

September 20

Scriptures: Read Jeremiah 50

Key Verse: “Their Redeemer is strong; the Lord of hosts is His name. He will thoroughly plead their case, that He may give rest to the land?” (Jeremiah 50:34)

Overview

The most descriptive, horrifying, detailed, and longest single oracle of judgment against a heathen nation is found in chapters 50 and 51. It is against Babylon, the chief city of the Babylonians (also called Chaldeans), situated about eighty kilometers south of Baghdad on the Euphrates River. Babylon had been a vassal kingdom of the Assyrian Empire but gained her independence under Nebopolassar and his son Nebuchadnezzar. They made Babylon the most powerful empire in that day and age. Jeremiah had made it clear that Babylon had been raised up by God to perform His judgments upon Judah and many other nations. He urged the people to submit to Nebuchadnezzar, but this did not mean he was “pro-Babylonian”. Jeremiah only spoke the truth of the Lord, and here he again proclaims a true prophecy, saying that God will punish Babylon for her pride, unscrupulous plunder, excessive oppression, covetousness and idolatry; she took pleasure in all this and “sinned against the Lord”. Therefore, the Lord would repay Babylon according to her works; what she had done to others, would be done to her (50:11, 14, 29, 31, 38). God’s holiness and justice demand the punishment of sinful nations (cf. Amos 9:8).

On the appointed day of Babylon’s punishment, just as the Lord had purposed, Babylon fell to the Persians under King Cyrus without even a battle (539 B.C.). The Persians entered the city secretly, during a time of drought, through a dried-up waterway. They overthrew the king and robbed all his treasures (50:37b, 38). Babylon would never again rise to power (50:3,13). In the providence of God, Cyrus reversed the Babylonian policy of deportation by issuing decrees which allowed the captives to return to their country of origin (cf. Ezra. 1:1-4). The Lord Himself interceded to plead the cause of His people, for “their Redeemer is strong” (50:34). Once the Lord had opened the way, many Jews returned to the land of their inheritance, after seventy years of captivity, fulfilling numerous prophecies by various prophets.

Jeremiah’s prophecy concerning Babylon begins with the exhortation to spread the news about her fall and the humiliation of her national god Bel Merodach (or Marduk, creator and sun god), for the images of Merodach and the other idols were broken into pieces (50:2). The Persians were also idolatrous, so they replaced Babylon’s gods with their own. Although the Persians were from the east of Babylon, we read that Babylon would be attacked from the north (50:3, 9, 41). Possibly this had come to be an expression of coming doom or that the approach of the Persians to the city of Babylon would be from the north. In any case, Babylon was doomed to fall in ruins from that day onward (50:3,13). Cyrus did not destroy the city when he captured it; its walls were later destroyed by another Persian monarch in 514 B.C. The city gradually decayed and became totally uninhabited and desolate by the time of the Christian era.

Jeremiah’s message would have given much hope to his fellow countrymen in exile, whom he called “lost sheep” (50:6, 17). Jesus, the Good Shepherd, also looked upon the people of Israel as lost sheep, since they were far from God (Matt. 10:6; John 10:14-16). Jeremiah’s message also

would have given the exiles encouragement to return when Cyrus' decree was issued (50:8), and through the fulfillment of these prophecies, which had been revealed many years earlier, they would witness the greatness of their God.

It appears that Jeremiah, like Isaiah, foresaw yet a greater gathering of God's people into a glorious inheritance (50:19-20), for there has never been a return to Israel wherein all the people have been truly repentant, washed clean from their sins and made acceptable before God. The only time this will be completely fulfilled is when Jesus Christ returns for His unified body of repentant and redeemed believers, from whom all sin has been washed. He will gather all His people for whom He, the Great Mediator, has "plead their case" and brought them into a land of peace (50:34; Heb. 7:25; 8:6). This preserved remnant is the spiritual Israel (the Church), for they alone will be found pure and clean, without spot or wrinkle, having been washed by Jesus' blood of atonement.

Prayer

Dear God, Your wrath is poured out upon those who reject You, but Your pardon and protection is given to those who accept Your love and salvation through Jesus. Give us boldness to lead others to this saving knowledge of You.