genesis DI - The Tower of Babel**). But now **God** tells us **Babylon** will cease to exist. During the Messianic Kingdom, as we know elsewhere in **Isaiah**, while everything is perfect and beautiful, **Babylon** is nothing but a wasteland (see the commentary on **Revelation Er - Babylon Will Never Be Found Again**). And who is living there for one thousand years? Demons!

Once again we turn to **Babylon's** false security. **You have trusted in your wickedness and have said, "No one sees me." Your wisdom and knowledge mislead you when you say to yourself, "I am, and there is none besides me" (47:10)**. Those who say there is no **God** and no life to come, opt for a world without moral consequences. Their own delusional brand of **wisdom** and **knowledge** arose out of a sense of self-sufficiency and unaccountability.

The King of Tyre, because of his position of authority in **Ezekiel's** day, which was 70 or 80 years after **Isaiah**, declared himself to be god. He copied the same thing that **Babylon** mimicked. **I am a god (Ezeki'el 28:2)**. Later in **Ezeki'el 28:11-19**, the Adversary also said that he was **god**; in reference to the world, he said to **Jesus**, **"All this I will give to you if you bow down and worship me" (Matthew 4:9)**. As a result, this desire to be **god** was found in the King of Tyre, Satan, and in **Babylon** as well.

Then we see the actual fall of **Babylon (47:11-15)**. Although this prophecy by **Isaiah** was about 200 years in the future, it would point to the end of the punishment of **Isra'el** for **her** spiritual adultery and war with **the LORD**. When Cyrus defeated **Babylon** and **her gods**, the way would be cleared for **Isra'el** to return to the Land, rebuild the Temple and **their** way of life. At that time, **Israel** could say **that her warfare had been completed (40:12 to 48:22)**.

The **disaster** would **come** swiftly **upon Babylon**. **She** will be caught totally by surprise when the fall comes. **Disaster will come upon you, and you will not know how to conjure it away (47:11a)**. There will be no warnings from **her** gods; neither **sorcery** nor the occult will help **Babylon** in **her** moment of trial. **She** prided **herself** in **her sorcerers** who supposedly could tell the future and cast **spells** to influence others. So mockingly, **Isaiah** challenged **the Babylonians** to look to **their sorcerers** after the fall had already come. Could **they conjure it away**? Obviously **they** could not.

The **Babylon** that felt secure in **her wickedness** (*ra'a*) would find **evil** (*ra'a*) turning on **her**. **A calamity will fall upon you that you cannot ward off with a ransom; a catastrophe you cannot foresee will suddenly come upon you (47:11b)**. When **Babylon** fell, all **her** ritual and magical arts would prove worthless. **She** had made **her** ethical choices and was going to pay for them. All **her** ritual was less than worthless. **The LORD** could not be charmed out of **His** righteous anger.

ADONAI sarcastically urges **Babylon** to turn to the witchcraft that **she** trusted and that got **her** into trouble in the first place. **Keep on, then, with your magic spells and with your many sorceries, which you have labored since childhood**, that is, since the nation was founded. **God** sarcastically stated: **Perhaps you will succeed, perhaps you will cause terror (47:12)**. It was though **God** was saying, "If you don't believe **Me**, go ahead and put your faith into your foolish **magic**. Who knows, maybe it will help **you**." Maybe **her sorcerers** could perform some **magic spell** that would **terrorize** the hearts of **her** enemies and cause them to run away. Ridiculous! If they wanted **terror** they only needed to wait for **God's** judgment. Then they would know **terror**.

Ironically **ADONAI** suggests that the **astrologer** and **stargazers** **save** them. Astrology was common in **Babylon** and **she** was tireless in **her** pursuit, more than any other nation in the ancient world. **Her** priests would read the intestines of sacrificial animals, **her astrologers** would chart the movements of the constellations. But it was all for naught. **Isaiah** cautioned: **All the counsel you have received has only worn you out! Let your astrologers come forward, those stargazers who make predictions month by month, let them save you from what is coming to you (47:13)**.

Isaiah finally reveals the result of **Babylon's** dependence on **the magic** arts - utter disaster. **The fire will burn them up. They cannot even save themselves from the power of the flame (47:14a)**. But **their** work was worthless, **like** mere **straw**, **they** were like dried stalks of grain that burned quickly. Those **sorcerers** could not even **save themselves**, let alone **Babylon**. Yet, **they** persisted in **their error**. **Here are no coals to warm anyone; here is no fire to sit by (47:14b)**. The idols will be **burned**, and **they** will be **burned** in such a way that **they** will not even provide warmth from the cold. There will be no comfort from **them**. Then comes the conclusion; the fall of **Babylon** will be total. After **Chapters 46** and **47** **Babylon** will not be mentioned again for the remainder of the book.

That is all they can do for you - these you have labored with and trafficked with since childhood. Each of them wanders off on in their error, there is not one that

can save you (47:15). The end result was that there was no savior to whom **Babylon** could turn. **Her** pride? **Her** glory? **They** were only dust and ashes. **Her** gods? **She** had to carry **them**. **Her** ancient wisdom? Gone with the wind. But by contrast, there was **Isra'el**. Whereas **Babylon** had nowhere to turn but **herself**, **Isra'el** could turn to **the Holy One of Isra'el**, her Savior.

Like **Babylon**, all mankind will also be judged. The Bible teaches **that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow (Philippians 2:10a)**, and that **all judgment has been entrusted to the Son (John 5:22)**. Unbelievers will face **the LORD** before **His** throne (see the commentary on **Revelation Fo - The Great White Throne Judgment**). Believers will also stand before **Yeshua Messiah** but our judgment has nothing to do with salvation (**James 2:18-26**), only rewards for our work for the Kingdom of **God**. While in this life we are building on the **foundation of Yeshua Messiah** who is **the chief cornerstone** of our faith. **In Him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the LORD (Ephesians 2:20-21).**

If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day of Judgment will bring it to light (First Corinthians 3:12). The building materials mentioned here are in two categories, each listed in descending order of value. The first category - **gold, silver, costly stones** - clearly represents high-quality materials. The second - **wood, hay or straw** - just as clearly represents inferior materials. **Gold** represents the greatest faithfulness, the most skillful and careful work done for **ADONAI**. But, **straw** represents the least, the spiritual leftovers. **God** wants us to build with only the best materials because only the best materials are worthy of **Him**, are the most effective and will last.

Ultimately the flame of **God's judgment will test** what we have done. **If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light.** The **wood, hay and straw** are not sinful things, but spiritually inferior things. But when tested by **fire**, they all burn up. **It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work.** Only the most faithful, skillful and careful works of **gold, silver and costly stones** will survive the flame of **judgment**. **If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward** of crowns (see my commentary on (see the commentary on **Revelation Cc - For We Must All Appear Before the Judgment Seat of Christ**). If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved - even though only as one escaping through the flames (**First Corinthians 3:13-15**). **We build for the Lord in three basic ways.**

First, we build by our motives. Therefore, judge nothing before the appointed time; wait until the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of the heart. At that time, each will receive their praise from God (First Corinthians 4:5).

Secondly, we build by our conduct. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or *phaulos*, best translated worthless (Second Corinthians 5:10).

Thirdly, we build by our service. The way we use the spiritual gifts God has given us (Romans 12:6-8; First Corinthians 12:1-11; Ephesians 4:11-13; First Peter 4:10-11), the way we minister in His name, is of greatest importance in our building. God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness." In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for special purposes and some for common use. Those who cleanse themselves from the latter will be instruments for special purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work (2 Tim 2:19-21).