

ISAIAH

Chapter 47

The Fall of Babylon

“Go down, sit in the dust, Virgin Daughter of Babylon; sit on the ground without a throne, Daughter of the Babylonians. No more will you be called tender or delicate. ²Take millstones and grind flour; take off your veil. Lift up your skirts, bare your legs, and wade through the streams. ³Your nakedness will be exposed and your shame uncovered. I will take vengeance; I will spare no one.” ⁴Our Redeemer—the LORD Almighty is his name— is the Holy One of Israel. ⁵“Sit in silence, go into darkness, Daughter of the Babylonians; no more will you be called queen of kingdoms. ⁶I was angry with my people and desecrated my inheritance; I gave them into your hand, and you showed them no mercy. Even on the aged you laid a very heavy yoke. ⁷You said, ‘I will continue forever— the eternal queen!’ But you did not consider these things or reflect on what might happen. ⁸“Now then, listen, you wanton creature, lounging in your security and saying to yourself, ‘I am, and there is none besides me. I will never be a widow or suffer the loss of children.’ ⁹Both of these will overtake you in a moment, on a single day: loss of children and widowhood. They will come upon you in full measure, in spite of your many sorceries and all your potent spells. ¹⁰You have trusted in your wickedness and have said, ‘No one sees me.’ Your wisdom and knowledge mislead you when you say to yourself, ‘I am, and there is none besides me.’ ¹¹Disaster will come upon you, and you will not know how to conjure it away. A calamity will fall upon you that you cannot ward off with a ransom; a catastrophe you cannot foresee will suddenly come upon you. ¹²“Keep on, then, with your magic spells and with your many sorceries, which you have labored at since childhood. Perhaps you will succeed, perhaps you will cause terror. ¹³All the counsel you have received has only worn you out! Let your astrologers come forward, those stargazers who make predictions month by month, let them save you from what is coming upon you. ¹⁴Surely they are like stubble; the fire will burn them up. They cannot even save themselves from the power of the flame. Here are no coals to warm anyone; here is no fire to sit by. ¹⁵That is all they can do for you— these you have labored with and trafficked with since childhood. Each of them goes on in his error; there is not one that can save you.

47:1 *sit in the dust ... on the ground.* A sign of mourning (see 3:26). (CSB)

Babylon arrogantly assumed that she would be “mistress forever” (v 7), in defiance of the Lord of hosts. (TLSB)

Under Nebuchadnezzar, Babylon rose to great power. With the help of his wife Amytis, the Babylonians king rebuilt and embellished the city of Babylon. He rebuilt the temples of Marduk and Nabu (called Bel and Nebo in chapter 46) and built a massive gate called the Ishtar Gate, from which a procession way stretched into the city. The procession way was lined by walls decorated with enameled bricks showing lions, dragons, and bulls – all symbols of Babylonian gods. The Babylonian king built the famous hanging gardens for his wife to remind her of her homeland. Some of Nebuchadnezzar’s architectural works were classified among the seven wonders of the ancient world. Babylon was a beautiful city, marked by the best the ancient world could offer. When Isaiah wrote these words, all this glory was still in the future, but something else was also in the future – Babylon’s fall. This chapter poetically commemorates Babylon’s downfall. It is a dirge. (PBC)

Virgin Daughter of Babylon. A personification of Babylon and its inhabitants. (CSB)

Class of people famous for their wisdom and knowledge (v 10; cf Dn 2:2, 4, 5, 10; 4:7). (TLSB)

no more ... tender and delicate. No longer privileged, they will be worked as slaves. (TLSB)

47:2 *millstones and grind.* A menial task performed by women (see Ex 11:5 and note; Jdg 9:53 and note). (CSB)

Task of female slaves (cf Ex 11:5). (TLSB)

From the pampered life of a queen, the city would be reduced to the status of a common slave girl. Normally, slave girls were the ones who ground flour (two stones were worked against each other by hand to produce flour). (PBC)

PUT OFF YOUR VEIL – The veil mentioned here was made from finely woven cloth and identified a woman of high station. (PBC)

Preparing to wade across the river. (TLSB)

UNCOVER YOUR LEGS – Pampered women covered their legs, but slave girls had to tie up their skirts to do the work. (PBC)

through the streams. Probably on the way to exile. (CSB)

“As a servant, you will have neither ship nor wagon. You will have to wade.” (Luther)

47:3 *nakedness will be exposed.* See Eze 16:36. Babylon is no longer a queen (see vv. 5, 7); she is reduced to a servant girl or a prostitute (see v. 8). (CSB)

take vengeance. See 34:8 and note. (CSB)

Nations are not autonomous despite superior resources and armaments. God governs the rise and fall of empires. (TLSB)

spare no one. See 13:18–20. (CSB)

No one could oppose Him. No man would meet God in order to talk Him out of His judgment. No one could object, oppose, offer advice, or even plead for mercy. (PBC)

47:4 Redeemer. See note on 41:14. (CSB)

This is rejoicing in the Lord who delivers them. “You are our Redeemer, who says and does these things.” He threatens an inevitable vengeance to the Babylonians, because He is our Redeemer. (Luther)

LORD Almighty. See 13:4 and note. (CSB)

The prophet uses the name for God that takes us back to His faithfulness to all His promises; He is Jehovah, the God of free and faithful service. (PBC)

Holy One of Israel. See 1:4; 41:14 and notes. (CSB)

He calls Him by that name on account of the worship at Jerusalem, where He is adored. $\aleph \beth \daleth$ denotes worship and a military host. He says: “We do not want to worship the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem.” (Luther)

47:5 queen of kingdoms. Babylon was a very beautiful city (see 13:19 and note). (CSB)

Babylon, the imperial city, ruled over 100 lesser kingdoms by its armies. But no longer would it be the “glory of kingdoms” (13:19). Cf Rv 18 for a similar taunt against Babylon, the NT symbol for all of God’s enemies. (TLSB)

47:6 angry ... desecrated my inheritance. See 10:5–6 (where Assyria is God’s tool); 42:24 and note; 43:28 and note; La 2:2. (CSB)

The Lord showed His anger by bringing Israel into exile. His anger, though lasting only a moment (cf Ps 30:5), was fully expressed when He destroyed and desecrated His temple. (TLSB)

DESCRATED MY INHERITANCE – Chosen to be God’s own possession, a holy nation, the Israelites, at God’s direction, became prey of a profane people because the Israelites would not walk in His ways. (TLSB)

Even on the aged. Their suffering fulfilled Moses’ curse for covenant disobedience (Dt 28:49–50). (CSB)

47:7 *I will continue forever.* Cf. the arrogant words of Nebuchadnezzar in Da 4:30. (CSB)

47:8, 10 *I am ... none besides me.* Almost a claim of deity (cf. the Lord's words in 43:11; 45:5–6, 18, 22). See also 14:12–15 and note. (CSB)

Lit, "I and only me alone." Babylon arrogated to herself the claim made repeatedly by God (43:11; 44:6, 8; 46:9). (TLSB)

47:8 *angry with My people.* The Lord showed His anger by bringing Israel into exile. His anger, though lasting only a moment (cf Ps 30:5), was fully expressed when He destroyed and desecrated His temple (587 BC). Cf Ezk 10. (TLSB)

lounging in your security. Similar language is used of the complacent women of Jerusalem in 32:9, 11. (CSB)

The daughter (v 1). In Rv, Babylon is the symbol of wickedness (14:8; 18:2–24). (TLSB)

widow. Deserted and distressed. (CSB)

loss of children. See v. 9; 13:16, 18; 14:22. (CSB)

Situations of greatest loss for a woman. (TLSB)

Situations of greatest loss for a woman. (TLSB)

47:9, 12 *sorceries ... spells.* Magical practices to avoid danger and to inflict harm on the enemy (see 3:2–3 and note). (CSB)

47:9 OVERTAKE...SINGLE DAY – "This will happen to you," for such great dangers and misfortunes will seize them suddenly as they are crowded together within such great walls. This will happen to all the ungodly, upon whom these things will suddenly and unexpectedly come. For they do not believe the counsels of others but are extremely smug in their own presumption and pride. Necessarily and suddenly, therefore, their disaster will befall all the ungodly. The Babylonians said, "Is it conceivable that Cyrus should capture Babylon?" Unexpectedly calamity will fall upon all the ungodly, because they are hardened and will believe neither the Word nor signs. In this way the last judgment will draw near and will cause us to say, "I would never have believed it." (Luther)

loss of children ... widowhood. Queenly city would no longer have a king; her population would be destroyed. (TLSB)

IN FULL MEASURE – The Hebrew word **דָּבָר** means "whole and complete," "with nothing lacking." It means that you will be altogether childless and bare, and nothing will remain. (Luther)

sorceries ... enchantments. Key elements of their religion and culture. (TLSB)

47:10 *No one sees me.* See 29:15 and note. (CSB)

The wickedness of Babylon had grown to the point that its citizens were no longer worried about the consequences of their sins. Babylon trusted in its stability to hide its own evil. (PBC)

The Babylonians had even found some apparent justification for their pride. The skill and knowledge of the Babylonians in the ancient world was great. Science also traces its roots through Babylon. The technical skill of the Babylonians allowed them to build their captical city into one of the wonders of the ancient world. (PBC)

47:11 *with a ransom.* The Medes and Persians would not accept any settlement short of surrender (see 13:17). (CSB)

Babylon was known throughout the ancient world for sorceries and enchantments (v 9). These were often performed to avert calamity and/or to foretell it. The means used to accomplish such magic was astrology (cf v 13). Such astrology, though, neither averted calamity nor foretold its coming.

charm away ... atone. Disaster, like an untamable monster, cannot be placated by magic and incantations. (TLSB)

47:12 **KEEP ON THEN...CAUSE TERROR** – Sarcasm. They hope to frighten opponents with their elaborate devotion to false gods, which the ignorant would regard as winning the god's favor. (TLSB)

47:13 *astrologers ... stargazers.* Babylon probably utilized their services more than any other nation (see Da 2:2, 10). (CSB)

Astrology is nothing new. Ancient Babylonians grouped stars into constellations and zodiacal signs for the purpose of casting horoscopes and predicting future events. (TLSB)

47:14 *they.* Babylonians. (TLSB)

stubble. This will be a rapid, powerful fire. See note on 1:31; cf. Mal 4:1. (CSB)

Though they gaze at stars, Babylonians are no more lasting than the dry grass (40:7). (TLSB)

cannot ... save themselves. In contrast to the mighty Savior of Israel (see 43:3 and note), astrologers and sorcerers are as helpless as idols (see 44:17 and note). (CSB)

no coals to warm anyone. A subtle reference to firewood, a material from which pagans sometimes made idols (see 44:15). (CSB)

Wooden idols could be burned for warmth, but while still serving as idols, they do not give even this comfort.

Ch 47 The Babylonians regard themselves as uniquely wise and blessed through their astrological devotion, but they will be enslaved and humiliated. If you put your confidence in astrology, horoscopes, incantations, or charms, you will fall too. True wisdom comes from the Lord and His Word. He gives His blessings through the Word and in answer to prayer. • O Lord, You hold my future. Grant me wisdom in making decisions and contentment in the blessings I receive, ever seeking greater opportunity to serve You alone. Amen. (TLSB)