

should now show their mettle. Their city and empire were at their last extremity; if these spiritual technicians had any skill whatever in divining the future and helping their clients avoid evil consequences, this was the time to put that skill to good effect” (Oswalt 1998: 254).

vv14-15 “The end result is that there is no *savior* to whom Babylon can turn. Her pride and glory? Dust and ashes. Her gods? She must carry them. Her ancient wisdom? A vapor. By contrast, there is Jerusalem, ignominiously defeated, her god nothing but a box (the ark of the covenant), her wisdom nothing but some laws and stories. Ah, but what a difference!” (Oswalt 1998: 255).

“In an interview on National Public Radio persons advocating fetal-tissue research admitted that there are ethical issues but focused completely on the political tactics that would be necessary to get federal funding for the research. Not once did they discuss the ethics of killing the weak in order to indefinitely preserve the life of the strong. Their argument was simply that since we now have the technology do this sort of thing, we must. Our wisdom and knowledge have misled us. How long will it be before the Redeemer, whose name is Yahweh of Heaven’s Armies, the Holy One of Israel, tells us to get off our throne and to take our place in the dust?” (Oswalt 2003: 532).

### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Compare this chapter to Revelation 17–18. How are they similar?

What is the significance of verse 4? What application does it have to your life?

What are some present manifestations of Babylon today?

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## ISAIAH 47: THE PRIDE AND FALL OF BABYLON

### OUTLINE OF ISAIAH 47

- I. Announcement: Babylon will be humiliated by God (47:1-4)
- II. Cause: Babylon mistreated Israel (47:5-7)
- III. Judgment: The “secure” one will be totally destroyed (47:8-11)
- IV. Taunt: Good luck depending upon your wise men (47:12-15)

Babylon’s reversal of fortunes:

- From the throne to the dust
- From delicate to rough
- From beautifully dressed to shamefully exposed
- From queen of the kingdoms to rejected outcast
- From living forever to very dead
- From married with many children to a childless widow
- From impregnable to destroyed
- From well counseled to all alone
- From many partners to none

## BABYLON IN THE BIBLE

“Babylon here is not merely the ancient city of that name, and the poem does not simply look forward to what was to happen to it in 539 when Cyrus conquered it. Like Jerusalem, with which it is contrasted, it is both a concrete historical reality and a symbol, and it is the symbolic significance of Babylon which is primary here” (Webb 1996: 190).

“As in 14:3-23, Babylon represents humankind organized in defiance of God—the kingdom of mere mortals, in contrast to the kingdom of God. In this sense ‘Babylon’ is still with us, and still stands under judgment of God. The historical Babylon of the sixth century BC was merely one manifestation of it” (Webb 1996: 190).

“Chs. 40–48 do not have as their chief purpose the prediction of the fall of Babylon in 539, and this is not the climax of that prediction. Rather, the point of these chapters is to teach the absolute power and the unceasing grace of God, using the particular backdrop of the exile and return to illustrate the point. Thus this chapter was not designed as a specific prediction.... There is a general correspondence to fact. The oracles would be meaningless if that were not the case. But their primary purpose is to illustrate a theological point, using the highest literary artistry” (Oswalt 1998: 241).

## NOTES

“He represents the city and its empire as a beautiful and arrogant woman who is forced to abandon her pretensions and take the place of a slave. All the things on which she relied, not the least of which was her own self-confidence, will be shown to have been a false hope. The nations of earth have no hope, except in Israel’s God (cf. 45:21–23)” (Oswalt 1998: 240).

“Although the poem has many second person verbs and pronominal suffixes (over 30) that refer to Babylon, there is no indication that the prophet was actually addressing a group of Babylonians. Like chap. 46, the prophet is addressing a Hebrew

audience (notice “our Redeemer” in 47:4) to reveal to them God’s plans for Babylon....The central contrasting themes that climax the end of chaps. 46 and 47 are that God is able to save Zion (46:13), but Babylon, her gods, and her religious leaders are powerless and not able to save Babylon (46:7; 47:13–15)” (Smith 2009: 299).

vv5-11 “The wisest thing I can do as a creature is to acknowledge that if there is someone immortal and independent, it is not me. ‘The beginning of knowledge is the fear of the Lord’ (Prov. 1:7)” (Oswalt 1998: 246).

vv8-11 “It is clear that this is the prophet’s point when we remember that the words coming from Babylon’s mouth, *I am, and there is no one else besides*, are the words spoken by God in 45:5, 6, 18, 22; 46:9. He alone is incomparable; he alone is self-existent; he alone is sovereign over all. By arrogating these attributes to herself, Babylon and all the human enterprises like her have set themselves on a collision course with God” (Oswalt 1998: 248).

vv12-15 “In fact false religion, far from offering protection (12), only adds fuel to the fire” (Motyer 1999: 337).

vv12-13 “It is as though the prophet is saying, “If you don’t believe me, go ahead and put your trust in this foolishness. Who knows, maybe it will help you?” The city that has made itself the equal of God has no alternative—it must trust its vaunted intelligence, there is nothing else. It has invested too much hard, exhausting labor for too many years (*from your youth*) to abandon the effort now” (Oswalt 1998: 253).

vv12-13 “Babylon had sought wisdom to guide its future (*counsel*) more assiduously than any nation in the ancient world. It had looked everywhere, from the entrails of sacrificial animals to the movements of the constellations. Now was the time for all that effort and exercise of talent to pay off, if ever it would. Those who divided the heavens into “houses” and carefully calculated when the stars and the moon were in propitious locations should now step forward. Those who created an almanac for each month