

CHAPTER 47

INTRODUCTION TO ISAIAH 47

This chapter is a prophecy of the destruction of Babylon, and of the Chaldeans, and declares the causes of it. The mean, low, ignominious, and miserable condition Babylon and the Chaldeans should be brought into by the Lord, the Redeemer of his people, is described, (^{2340E}Isaiah 47:1-5), the causes of it are their cruelty to the Jews, (^{2340E}Isaiah 47:6), their pride, voluptuousness, and carnal security, (^{2340E}Isaiah 47:7,8) their sorceries and enchantments, and trust in their own wisdom, (^{2340E}Isaiah 47:9,10), wherefore their destruction should come suddenly upon them, and they should not be able to put it off, (^{2340E}Isaiah 47:11), their magic art, and judiciary astrology, which they boasted of, by them they could neither foresee nor withstand their ruin, which would be of no avail unto them, (^{2340E}Isaiah 47:12-14), nor their merchants either, (^{2340E}Isaiah 47:15).

Ver. 1. *Come down, and sit in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon,* &c.] The kingdom of Babylon is meant, as the Targum paraphrases it; or the Babylonish monarchy, called a virgin, because it had never been subdued and conquered from the first setting of it up, until it was by Cyrus; so Herodotus¹⁹²⁵ says, this was the first time that Babylon was taken; and also because of the beauty and glory of it: but now it is called to come down from its height and excellency, and its dominion over other kingdoms, and sit in a mournful posture, and as in subjection to other princes and states, Jerom observes, that some interpret this of the city of Rome, which is mystical Babylon, and whose ruin may be hinted at under the type of literal Babylon. And though the church of Rome boasts of her purity and chastity, of her being espoused to Christ as a chaste virgin, she is no other than the great whore, the mother of harlots; and though she has reigned over the kings of the earth, the time is coming when she must come down from her throne and dignity, and sit and be rolled in the dust:

there is no throne, O daughter of the Chaldeans: that is, for her; there was a throne, but it was for Cyrus and Darius, kings of Persia, who should now possess it, when the king of Babylon should be obliged to come down from

it. So the seat and throne which the dragon gave to the beast shall be taken from it, and be no more, (^{<6613>}Revelation 13:2):

for thou shall no more be called tender and delicate; or be treated in a tender and delicate manner; or live deliciously, and upon dainties, as royal personages do, (^{<6618>}Revelation 18:7).

Ver. 2. *Take the millstones, and grind meal*, &c.] Foretelling that the Chaldeans should be taken captives, and used as such, and sent to prison houses, where they should turn the mill, and grind corn into meal; a very servile work, and which used to be done by captives and slaves, even by female ones, (^{<2115>}Exodus 11:5 12:29 ^{<0762>}Judges 16:21). The Targum is,

“go into servitude;”

of which this was a sign:

uncover thy locks: the attire and dress of the head, by which the locks were bound up and kept together; but being taken off, would hang loose, and be dishevelled, as in captives and mourners. The Targum is,

“uncover the glory of thy kingdom:”

make bare the leg; or the shoulder, as the Vulgate Latin version, to be scourged by the Persians:

uncover the thigh, pass over the rivers: they are bid to tuck up their clothes so high, that they might pass over the rivers which lay between them and Persia, whither they were carried captives. The Targum is,

“thy princes are broken, the people of their army are scattered, they pass away as the waters of the river.”

Ver. 3. *Thy nakedness shall be uncovered, yea, thy shame shall be seen*, &c.] Not only stripped of their garments, and have nothing to cover their naked bodies, being spoiled of all by the soldiers; but should have nothing to cover those parts which women are most ashamed should be exposed to view, and which is often the case of such who fall into the hands of the conquerors. It is said of the whore of Rome, of mystical Babylon, that the kings of the earth should hate her, and make her desolate and naked, (^{<6616>}Revelation 17:16):

I will take vengeance; for though the Medes and Persians were the instruments, the destruction was of the Lord, who took vengeance of the

Chaldeans, for their ill usage of his people; as he will on mystical Babylon, (~~688~~ Revelation 18:20 19:2):

and I will not meet thee as a man; in a humane way, with lenity, tenderness, and compassion, but with inflexible wrath and fury; not with human strength, which is but weakness, but with the strength of the mighty God; as is said of mystical Babylon,

strong is the Lord God that judgeth her, (~~688~~ Revelation 18:8) or it may be rendered, “I will not meet a man”^{f926}; or a man shall not meet me, to stop or hinder me, by strength or might, or by prayers and entreaties. So some give the sense, “I will not receive the “intercession of any man for thee”; which is observed by Kimchi. The Targum is, “I will change “thy judgment from the children of men”; which agrees with the first sense.

Ver. 4. *As for our Redeemer*, &c.] Or, “saith our Redeemer”, as it may be supplied^{f927}: or, “our Redeemer” will do this; inflict this punishment on Babylon, even he who has undertook our cause, and will deliver us from the Babylonish yoke, and return us to our land: these are the words of the Lord’s people, expressing their faith in the things foretold of Babylon, and in their own deliverance:

the Lord of hosts is his name; and therefore able to redeem his people, and destroy his enemies, being the Lord of armies above and below, and having all at his command:

the Holy One of Israel; the sanctifier of them, their covenant God, and therefore will save them, and destroy their enemies, being hateful to him, because unholy and impure.

Ver. 5. *Sit thou silent*, &c.] Here the speech is directed again to Babylon, which used to be a place of noise and hurry, as well as famous and much talked of all the world over; but now there should be a deep silence in it, no voice to be heard, the inhabitants being gone, and no discourse concerning it; no more talked of and celebrated for its magnificence and authority, trade and riches, but buried in oblivion. It is represented as sitting in silence, either as a mourner, or as one that is free among the dead, remembered no more:

and get thee into darkness, O daughter of the Chaldeans; meaning either captivity or imprisonment, prison houses being dark; or into the state of the dead, which is a state of darkness:

for thou shall no more be called the lady of kingdoms; the mistress or governess of them, as she had been, having subdued many kingdoms and nations, and added them to her monarchy, which now would be at an end. Thus mystical Babylon, or Rome, has reigned over the kings of the earth, and has been mistress over many nations; but the time is coming when she will sit in silence, and no voice will be heard in her; and when the kingdom of the beast will be full of darkness, (^{<66715>}Revelation 17:15,18 18:22,23 16:10).

Ver. 6. *I was wroth with my people, &c.*] The people of Israel, for their sins and transgressions, particularly their idolatries. Here begin the reasons and causes of the destruction of Babylon, and the first mentioned is their cruelty to the people of God; for though he was angry with them himself, yet he resented their being ill used by them:

I have polluted mine inheritance; the Jews, who, as they were his people, were his portion and inheritance, as he was theirs: these he is said to pollute, by suffering the Heathen to enter into the land, and defile their city and sanctuary, and carry them captive into an unclean and idolatrous country:

and given them into thine hand; to correct and chastise, but in measure, not to kill and destroy:

whereas thou didst show them no mercy; used them very cruelly, and exceeded the commission given:

upon the ancient hast thou very heavily laid thy yoke; whose age should have commanded reverence and respect, and whose weakness and infirmities called for compassion; but nothing of this kind was shown; they were not spared because of age, but had insupportable burdens laid upon them; and if not they, then much less young men; (see ^{<2512>}Lamentations 5:12).

Ver. 7. *And thou saidst, I shall be a lady for ever, &c.*] That her monarchy would continue in a succession of kings, that should rule over all nations to the end of the world. So mystical Babylon, when near her ruin, will say, “I sit a queen----and shall see no sorrow”, (^{<66807>}Revelation 18:7):

so that thou didst not lay these things to thy heart; neither the sins she had been guilty of, particularly in acting the cruel part towards the people of God; nor the evils foretold should come upon her; these she did not

consider of and think upon, so as to repent of the one, and prevent the other:

neither didst remember the latter end of it; or, “thy latter end”^{f928}; either her own latter end, the end of her wickedness which she had committed, as Jarchi; the end of her pride, that she should be humbled, as Aben Ezra and Kimchi; or her ruin and destruction, the end she should come to at last; this she never thought of, but put this evil day far from her: or she remembered not the latter end of Jerusalem, who, though a lady too, fell by her own hand; which sense Kimchi takes notice of: or she did not consider what would befall the Jews in the latter day; that God would put an end to their calamities, and deliver them out of Babylon, as he had foretold.

Ver. 8. *Therefore hear now this, thou that art given to pleasures, &c.*] To carnal lusts and pleasures; gratifying her sensual appetite; indulging herself in everything that was agreeable to the senses; abounding in delicacies, and living deliciously; as is said of mystical Babylon, (~~66814~~ Revelation 18:4,7), particularly given to venereal pleasures. Curtius says^{f929},

“no city was more corrupt in its manners, or furnished to irritate or allure to immoderate pleasures. Parents and husbands suffered their children and wives to prostitute themselves to strangers, so that they had but a price.”

Yea, every woman was obliged by a law to do this once in life, and that in a public manner, in the temple of Venus; the impurities of which are at large described by Herodotus^{f930} and Strabo^{f931}:

that dwelleth carelessly; in great confidence and security, being fearless of danger, and insensible of any:

that sayest in thine heart, I am, and none else besides me: sole monarch of the world, empress of the whole universe; no competitor with me, none that can rival me. These words are sometimes used by the eternal and unchangeable Jehovah of himself, and indeed they suit with none but him; and it is the height of insolence and blasphemy in a creature to use them of itself; they fitly express that sovereignty, supremacy, infallibility, and even deity, which mystical Babylon assumes and ascribes to her head:

I shall not sit as a widow, neither shall I know the loss of children; not be without a head, king, or monarch, which is as a husband to the state; nor

without numerous subjects, which are as children. The like mystical Babylon says, “I sit a queen, and am no widow”, (~~6680~~ Revelation 18:7).

Ver. 9. *But these two things shall come to thee in a moment on one day,* &c.] Suddenly, at once, at one and the same time. The destruction of Babylon was very sudden; the city was taken by surprise, before the inhabitants were aware of it, while the king and his nobles were regaling themselves at a feast; that very night Belshazzar was slain, and Darius the Mede took the kingdom, (~~2781~~ Daniel 5:30,31) and so those two things she boasted of would never be her lot came upon her together and at once: “the loss of children, and widowhood”; bereaved of her king, and the whole royal family, and of her people in great numbers, who were either slain, or carried captive; or, however, the kingdom was transferred from them to another people. When Babylon was taken by Cyrus, according to Xenophon^{f932}, not only the king was slain, but those that were about him; and orders were presently given to the inhabitants to keep within doors, and to slay all that were found without. Though Dr. Prideaux^{f933} thinks this prophecy had its accomplishment when Babylon was besieged by Darius, who, to save provisions, slew all their own women, wives, sisters, daughters, and all their children, reserving only one wife and maidservant to a man; and when it was taken, Darius ordered three thousand of the principal inhabitants to be crucified. And in much such language is the destruction of mystical Babylon expressed, when God shall “kill her children with death; her plagues shall come in one day, death, and mourning, and famine”, (~~6623~~ Revelation 2:23 18:8):

they shall come upon thee in their perfection; those evils and calamities shall be fully accomplished, not in part only, but in whole; she should have no king to govern, nor anything like one; should have no share of government; and her children or subjects should be entirely destroyed:

for the multitude of thy sorceries, and for the great abundance of thine enchantments; which the Chaldeans were very famous for; this is another reason given for their destruction; (see ~~2710~~ Daniel 2:2), or, “in the multitude of thy sorceries”^{f934}, &c.; notwithstanding these, her destruction should come upon her, which her sorcerers and enchanters could neither foresee nor prevent. Sorceries are ascribed to mystical Babylon, and as the cause of her ruin, (~~6621~~ Revelation 9:21 18:23).

Ver. 10. *For thou hast trusted in thy wickedness,* &c.] In wealth and power wickedly obtained; in political schemes wickedly contrived; in her

ambition and pride, tyranny and cruelty; and especially in her wicked arts of astrology, divination, and magic:

thou hast said, none seeth me; lay her schemes of policy, which she thought so deeply laid, as not to be discovered; perform her magic arts, which were secretly done, and other her wicked actions done in the dark; but nothing can be hid from the omniscient God:

thy wisdom and thy knowledge, it hath perverted thee: her high opinion of her own wisdom and knowledge in political affairs, or in magic arts, deceived her, and turned her from right to wrong ways, which issued in her ruin. This rightly describes the Jesuits, and other emissaries of the church of Rome, who trust in their wickedness, their craft and cunning, which none can penetrate into; but there is an all seeing eye upon them, which discovers their intrigues, blasts their designs, and brings them into confusion:

and thou hast said in thine heart, I am, and none else besides me; none so wise and knowing as myself. This is what the oracle said of the Chaldeans^{f935},

“the Chaldeans and the Hebrews are the only wise.”

This is repeated, to observe the haughty and insolent boasts of themselves.

Ver. 11. *Therefore shall evil come upon thee*, &c.] The evil of punishment, a great calamity; so Nebuchadnezzar foretold, as Abydenus relates^{f936}, that **συμφορη**, a calamity, should come upon the Babylonians; a day of evil, because of the above sins Babylon was guilty of:

thou shall not know from whence it riseth; from what quarter it will come, little dreaming of Cyrus, with whom the Chaldeans had had no quarrel. So mystical Babylon will not know from whence her ruin will come; little thinking that the kings of the earth, who have committed fornication with her, and have given their kingdoms to her, will hate her, and burn her flesh with fire: or, “thou shall not know the morning of it”^{f937}: that is, on what day, or at what time, it will be. Babylon was taken when it was not thought of, as appears from the book of Daniel, and profane history. Aristotle^{f938} reports, that it was said, that the third day after Babylon was taken, one part of the city did not know that it was taken. Or the sense is, this day of evil and calamity should be such a dark and gloomy day, there should be no light in it, it should be as the night, and therefore its morning or light

should not be known, so Aben Ezra: “and mischief shall fall upon thee”; contrived for others; the pit dug for others she should fall into herself: though the phrase seems to denote the mischief coming from above, by the hand of heaven, and suddenly and irresistibly; which should fall with weight and vengeance upon her, to the crushing and utter destruction of her:

thou shalt not be able to put it off; or, “to expiate it”¹⁹³⁹; and atone for it, either by prayers and entreaties, which God will not regard, (^{2347B}Isaiah 47:3) or by gifts, or by ransom price, by gold and silver, which the Medes and Persians were no lovers of, (²³³⁷Isaiah 13:17):

and desolation shall come upon thee suddenly, which thou shalt not know; that is, before hand; neither the persons from whom nor the time when it shall come; notwithstanding their astrologers, diviners, and monthly prognosticators, pretended to tell what would come to pass every day; but not being able by their art to give the least hint of Babylon’s destruction, as to either time or means, the Chaldeans were in great security, quite ignorant of their ruin at hand, and which therefore came suddenly and unawares upon them; as will the destruction of mystical Babylon.

Ver. 12. *Stand now with thine enchantments, and with the multitude of thy sorceries, &c.*] An ironic expression, deriding those evil arts, bidding defiance to them, calling upon the masters of them to do their utmost by them:

wherein thou hast laboured from thy youth; from the infancy of their state; as soon as their monarchy was founded, or they became a people, they were given to these practices, and were famous for them; and in which, no doubt, many among them were brought up from their youth; and to gain the knowledge of which they were at great labour and expense; and yet it was all in vain, and to no purpose:

if so be thou shall be able to profit, if so be thou mayest prevail; if skill in these things can be of any advantage to keep off the impending calamity, and fortify against the powerful enemy that will quickly surprise thee; try if by thine art thou canst foresee the danger, and prevent it.

Ver. 13. *Thou art wearied in the multitude of thy counsels, &c.*] Taken of astrologers, diviners, and soothsayers; who were never able to give any satisfactory answers to questions put to them, or to give good advice in cases of emergency; as appears from Nebuchadnezzar’s consultation with them about his dream; and Belshazzar’s about the handwriting upon the

wall, which was the very night that the city was taken, (²⁰⁰Daniel 2:2,10 5:7,8,30):

let now the astrologers; or, “viewers of the heavens”^{f940}; not that look upon them, and consider them as the work of God’s hands, in order to glorify him; but that examine the face of the skies, and the position of the heavenly bodies, their conjunctions with, and aspects on each other, in order to foretell what shall be below: or, “the dividers of the heavens”^{f941}, as it may be rendered, from the use of the word in the Arabic language; who divide the heavens into so many parts, or houses; who, as Kimchi^{f942}, from the same use of the word, fix and determine things according to the stars; and who next are called “the stargazers”; that look at them, and, according to their position, conjunction, aspect, and influence, judge what will come to pass among men. So Cicero observes^{f943}, that the Chaldeans, by long observation of the stars, were thought to have formed a science, whereby they could foretell what should happen to everyone, and what fate he was born to:

the monthly prognosticators; or “that make known months”, or “for the months”^{f944}; what shall be in every month; what weather it will be, and what things shall happen; such as our almanac makers. Let these now all meet together,

and stand up and save thee from those things that shall come upon thee; which they were never able to do; for if they could not foretell these things by their art, it could not be thought they could give any directions how to escape them, or put upon any methods that would secure from them.

Ver. 14. *Behold, they shall be as stubble, the fire shall burn them, &c.*] That is, these astrologers and diviners shall be like stubble; weak as that, as the Targum; they shall be no more able to stand before the fire of divine wrath, or before the judgments of God, by the hands of the Medes and Persians, than stubble can stand before a consuming fire:

they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame; from those dreadful calamities that shall come upon them like flames of fire; and if they cannot deliver themselves by their art and skill, how should they deliver others?

there shall not be a coal to warm, nor fire to sit before it; stubble, when burnt, leaves no coals to warm a man with; and though it gives a blaze for a short time, while burning, it is quickly out, and gives no light nor heat for

a man to sit by, so that there is little or no profit by it; which signifies that there were no hope, or help, or comfort, to be expected from those sorts of persons.

Ver. 15. *Thus shall they be unto thee with whom thou hast laboured, &c.*]

In training them up in those arts, and in consulting with them in cases of difficulty; in which they were of no service, and now in time of danger as useless as stubble, or a blaze of straw:

even thy merchants from thy youth; either the above astrologers and diviners, who had been with them from the beginning of their state; and who had made merchandise of them, and were become rich as merchants by telling fortunes, and predicting things to come by the stars; which sense our version leads to by supplying the word “even”; or rather merchants in a literal sense, which Babylon abounded with from the first building of it; it being the metropolis of the empire, and the mart of nations: these, upon the destruction of the city,

shall wander everyone to his quarter, or “passage”,^{f945}; to the country from whence they came, and to the passage in that part of the city which led unto it; or to the passage over the river Euphrates, which ran through the city; or to the next port, from whence they might have a passage by shipping to their own land: it denotes the fright and fugitive state in which merchants, from other countries, should be in, when this calamity should come upon Babylon; that they should leave their effects, flee for their lives, and wander about till they got a passage over to their native place, and be of no service to the Chaldeans, as follows:

none shall save thee: neither astrologers nor merchants; so the merchants of mystical Babylon will get without the city, and stand afar off, and lament her sad case, but will not be able to help her, (~~6815~~ Revelation 18:15).