

POWER

"... the gospel ... is the power of God unto salvation ..." (Romans 1:16)

JUDGMENT FOR BABYLON, JUDGMENT FOR US (JEREMIAH 50-51)

Wade L. Webster

The fiftieth chapter of Jeremiah is one of the longest chapters in the book. Its message is a mixture of horror and hope, destruction and deliverance. From beginning to end, the chapter is about judgment. Israel's judgment has passed. She has served her time. In the fiftieth and fifty-first chapters of Jeremiah, the gavel of divine judgment falls upon Babylon. Her day has finally come (*Jer. 50:31; 51:13*). Babylon had been a golden cup or instrument of judgment in the hand of God (*Jer. 51:7*). However, it was now time for her to drink the dregs of her own destruction. Her judgment, or need for it, reached to heaven (*Jer. 51:9*).

The main focus of this lesson will not be on Babylon's judgment, but rather, on our own. After all, Babylon's judgment is past, but ours is still to come (*1 Pet. 4:17*). In this study, we will note similarities between the judgment that came for Babylon and the judgment that is coming for us.

Judgment Is Sure

At the time that this prophecy was given, the fourth year of the reign of Zedekiah (*Jer. 51:59*), Babylon ruled the world. Its walls were 300 feet high and 87 feet thick (*Jer. 51:58*). There were enough provisions in the city to hold out for twenty years should an enemy besiege them. It seemed impossible that Babylon would ever fall. Yet, God decreed that it would through Jeremiah. In fact, the weeping prophet spoke of Babylon's fall as having already occurred. He declared, "Babylon is taken, Bel is confounded, Merodach is broken in pieces" (*Jer. 50:2*). Jeremiah could speak of Babylon's fall as past, because he knew that the prediction would not fail. Like Paul, Jeremiah knew that the omniscient and omnipotent God that He served could call "things which be not as though they were" (*Rom. 4:17*). At the time

that Jeremiah penned his prophecy of Babylon's demise, it seemed far more likely that Israel would disappear than Babylon. However, Israel was going to survive and Babylon was going to be buried under the sands of time. Amazingly, Jeremiah not only predicted Babylon's fall, but he revealed how it would be done. He revealed that it would happen suddenly (*Jer. 51:8*), that it would come from the north (*Jer. 50:3, 41*), that it would be by the hand of the Medes (*51:11, 28*), and that it would involve the drying up of Babylon's waterways (*Jer. 50:38; 51:36*). Of course, history proved all of this to be true. Prior to their assault on the city, the Medo-Persian forces cleared out a canal that carried away superfluous water from the Euphrates into the lake of Nitocris. By clearing out the canal, they were able to divert the Euphrates away from the city. The Euphrates, which ran through the heart of the city, was rendered so shallow by their actions that they were able to walk along its bed into the city. The huge walls of Babylon had been breached with ease. The fifth chapter of Daniel records what was taking place inside Babylon while the Medo-Persian forces were entering the city. Every purpose of God against Babylon was performed (*Jer. 51:12, 29, 60-62*). Not one word failed.

In like manner, judgment is sure for us. The Hebrew writer declared that "it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (*Heb 9:27*). We can be certain that judgment will come. On Mars Hill, Paul declared that God has "appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead" (*Acts 17:31*). Please note that God has given assurance that the Day of Judgment will come. The assurance is the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. The God who raised Jesus from the dead will one day raise all who

have died that they might stand before Him in judgment. Jesus declared that "the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation" (*John 5:28-29*).

Judgment Is For All

Within the context, it is clear that judgment is for all. First, judgment is for believers and unbelievers. Both Israel and Babylon were judged by God. As you recall, judgment began at the house of God. It began with Israel. God used Babylon to punish his people, and now he was going to use the Medes and the Persians to punish Babylon. Second, judgment is for the small and the great. In the forty-ninth chapter of Jeremiah, we read of smaller nations that were judged. One of these nations was the tiny nation of Edom (*Jer. 49:7-21*). In the fiftieth chapter, we read of the judgment of Babylon the Great. Along with Assyria, Babylon was pictured by Jeremiah as a lion that came against Israel and Judah, God's lambs (*Jer. 50:17*). Assyria had already been judged, and now it was Babylon's turn (*Jer. 50:18*). Those in the region of the Red Sea would be moved at the report of little Edom's fall (*Jer. 49:7-21*). However, the whole world would be moved at the news of Babylon's fall (*Jer. 50:46; 51:48*). Although Babylon was rich and powerful, she would not escape judgment. In the fifty-first chapter, God declared, "Though Babylon should mount up to heaven, and though she should fortify the height of her strength, yet from me shall spoilers come unto her, saith the LORD" (*Jer. 51:53*). Further, He declared, "Thus saith the LORD of hosts; The broad walls of Babylon shall be utterly broken, and her high gates shall be burned with fire; and the people shall labour in vain, and the folk in the fire, and

they shall be weary" (*Jer. 51:58*). Third, Jeremiah records that judgment is for the young and the old (*Jer. 50:27, 30, 36; 51:3*), the rich and the poor (*Jer. 50:37*), the learned and the unlearned (*Jer. 50:35-36; 51:57*), the noble and the common (*Jer. 50:35; 51:57*), the strong and the weak (*Jer. 50:36; 51:56*), the mingled and the unmingled (*Jer. 50:37*), and the fast and the slow (*Jer. 50:37*). No one, regardless of age, race, wealth, position, or intelligence, was going to escape judgment. In the context, God ordered the Persian

archers to surround the city of Babylon and to let none escape (*Jer. 50:29*). None of their arrows were going to return in vain. They were all going to find their intended targets (*Jer. 50:9*).

Like Jeremiah, the inspired writers of the New Testament record that judgment is for all. They record that it is for believers and unbelievers. Both the sheep and the goats will be there (*Mt. 25:31-33*). In like manner, they record that it is for the small and the great. John wrote, "And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works" (*Rev. 20:10; cf. Rom. 14:10*). Those in penthouses as well as those in poorhouses will be in the judgment. The young and the old (*Ecc. 11:9-10*), the learned and the unlearned (*2 Thess. 1:8*), the mingled and the unmingled (those of every nation) will be there (*Mt. 25:32*).

earth" (*Jer. 50:23*), was now going to be pounded into submission. The rhythm of the Hebrew poetry captures the hammering that Babylon was going to take. The nation that had been the terror from the north was now going to be terrorized from the north (*Jer. 50:3*). The nation that had trapped others was now going to be trapped (*Jer. 50:24*) and the nation that had besieged others was now going to be besieged (*50:29*). Babylon had mocked others and now she was going to be mocked (*Jer. 51:8*). God's wrath was especially hot against Babylon because she had delighted in the destruction of His heritage (*Jer. 50:11*). God pictured Babylon as a heifer growing fat off His pasture (*Jer. 50:11*). Of course, Babylon was simply fattening herself for slaughter. Because Babylon had meted out judgment without mercy, her judgment would be without mercy. God instructed those who came against her to "spare no arrows" (*Jer. 50:14*). Further, Jeremiah prophesied, "They shall hold the bow and the lance: they are cruel, and will not shew mercy: their voice shall roar like the sea, and they shall ride upon horses, every one put in array, like a man to the battle, against thee, O daughter of Babylon" (*Jer. 50:42*). Along the same lines, the psalmist declared, "O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed; happy shall he be, that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us. Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones" (*Psa. 137:8-9; cf. 28:4; 62:12; Prov. 24:12, 29*).

Our judgment will also be according to our works. John wrote,

"And I saw the dead, *small* and great, *stand* before God; and *the books* were opened: *and another* book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, *according* to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works" (*Rev. 20:12-13; cf. Rev. 2:23; cf. Mt. 16:27; Rom. 2:6; 2 Cor. 5:10*).

As was true with Babylon, our judgment will

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Judgment Is According To Works

Several times within the chapter, Jeremiah declares that Babylon's judgment will be according to her works. In the fifteenth verse, we read, "Shout against her round about: she hath given her hand: her foundations are fallen, her walls are thrown down: for it is the vengeance of the LORD: take vengeance upon her; as she hath done, do unto her" (*cf. 51:24, 34-35, 49*). Please note the final seven words: "as she hath done, do unto her." In like manner, in the twenty-ninth verse, we read, "Call together *the archers* against Babylon: all ye that bend the bow, camp against it round about; let none thereof escape: *recompense* her according to her work; according to all that she hath done, do unto her: *for she hath* been proud against the LORD, against the Holy One of Israel." (*cf. Jer. 17:10; 32:19; cf. Rev. 18:2, 6*). Again, we see that Babylon would be recompensed "according to her work." Philip Ryken noted that "Jeremiah 50 is the Biblical version of 'what goes around comes around.'" Babylon, which had been "the hammer of the whole

also be according to how we have treated or judged others. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus declared, "For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again" (*Mt. 7:2*). If we want mercy, then we must show it. James wrote, "For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment" (*Jam. 2:13; cf. Mt. 5:7; 6:15; 18:28-35; 25:41-46; Judges 1:7*).

Judgment Requires Repentance

Jeremiah pictured the children of Israel and the children of Judah as being delivered from divine wrath through penitence. He pictured them as "going and weeping" in search of the Lord (*Jer. 50:4*). Furthermore, he recorded them as asking for the way to Zion that they might walk faithfully with God (*Jer. 50:5; cf. Amos 3:3*). As you likely know, this was a great change from what was true of them earlier in the book. Earlier, they had refused to walk in the good way (*Jer. 6:16*). The captivity would accomplish its desired end. It would bring God's people to repentance. God would pardon them and would remember their sins no more (*Jer. 50:20*). Although Babylon held them fast and refused to let them go, God was going to deliver them. Israel's Redeemer was strong (*Jer. 50:34*). He had not forsaken His people (*Jer. 51:5*).

Unlike Israel and Judah, Babylon was unwilling to repent (*Ezek. 33:11, 14-16, 19*). No doubt, she could have avoided judgment as Nineveh did (*Jer. 51:9*). As you likely recall, the city of Nineveh, just forty days from destruction, was spared by God when it responded penitently to the preaching of Jonah (*Jonah 3*). Although judgment eventually came to Nineveh, it was stayed for a time by repentance. Babylon's judgment would come without delay.

In the gospel of Luke we read of an occasion where some were exaggerating

the sins of others and minimizing their own sins. They saw others, but not themselves, on the brink of destruction. They saw others, but not themselves, as deserving of punishment. They saw others, but not themselves, as needing repentance. Jesus attacked their erroneous thinking head on, by declaring, "I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (*Lk. 13:3*). Notice that Jesus put the spotlight of truth on them. He made clear that all men must repent or perish. In like manner, Peter declared, "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (*2 Pet. 3:9*). Note that all must come to repentance. On Mar's Hill, Paul preached, "And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because He hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that man who he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead" (*Acts 17:30-31*).

Judgment Requires Haste

Jeremiah pictured the people of God as going forth out of the land of the Chaldeans as "he goats before the flocks" (*Jer. 50:8*). Evidently, when the goats are put out to pasture, the male goats are the first to go out. They rush out before the others. To further understand Jeremiah's point, consider what he wrote a little later. In the fifty-first chapter, Jeremiah instructed Israel to "flee out of the midst of Babylon" and to deliver their souls (*Jer. 51:6, cf. 51:45*). They were to flee quickly because Babylon's judgment was going to come "suddenly" (*Jer. 51:8*). One Babylonian postman is pictured as running to meet another to relay the message that Babylon has fallen to the king (*Jer. 51:31-32*). By the time the king gets the message, it will be too late. Babylon's judgment came suddenly and without warning. Jeremiah pictures Babylon as sinking like a

rock cast into the river (*Jer. 51:63-64*). Judgment requires haste. In the days of the prophet Amos, God brought great judgment upon his people. However, they still didn't return. With more judgment on its way, God declared, "Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel" (*Amos 4:12*). Israel needed to stop procrastinating and start preparing. In like manner, Isaiah knew that his people had only a small window of time in which to prepare for the coming judgment. He wrote, "Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon" (*Isa. 55:6-7*).

In light of the coming judgment, we should be moving with haste to make sure that we are ready. There is a great deal of emphasis in the New Testament upon doing things right now (*2 Cor. 6:1-2; Heb. 3:7, 13, 15*). If we are not careful, we will be like the five foolish virgins who were not ready for the coming of the bridegroom (*Mt. 25:1-10*). We must not wait for a convenient season (*Acts 24:25*).

Judgment Involves Shepherds Giving Answer

Through Jeremiah God pictured His people as having been "lost sheep" upon the mountains. He laid the blame for the people going astray at the feet of "their shepherds" or leaders (*Jer. 50:6*). The shepherds had "caused them to go astray" (*Jer. 50:6*). Sadly, throughout the prophetic literature, the failure of shepherds is a recurring theme (*Isa. 56:10-12; Ezek. 34:4-12; Zech. 11:4-5*). The sheep were "devoured" by all who found them because the shepherds were not giving the proper watch care to them.

On the final Day of Judgment, elders or shepherds will be called to answer for how they have cared for God's flock. In

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JUDGMENT FOR BABYLON, JUDGMENT FOR US (JEREMIAH 50-51)

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Hebrews, we read, "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you" (*Heb. 13:17; cf. Lk. 16:1-2*). Realizing that elders must give an account of the sheep committed to their care, Peter exhorted elders to take the oversight of the flock and to be ensamples to the flock (*1 Pet. 5:1-4; cf. Acts 20:28*).

Judgment Involves God Exacting Vengeance

Repeatedly Jeremiah described Babylon's judgment as "the vengeance of the Lord" (*Jer. 50:15, 28; 51:6, 11, 36*). In other places we read of "wrath" (*Jer. 50:13*), "indignation" (*Jer. 50:25*), and "recompense" (*Jer. 51:6*). The vengeance or wrath of the Lord would cause Babylon's foundations and walls to fall (*Jer. 50:15*). God assured His people that He would plead their cause and take vengeance for them. God would open His armory and bring forth the weapons of His indignation against Babylon (*Jer. 50:25*). He would fill her with men (Medo-Persian soldiers) as caterpillars (*Jer. 51:14, 27*). No one in Babylon was going to be able to stand in the day of God's vengeance. The mighty men of Babylon would become like women in the hour of judgment (*Jer. 50:37, 43; 51:30*). In other words, fear would seize them and they would be unable to respond. The joints of their loins would be loosed and their knees would knock together (*Dan. 5:5-6*). The wicked, no matter how mighty, would be unable to stand before God in judgment (*Jer. 50:44; Psa. 1:5*). Although shepherds were known for their courage in standing against lions (*1 Sam. 17:34-36*), no shepherd (no man in Babylon) would have the courage to stand before the lion of God's judgment (*Jer. 50:44*). Babylon was chaff before the wind of God's judgment (*Jer. 51:1-2, 33; cf.*

Mt. 3:12). God was going to start a fire that the firemen in Babylon would labor in vain to extinguish (*Jer. 51:58*). The greatness of the vengeance to be exacted upon Babylon is seen in its comparison to the fiery destruction that came upon Sodom and Gomorrah (*Gen. 50:40*).

In like manner, the New Testament assures us that God will take vengeance on His enemies and the enemies of His people. Paul wrote, "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord" (*Rom. 12:19; cf. Heb. 11:30*). One day Christ is going to come in "flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (*2 Thess. 1:8; cf. Jude 7*). On the final Judgment Day, the wicked will face a far greater fire than those in Babylon did (*Mk. 9:43-46, 48*).

CONCLUSION

As you can see, there is much that we can learn from Babylon's judgment. The fiftieth chapter of Jeremiah is more than a prophecy against Babylon. It is a warning to us. If we will heed the clear teaching of this chapter, then we can find deliverance in the Day of Judgment. However, if we fail to heed Jeremiah's words, then we will be as unprepared for our judgment as Babylon was for hers. Are you ready for the Judgment Day?

¹Ryken, Philip Graham. **Jeremiah & Lamentations: From Sorrow To Hope**. Preaching The Word Series. R. Kent Hughes, General Editor. Crossway Books: Wheaton, Illinois, 2001, p. 692.

²Ibid., 688.

³Ibid., 691.

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