

Jeremiah 51:47-64 Rejoicing Over Babylon's Sinking Falls Ch. AM 9/3/2023

Throughout this book, our prophet Jeremiah has specialized in object lessons. In chapter 13, God told him to bury a linen belt, in chapter 19, to smash a clay pot, and in chapter 32, to buy a field in enemy territory. This time in chapter 51, he told the messenger to tie a stone to a scroll and throw it in the river to show that Babylon must sink. That illustrates the main point of our passage, which is ... **The final joyous dual-verdict from God is that antagonistic Babylon must sink to rise no more, while repentant exiles must rise to sink no more!**

**1. Babylon must fall, while the earth will sing for joy that God remembers Jerusalem. (v.47-53)**

In our study of the Book of Jeremiah, we have come to last part of the last poem. Verse 47 starts with the ominous formula, "*Behold, the days are coming...*" The defeat of Babylon includes the defeat of her images or false gods, which were empty and powerless. The elimination of Babylon would enable other nations to breathe a sigh of relief. Even more than that - the whole universe would be joyful. Look at the rejoicing breaking out into singing in verse 48, "*...then the heavens and the earth, and all that is in them, shall sing for joy over Babylon...*"

The reason for the downfall of Babylon is clear in verse 49, "*Babylon must fall for the slain of Israel...*" A correspondence is set up here between what has happened to God's people because of Babylon's attack, and therefore what must happen to Babylon.

In verses 50, once God's judgment begins, any remaining remnant of God's people who had not been killed by Babylon's sword were told not to leave Babylon. God had given a clear command to exiles in verse 50, "*go, do not stand still!*" What is the basis of the exiles departing? Remembering The LORD! They must remember the LORD in relationship to Jerusalem. Listen to the middle of verse 50, "*Remember the LORD from far away, and let Jerusalem come into your mind...*"

To remember was more than mental recall – it was a summons to take action. Remembering the LORD was the ground for the exiles to disengage from the Babylonian empire geographically, economically, politically, and even emotionally. Alternatively, if the exiles were to forget, they might give up on Jerusalem, and stay in Babylon as if to make a life there. But there is no future in Babylon, because the LORD is against it! Similar to Psalm 74 and Psalm 79, both the worshippers and the LORD Himself are to remember, as verse 51 reminds, "*foreigners have come into the holy places of The LORD's house.*" They needed to remember Jerusalem with hope! That hope was exactly what God was giving them. Listen to verse 52, "*Therefore, behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, I will execute judgment...*"

What if it seems like Babylon is dominant? What about the success of Babylon, and therefore the seeming success of Babylon's false gods? God answered in Verse 53, *“though Babylon should mount up to heaven...”* a reference to the worship structures that Babylon built that were like a staircase on each side, leading up to a high platform called a ziggurat. One such high tower we call the Tower of Babel. Babel is the Hebrew word, and Babylon is the Greek word. The Tower of Babel is the Tower of Babylon! Genesis 11:4, *“Then they said, ‘Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens...”* Yet God says destroyers are coming. Babylon is not dominant. Babylon must sink.

## **2. Babylon will shriek before the God of recompense, while the exiles go free! (v.54-58)**

In verse 54, our author hears something before others hear it. What does he hear? A voice! Babylon shrieking in fear and terror, the sound of being attacked. Verse 55 ends with this statement, *“...the noise of their voice is raised, for a destroyer has come upon her, upon Babylon....”* They are overcome by a judgment in which their scream never ends. This is ordered by the God who now refers to Himself in verse 56 as *“...a God of recompense!”* Why? Because, *“...He will surely repay!”* This word repay is the Hebrew word Shalom. We often over-simplify the word Shalom as meaning simply ‘peace,’ but it actually means completion, or coming full circle. As a blessing, coming full circle provides peace in all directions and with all relationships, but as a curse, coming full circle provides terror in all directions with all relationships. God will bring ‘shalom/complete the circle’ peace to His people, but God will ‘shalom/complete the circle’ of justice against His enemies! Shalom is the God of recompense giving people what they have coming! Babylon will shriek, but the exiles will go free. Shalom!

In verse 57, God will serve each leader a cup of wrath that was fitting for his crimes – each official, wise man, governor, commander and warrior *“...shall sleep a perpetual sleep and not wake.”* Each would be rendered intoxicated by God's wrath and helpless. The judgment was severe, sudden, and fatal! It reads like a royal formula, as if the official authorization papers for the attack order had been drawn up from the royal courts of heaven. Verse 57 ends with this phrase, *“...declares the King, whose name is the LORD of hosts.”* It is our God who takes those who are sleeping and reveals them as actually dead, and God takes those who are dead, and reveals them as actually sleeping. 1 Thessalonians 4:14, *“...since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep.”* Those opposing God will sleep a perpetual sleep, while God's people will live a perpetual life. By order of...The King!

## **3. Babylon will sink like a rock never to rise again, while the exiles rise never to sink again. (v.59-64)**

The poetry ends with verse 58 about the wall of Babylon. They had a thick tall wall, then a moat of water, then a second thick tall wall. How could they enter and exit their city? There were a few gates. One was the famous Ishtar Gate, 30 feet tall. It was built by conquered people from all of Babylon's wars, who were brought back to Babylon and used as forced labor to build walls, gates, and fortifications. But the verse does not begin by talking about the famous gate. Because God will not enter Babylon through a gate. First, verse 58 tells us, God will level the entire wall *to the ground*, so that the only part left standing was that very tall gate. A gate without a wall looks rather silly and ineffective, striking terror in the Babylonians. Then, as a last symbolic action of dominance, God will then also burn with fire that remaining high gate, standing alone. Let's put it all together and read back over the ending of the poem in verse 58, "...*Thus says The LORD of hosts: The broad wall of Babylon shall be leveled to the ground, and her high gates shall be burned with fire. The peoples labor for nothing, and the nations weary themselves only for fire.*" That is how the poem ends.

In verse 59, Jeremiah assigned the care of the scroll of God's Word to an official named Seriah. His job was taking care of the living quarters or lodging whenever the king of Judah traveled, so he had the title "quartermaster." This was time-stamped when Babylon summoned the local King of Judah, to come to Babylon and explain whether or not he had a part in a recent uprising.

But it was Babylon that should be scared, because Jeremiah sent with Seriah a scroll of God's Word about, as verse 60 says, "...*all the disaster that should come upon Babylon.*" Which is more powerful God's Word on that scroll or the mighty superpower Babylon?

In verse 61, this man Seriah was to go to Babylon and read God's words of the scroll! Reading it symbolized the effectiveness of the word of The LORD being let loose in the city of Babylon itself. In verse 62, God's scroll says that the city shall be cut off, and become desolate, forever.

After the message from God's Word against Babylon had been declared, all that was left was to illustrate it. Verse 63-64, "...*when you have finished reading this book, tie a stone to it and cast it into the midst of the Euphrates (River), and say, 'Thus shall Babylon sink, to rise no more...'*" Here is the last symbolic act of Jeremiah, demonstrating that Babylon would fall.

This reminds us how God destroyed the Pharaoh of Egypt. Listen and compare to Exodus 15:4, in the famous Song of Moses, we read, "*Pharaoh's chariots and his host he cast into the sea, and his chosen officers were sunk in the Red Sea, the floods covered them; they went down into the depths like a stone. Your right hand, O LORD, glorious in power, Your right hand, O LORD, shatters the enemy...(v.10) they sank like lead in the mighty waters...*"

This symbolic action of the scroll and stone was repeated in the vision of the Apostle John of Babylon from Revelation 18:21, “*Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, ‘So will Babylon the great city be thrown down with violence, and will be found no more...’*”

In verse 64, the statement ‘*thus far are the words of Jeremiah*’ is like the much later cry from the cross that Jesus made, that we find in John 19:30, “*It is finished!*” God’s destruction of sin was finished when Jesus died. God’s people were rescued. The sinking of the stone with the scroll was synonymous with the rising of God’s exiles from the Euphrates river to go back home. The sinking of Jesus unto death was synonymous with us rising from the hold that death had on us. The punishment of our sins was finished and complete. God completed the judgment on our sins. Jesus took what we had coming! Shalom.

### **Conclusion:**

#### 1. Do not fall in love with the world.

Because we are heaven’s exiles here, and we know that evil will not triumph forever, we must not fall in love with the world.

Tyrants will not have the last word. Pride, greed, aggression, violence, and even murder will ultimately be overturned by the living God. God’s will is invincible. Why would we turn to the world? For a right-thinking Christian, it makes no sense.

Paul expresses this core logic, when he pleads with the Christians in sin city Corinth to live differently than the city in which they reside. Corinth was a repeat of Babylon! Paul was giving later exiles the way to think about their inherent difference from those in their surroundings. Listen to 2 Corinthians 6:14-16, “*what fellowship has light with darkness? 15 What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, “I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, ...”* We must not fall in love with the world.

#### 2. Set your mind on heaven.

Paul calls us to remember that “*Our citizenship is in heaven.*” Phil. 3:20. And Hebrews 13:14 reminds us that “*Here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.*”

Our home is the New Jerusalem in heaven. Even though it is out of sight, it is not out of mind for us. Jeremiah 51:50, “*...Remember The LORD from far away, and let Jerusalem come into your mind...*”

It may look like the church is defeated and shamed, but she is victorious in the LORD’s timing. It is like a teeter-totter! Down with Babylon, up with the exiles. We have the same effect of the teeter-totter when we let the heavenly

Jerusalem come into our minds – down with Babylon, up with the New Jerusalem. To rejoice over the downfall of Babylon is the same as to rejoice in the victory of heaven. To praise God for the hope of heaven is the same as to praise God for the justice of hell. Babylon’s ruin is Zion’s praise! Revelation 18:19-20, “*And they threw dust on their heads as they wept and mourned, crying out, ‘Alas, alas, for the great city where all who had ships at sea grew rich by her wealth! For in a single hour she has been laid waste. Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, for God has given judgment for you against her!’*”

The church on earth and the church in heaven give to God the glory and praise of His righteousness in both rendering a verdict of some to heaven, and some to perdition. We take notice of both, and we give thanks to Him. Jeremiah 51:48, “*...then the heavens and the earth, and all that is in them, shall sing for joy over Babylon...*” Isaiah 49:13, “*Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth; break forth, O mountains, into singing! For the LORD has comforted His people and will have compassion on His afflicted.*”

The same heavens and earth that sing for joy over Babylon, are the same heavens and earth that sing over the LORD’s comfort for His people, and over the LORD’s compassion for His afflicted ones!

Just like the exiles of old, for us, too, a day is coming when the LORD will summon us and say, it is time to go home.

Colossians 3:1-4, “*If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.*”