

RECOGNIZE THE LORD'S AUTHORITY

Jeremiah 50:2-3,24-25,29-32,44

The politicians and the economists and the prognosticators and just about everyone will tell you that while we are having a rough time now, things will get better if we will just stay the course. Almost everyone has criticized Standard and Poor's for lowering the bond rating on our country's debt because we are, in fact, still the strongest economy in the world and corporate earnings are improving and we are really in good financial condition. People will tell you that we are the greatest nation on earth and there is nothing wrong with our country, that the problem lies with those who are saying we should act responsibly with our economy and that we should return to the founding principles of trusting in God, living by high moral standards and traditional family values and respect for life. The message that seems to come across is that we are so great that it doesn't matter what we do, we will be successful. Does that sound like arrogance to you?

In past times, many would openly admit that the reason we were doing well was because God was blessing us. Now-a-days the thought is that we are smarter and harder-working and more deserving just because we are Americans. We are enamored with technological capability and the weapons our military has and we think we are practically invincible in spite of the events of September 11, 2001. This is the same kind of thinking that Babylon had at the height of its power. Their pride caused them to treat others with disdain and cruelty and to reject the idea that they needed to abide by anyone's rules but their own. Their leaders promoted themselves to be "gods" and expected those under their control to bow down in worship of themselves. There is truth in the proverb that states "pride goes before a fall."

None Is Invincible - 50:2-3

²"Declare and proclaim among the nations. Proclaim it and lift up a standard. Do not conceal *it but* say, 'Babylon has been captured, Bel has been put to shame, Marduk has been shattered; Her images have been put to shame, her idols have been shattered.' ³"For a nation has come up against her out of the north; it will make her land an object of horror, and there will be no inhabitant in it. Both man and beast have wandered off, they have gone away! Jeremiah 50:2-3 (NASB95)

This prophecy from Jeremiah was made in the fourth year of the reign of Zedekiah which was several years before the destruction of Jerusalem. As is the case with many prophecies, it was stated as an accomplished fact even though it had not happened in history. As far as God was concerned, it was a done deal. This prophecy against Babylon was part of a series of prophecies concerning the surrounding nations that would fall victim to Babylon. This series concluded in a long discourse regarding the destruction of Babylon.

We know that throughout the history of Israel there was a general understanding that their success was related to God's favor and their failures were connected to God's judgments on their disobedience. This was a somewhat common understanding of other nations in that region in that they believed that their gods enabled them to be successful. They thought that if they were superior to another nation, it was because their gods were greater than the other nation's gods. Of course, we understand that the "little g" gods of the nations had nothing to do with anything, but that Jehovah God was in control of everything. For Babylon to give credit for their success to their gods Bel and Marduk was an example of misplaced trust and the predicted fall of the Babylonian Empire would show how powerless their so-called gods really were.

Some commentators think that Bel and Marduk were the same god. Bel (would be equivalent to Baal) literally means "lord" which was a description of the position of the entity.

Marduk (translated as Merodach in the KJV) is thought to be the same as the chief god of Babel as in the account of the Tower of Babel. The builder of Babel was called Nimrod in the Genesis account. As you know, the alphabet in use at that time did not have vowels. So Nimrod's name would have been represented as NMRD. Even today in some African languages the use of the letter "N" or "M" at the beginning of a name is a modifier that likely (originally) referred to some social position in that culture. If we represent Nimrod as N'MRD and choose alternate vowels to make the name something that can be pronounced, then Marduk can be seen to have likely been the same person that is referred to as Nimrod in Genesis.

The words that Jeremiah used to describe the outcome of the images and idols of Babylon were very unflattering. The images were to be humiliated or "dried up" and this term was used to describe dried up animal dung that was gathered and used as fuel. The idols were to be shattered or broken up in small pieces and that term was descriptive of kindling that would be easily burned in a fire. So you could read in an implication that the outcome of Babylon and all that it represented (worldly power and human might) was destined for destruction in fire. This same theme is picked up in John's account of the outcome of spiritual Babylon in Revelation 18:8-9

Therefore in one day her plagues will overtake her: death, mourning and famine. she will be consumed by fire, for mighty is the Lord God who judges her. When the kings of the earth who committed adultery with her and shared her luxury see the smoke of her burning, they will weep and mourn over her.

The means of destruction of Babylon was to be a nation that would come out of the north. First impressions would cause us to think that Jeremiah was referring to the Medes and Persians who would overthrow the Babylonian or Chaldean empire. Some commentators have noted that this does not agree with the historical facts. The Persians came out of the east and not the north. The city of Babylon was not destroyed and the inhabitants remained in place as opposed to it becoming uninhabitable. Babylon became one of the ruling centers of the Persian Empire and we know from other accounts that Daniel served in an administrative position to that government.

It is likely that this prophecy was intended to be fulfilled in a number of different periods of time. For example, Seleucia Nicanor essentially destroyed the city around 330 BC. It is likely that this prophecy was also intended to be applied not only to physical Babylon but also, eventually, to spiritual or mystical Babylon as we see in chapters 17 and 18 of the Revelation.

Resistance Is Futile - 50:24-25, 44

²⁴ "I set a snare for you and you were also caught, O Babylon, While you yourself were not aware; You have been found and also seized Because you have engaged in conflict with the LORD." ²⁵ The LORD has opened His armory And has brought forth the weapons of His indignation, For it is a work of the Lord GOD of hosts In the land of the Chaldeans.

⁴⁴ "Behold, one will come up like a lion from the thicket of the Jordan to a perennially watered pasture; for in an instant I will make them run away from it, and whoever is chosen I will appoint over it. For who is like Me, and who will summon Me *into court*? And who then is the shepherd who can stand before Me?" Jeremiah 50:24-25, 44 (NASB95)

It is likely that the first part of the account in this chapter was a reference to the final outcome of God's judgment against Babylon. The details of how the Chaldeans would fall to the Persians are alluded to in these later verses.

The rulers of Babylon thought they were completely safe and invincible. They boasted and bragged and congratulated themselves in parties and revelry and did not acknowledge the Lord of Glory who gave them success. When another nation was raised up to bring judgment on them, they were completely unprepared.

This is the problem of arrogance and pride. Not only do you get lulled into a sense of

being failure-proof, you also get deluded into thinking that you are not accountable to anyone or need to operate within reasonable bounds of behavior. Such an attitude leads to lawlessness and disregard for common decency. This attitude led to harsh treatment of those they conquered and unreasonable destruction of property which was beyond the intent that God had when He empowered them to bring judgment on other nations. This excessiveness, especially the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem and the taking of the vessels used in worship, had put them in conflict with God. This arrogance and pride also showed up requiring the people to worship those in leadership and their failure to give credit to Jehovah God for any success they had.

There was a direct connection to the misuse of the vessels of the temple that had been dedicated to God by Belshazzar at one of his drunken parties and the fall of Babylon to the forces of Cyrus. You will remember that it was at that party that there was a “hand writing on the wall” that announced the end of the Babylonian kingdom. That same night the army of Cyrus came into the city and took it without much of a fight.

Their success provided the materials for the trap that eventually ensnared them. When we take the fruits of success that God has given us and we indulge ourselves instead of helping others or working to make the world a better place, then we have stepped into the trap that leads to decay and dissipation in the lives of individuals or a nation. It is a major error in thinking to believe that we have arrived and we come to the attitude of the man in the parable Jesus told about the farmer who was so successful and had so much that he was having trouble figuring out what to do with all the produce. He decided to build bigger barns - to indulge himself.

They say that what goes around comes around. In verse 44 we see the words that described Nebuchadnezzar in his conquest of Edom and are now applied to Cyrus in his conquest of Babylon. God raised up Cyrus to break the power of Babylon and to ensure that the exiles could return to their homeland. If Babylon had remained in control, the release of the exiles would not have happened.

Resistance Is Fatal - 50:29-32

²⁹ “Summon many against Babylon, All those who bend the bow: Encamp against her on every side, Let there be no escape. Repay her according to her work; According to all that she has done, *so* do to her; For she has become arrogant against the LORD, Against the Holy One of Israel. ³⁰ “Therefore her young men will fall in her streets, And all her men of war will be silenced in that day,” declares the LORD. ³¹ “Behold, I am against you, O arrogant one,” Declares the Lord GOD of hosts, “For your day has come, The time when I will punish you. ³² “The arrogant one will stumble and fall With no one to raise him up; And I will set fire to his cities And it will devour all his environs.” Jeremiah 50:29-32 (NASB95)

This passage is probably one in which different time periods apply to the fulfillment of the prophecy. The call for many to come against Babylon was likely a specific reference to the forces of Cyrus who had (according to some historians) around sixty thousand archers. Even though they had surrounded the cities they did not do a frontal assault on it. They instead diverted the river that ran through the city and when they level drop, they simply followed the riverbed under the wall and took the city without the need for a lot of fighting. Those who surrounded Babylon were there to make sure that none escaped.

It is not clear whether the retribution of repaying them for how they had treated others (mentioned in verse 29) was carried out at the time of the invasion by Cyrus or if it was to come later in history. In Revelation 18:6 the call was for double retribution or repayment for mystical Babylon. The account in Daniel chapter five does include a report that Belshazzar was killed the night of the invasion.

After the Persian army had entered the city, they issued a proclamation that anyone who

came out of their house and was found in the streets would be killed. Many people abided by the curfew but those who defied it, likely died. We see in verse 30 that some of the young men would die in the streets, and that the men of war were silenced in that they did not venture out for fear of getting killed. This was certainly a time of the start of the destruction of the Babylonian empire and it was never a significant influence in that area again.

Apparently, the burning of the city came later in world history and the lessons of history would tell us that all who defy the Lord will fail. Babylon serves as an example of those who were once blessed and empowered by God but who failed to acknowledge Him as God. The manifestation of defiance against God is arrogance and pride.

The behavior of the Babylonian empire was so bad that it became the essence of man-centered government and religion and we see that name applied to the evil system that will arise in the end time that will oppose the Church and those who are called out of the world system into the Kingdom of God.