

Text: Jer 51.1-64

We have come to the final messages of judgement on Babylon. The chapter is lengthy, so I only want to make brief comments as we go through it. Many details will have to be glossed over as a result. I will spend some time on the symbolic acts at the end of the chapter.

“Judgment messages against Babylon in this chapter alternate with appeals to the Jewish exiles to flee the doomed city. The chapter is composed of a number of smaller units, mostly poetic. They describe an eagerly awaited event, Babylon’s fall.”¹

I. The Lord’s Vengeance on Babylon (51:1–14)²

A. The image of the winnowing hand of a foreign enemy, sifting the soldiers of Babylon (1-4)

It is useless to bend the bow against this foe.

B. The message to Israel and Judah concerning Babylon’s fall (5-10)

1. God remembers his people (5-6)
2. God used Babylon to seduce the nations (7)
3. Now Babylon has fallen and been broken (8)
4. Attempts to revive Babylon failed (9)
5. The people of Israel testify in Zion of God’s deliverance (10)

Some of this language is evocative of the fall of Babylon in Rev 16-19.

C. Babylon overwhelmed by the Medes (11-14)

1. This section brings the prophecy back into Jeremiah’s day, or shortly thereafter (70 years)
2. The end of Babylon’s empire came at the hand of the Medes, but the idea of Babylon lingers in history and will revive in the end (Revelation)

¹ F. B. Huey, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, Tenn: Broadman Press, 1993), 419.

² I am taking my main points from *ibid.*, 417–31.

“The fall of Babylon to the Medes was a fulfillment of this prophecy, but it did not fulfill all the prophecies about the fall of Babylon in these chapters.”³

II. A Hymn of Praise to the Lord (51:15–19)

“These verses are repeated from 10:12–16 with minor variations (note the omission of Israel in v. 19; cf. 10:16). Many examples of repeated or similar words are encountered in Jeremiah in different contexts. In chap. 10 the words were used to ridicule Israel’s powerless idols. Here the same words describe the impotent Babylonian idols.”⁴

III. God’s Power Against Enemies (51:20–26)

- A. God addresses his war club (unidentified) with which he shatters his enemies (20-23)
- B. God identifies the “shatteree” — Babylon, for all the evil it did to Israel (24)
- C. The Lord’s opposition to Babylon is complete (25-26)

IV. Nations Summoned Against Babylon (51:27–32)

- A. The nations are summoned, along with the Medes, to bring about the destruction of Babylon (27-28)
- B. The defeat of Babylon brings great turmoil and exhaustion to her troops (29-30)
- C. The couriers of Babylon run to the king, informing of the utter defeat (31-32)

“Babylon was noted for its messenger system that could carry messages by runners from one part of the kingdom to another in a matter of days (cf. 2 Sam 18:19, 23). In the final struggle one runner after another would come from every direction to tell the

³ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Jer 51.11.

⁴ Huey, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 422.

Babylonian king that his city had been taken.”⁵

V. A Call for Retribution (51:33–35)

- A. Nebuchadnezzar “devoured me” (Jerusalem)
- B. Let violence be done to Nebuchadnezzar

VI. Further Description of Babylon’s Fall (51:36–44)

- A. The Lord responds, Babylon will be dried up (36-40)
- B. Babylon’s doom is rehearsed, her god, Bel, punished, her walls broken (41-44)

VII. An Appeal to Flee from Babylon (51:45–48)

- A. The need for flight is urgent (45-46)
- B. The doom of Babylon’s idols is assured (47-48)

VIII. Another Warning of Babylon’s Coming Destruction (51:49–58)

Many similar themes repeated in this section with that has gone before. Babylon’s doom is certain.

IX. Seraiah’s Symbolic Act Against Babylon (51:59–64)

- A. The messenger identified and appointed (59)
 - 1. Seraiah is Baruch’s brother (see 32.12)
 - 2. Seraiah holds a responsible position in the government, perhaps like a “travel agent” — goes ahead and arranges lodging
 - 3. The occasion is a trip by Zedekiah to Babylon during the fourth year of his reign (594/593 BC)
- B. Jeremiah prepared a scroll containing these judgements against Babylon (60)
 - 1. Seraiah was to read the judgements aloud (61)
 - 2. And then to utter a verbal message of doom (62)
 - 3. He was to tie the scroll to a stone, and cast it into the Euphrates (63)

⁵ Ibid., 424.

C. The fate of the scroll symbolized the fate of Babylon (64)

“It is remarkable that at the very time Jeremiah was advising submission to that city, he was also foretelling her final overthrow. This answers the objections of those expositors who feel that chapters 50–51 could not have been written by Jeremiah in view of his attitude toward Babylon expressed earlier in the book.”⁶

“This is the last verse in the book that Jeremiah wrote. The remaining chapter was evidently the writing of someone else, perhaps Jeremiah’s secretary Baruch.”⁷

Conclusion:

The language in this chapter encompasses the fall of Babylon in history, but she was not completely destroyed in keeping with these passages.

Some suggest that Nebuchadnezzar’s repentance (Dan 4) brought about some mercy for Babylon that then was (like Nineveh in Jonah).

But if we take the Bible literally, we must conclude that these verses portray something that will yet come to pass:

“Most premillennial scholars believe that the fall of some modern form of what Babylon represented in ancient times is in view. I believe there will be an eschatological judgment of Babylon (Rev. 17–18), though not necessarily one that requires the rebuilding of the city. Destruction terminology, such as appears in this passage, is common in the annals of ancient Near Eastern nations. It speaks generally and hyperbolically of devastating defeat and destruction, but it did not always involve exact or detailed fulfillment.”⁸

⁶ Charles L. Feinberg, “Jeremiah,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 6 (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1986), 687.

⁷ Constable, *Expository Notes*, Jer 51.63.

⁸ *Ibid.*