

Jeremiah

Chapter 51

The Utter Destruction of Babylon

Thus says the LORD: “Behold, I will stir up the spirit of a destroyer against Babylon, against the inhabitants of Leb-kamai, 2 and I will send to Babylon winnowers, and they shall winnow her, and they shall empty her land, when they come against her from every side on the day of trouble. 3 Let not the archer bend his bow, and let him not stand up in his armor. Spare not her young men; devote to destruction all her army. 4 They shall fall down slain in the land of the Chaldeans, and wounded in her streets. 5 For Israel and Judah have not been forsaken by their God, the LORD of hosts, but the land of the Chaldeans is full of guilt against the Holy One of Israel. 6 “Flee from the midst of Babylon; let every one save his life! Be not cut off in her punishment, for this is the time of the LORD’s vengeance, the repayment he is rendering her. 7 Babylon was a golden cup in the LORD’s hand, making all the earth drunken; the nations drank of her wine; therefore the nations went mad. 8 Suddenly Babylon has fallen and been broken; wail for her! Take balm for her pain; perhaps she may be healed. 9 We would have healed Babylon, but she was not healed. Forsake her, and let us go each to his own country, for her judgment has reached up to heaven and has been lifted up even to the skies. 10 The LORD has brought about our vindication; come, let us declare in Zion the work of the LORD our God. 11 “Sharpen the arrows! Take up the shields! The LORD has stirred up the spirit of the kings of the Medes, because his purpose concerning Babylon is to destroy it, for that is the vengeance of the LORD, the vengeance for his temple. 12 “Set up a standard against the walls of Babylon; make the watch strong; set up watchmen; prepare the ambushes; for the LORD has both planned and done what he spoke concerning the inhabitants of Babylon. 13 O you who dwell by many waters, rich in treasures, your end has come; the thread of your life is cut. 14 The LORD of hosts has sworn by himself: Surely I will fill you with men, as many as locusts, and they shall raise the shout of victory over you. 15 “It is he who made the earth by his power, who established the world by his wisdom, and by his understanding stretched out the heavens. 16 When he utters his voice there is a tumult of waters in the heavens, and he makes the mist rise from the ends of the earth. He makes lightning for the rain, and he brings forth the wind from his storehouses. 17 Every man is stupid and without knowledge; every goldsmith is put to shame by his idols, for his images are false, and there is no breath in them. 18 They are worthless, a work of delusion; at the time of their punishment they shall perish. 19 Not like these is he who is the portion of Jacob, for he is the one who formed all things, and Israel is the tribe of his inheritance; the LORD of hosts is his name. 20 “You are my hammer and weapon of war: with you I break nations in pieces; with you I destroy kingdoms; 21 with you I break in pieces the horse and his rider; with you I break in pieces the chariot and the charioteer; 22 with you I break in pieces man and woman; with you I break in pieces the old man and the youth; with you I break in pieces the young man and the young woman; 23 with you I break in pieces the shepherd and his flock; with you I break in pieces the farmer and his team; with you I break in pieces governors and commanders. 24 “I will repay Babylon and all the inhabitants of Chaldea before your very eyes for all the evil that they have done in Zion, declares the LORD. 25 “Behold, I am against you, O destroying mountain, declares the LORD, which destroys the whole earth; I will stretch out my hand against you, and roll you down from the crags, and make you a burnt mountain. 26 No stone shall be taken from you for a corner and no stone for a foundation, but you shall be a perpetual waste, declares the LORD. 27 “Set up a standard on the earth; blow the trumpet among the nations; prepare the nations for war against her; summon against her the kingdoms, Ararat, Minni, and Ashkenaz; appoint a marshal against her; bring up horses like bristling locusts. 28 Prepare the

nations for war against her, the kings of the Medes, with their governors and deputies, and every land under their dominion. 29 The land trembles and writhes in pain, for the LORD's purposes against Babylon stand, to make the land of Babylon a desolation, without inhabitant. 30 The warriors of Babylon have ceased fighting; they remain in their strongholds; their strength has failed; they have become women; her dwellings are on fire; her bars are broken. 31 One runner runs to meet another, and one messenger to meet another, to tell the king of Babylon that his city is taken on every side; 32 the fords have been seized, the marshes are burned with fire, and the soldiers are in panic. 33 For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: The daughter of Babylon is like a threshing floor at the time when it is trodden; yet a little while and the time of her harvest will come." 34 "Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon has devoured me; he has crushed me; he has made me an empty vessel; he has swallowed me like a monster; he has filled his stomach with my delicacies; he has rinsed me out. 35 The violence done to me and to my kinsmen be upon Babylon," let the inhabitant of Zion say. "My blood be upon the inhabitants of Chaldea," let Jerusalem say. 36 Therefore thus says the LORD: "Behold, I will plead your cause and take vengeance for you. I will dry up her sea and make her fountain dry, 37 and Babylon shall become a heap of ruins, the haunt of jackals, a horror and a hissing, without inhabitant. 38 "They shall roar together like lions; they shall growl like lions' cubs. 39 While they are inflamed I will prepare them a feast and make them drunk, that they may become merry, then sleep a perpetual sleep and not wake, declares the LORD. 40 I will bring them down like lambs to the slaughter, like rams and male goats. 41 "How Babylon is taken, the praise of the whole earth seized! How Babylon has become a horror among the nations! 42 The sea has come up on Babylon; she is covered with its tumultuous waves. 43 Her cities have become a horror, a land of drought and a desert, a land in which no one dwells, and through which no son of man passes. 44 And I will punish Bel in Babylon, and take out of his mouth what he has swallowed. The nations shall no longer flow to him; the wall of Babylon has fallen. 45 "Go out of the midst of her, my people! Let every one save his life from the fierce anger of the LORD! 46 Let not your heart faint, and be not fearful at the report heard in the land, when a report comes in one year and afterward a report in another year, and violence is in the land, and ruler is against ruler. 47 "Therefore, behold, the days are coming when I will punish the images of Babylon; her whole land shall be put to shame, and all her slain shall fall in the midst of her. 48 Then the heavens and the earth, and all that is in them, shall sing for joy over Babylon, for the destroyers shall come against them out of the north, declares the LORD. 49 Babylon must fall for the slain of Israel, just as for Babylon have fallen the slain of all the earth. 50 "You who have escaped from the sword, go, do not stand still! Remember the LORD from far away, and let Jerusalem come into your mind: 51 'We are put to shame, for we have heard reproach; dishonor has covered our face, for foreigners have come into the holy places of the LORD's house.' 52 "Therefore, behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will execute judgment upon her images, and through all her land the wounded shall groan. 53 Though Babylon should mount up to heaven, and though she should fortify her strong height, yet destroyers would come from me against her, declares the LORD. 54 "A voice! A cry from Babylon! The noise of great destruction from the land of the Chaldeans! 55 For the LORD is laying Babylon waste and stilling her mighty voice. Their waves roar like many waters; the noise of their voice is raised, 56 for a destroyer has come upon her, upon Babylon; her warriors are taken; their bows are broken in pieces, for the LORD is a God of recompense; he will surely repay. 57 I will make drunk her officials and her wise men, her governors, her commanders, and her warriors; they shall sleep a perpetual sleep and not wake, declares the King, whose name is the LORD of hosts. 58 "Thus says the LORD of hosts: The broad wall of Babylon shall be leveled to the ground, and her high gates shall be burned with fire. The peoples labor for nothing, and the nations weary themselves only for fire." 59 The word that Jeremiah the prophet commanded Seraiah the son of Neriah, son of Mahseiah, when he went with Zedekiah king of Judah to Babylon, in the fourth year of his reign. Seraiah was the quartermaster. 60 Jeremiah wrote in a book all the disaster that should come upon Babylon, all these words that are written concerning Babylon. 61 And Jeremiah said to Seraiah: "When you

come to Babylon, see that you read all these words, 62 and say, ‘O LORD, you have said concerning this place that you will cut it off, so that nothing shall dwell in it, neither man nor beast, and it shall be desolate forever.’ 63 When you finish reading this book, tie a stone to it and cast it into the midst of the Euphrates, 64 and say, ‘Thus shall Babylon sink, to rise no more, because of the disaster that I am bringing upon her, and they shall become exhausted.’” Thus far are the words of Jeremiah.

51:1 *Thus says the LORD.* The oracle against Babylon continues. (TLSB)

stir up the spirit. See 1Ch 5:26; Hag 1:14. The Hebrew underlying this phrase is translated “aroused ... the hostility of” in 2Ch 21:16. (CSB)

destroyer. Here including the “kings of the Medes” (v. 11). (CSB)

Leb Kamai. Lit. “the heart of my attackers” (cf. Rev 17:5, where Babylon is called “the mother of prostitutes and of the abominations of the earth”). (CSB)

51:2 *Babylon winnowers.* The Hebrew for this phrase is an excellent example of alliteration and assonance. (CSB)

Figurative designation for destroyers. (TLSB)

51:3 *destruction.* In the first two lines, the defenders are told that resistance is in vain, while in the next two lines, the attackers are called upon to prove it. (TLSB)

51:4 *fall ... in her streets.* All this would happen on account of Israel's just cause against the Chaldeans. (Kretzmann)

51:5 *Holy One of Israel.* The land of the Chaldeans is filled with guilt," because they refused to accept the true God in spite of the many manifestations of His power and glory in their midst as brought to their attention, for instance, through Daniel and his friends. Therefore the Lord addresses Himself to the members of His chosen people living in Babylon, urging the proper behavior at the time of Babylon's downfall. (Kretzmann)

51:6 *Flee.* This was spoken to the people of Judah (as in 50:8). (CSB)

Addressed to the exiled Israelites. (TLSB)

repayment he is rendering. Note the contrast between human transgression, on the one hand, and the righteous punishment of the Lord, on the other. This is brought out most strongly by the picture of the golden cup. (Kretzmann)

51:7 *Babylon was a golden cup.* Divine judgment portrayed as a cup of wrath. See note, Is 51:17. Babylon, God's instrument of punishment on the nations, is called “golden” because of her imperial might and splendor. (TLSB)

51:8 *balm.* Spoken ironically to Babylon's sympathizers and confederates who see her wound. (TLSB)

51:9 The speakers are the nations conquered by Babylon. (CSB)

each to his own country – The Hebrew for this passage has a parallel in Isa 13:14. The captive peoples are warned to flee Babylon in order to avoid being cut down by her invaders. (CSB)

The strangers in the country are getting ready to preserve their lives before the threatening catastrophe comes. Over against this fate of Babylon is placed the deliverance of Judah from oppression and exile. (Kretzmann)

her judgment. Her sin, deserving of judgment. (CSB)

51:10 Judah speaks (see 50:28). (CSB)

The LORD has brought about our vindication us. See Ps 37:6. (CSB)

Israel is reminded that her vindication comes by God's grace. (TLSB)

51:11 *stirred up.* Lit. "stirred up the spirit of." (CSB)

Medes. Leaders of various tribes, united in the attack on Babylon. (TLSB)

vengeance, vengeance for his temple. The profanation at the hands of the Chaldeans must be punished. (Kretzmann)

51:12 *prepare the ambushes.* To keep defenders from retreating to the safety of their fortifications (see Jos 8:14–22; Jdg 20:29–39). (CSB)

This would be so that there would be no loophole of escape for the besieged. (Kretzmann)

51:13 *many waters.* The "rivers of Babylon" (Ps 137:1), including the mighty Euphrates along with a magnificent system of irrigation canals, were proverbial. (CSB)

The Euphrates River was diverted into a network of irrigation canals as it flowed through Babylon. (TLSB)

cut. Like a thread from the loom (see Isa 38:12). (CSB)

Babylon's last thread has been stitched or woven in the tapestry of history. God is done with them. (TLSB)

There would be no more unjust enrichment through robbery and plunder after the fall of the city. (Kretzmann)

51:14 *sworn by himself.* There is no greater name in which the Lord can take an oath (see Heb 6:13). (CSB)

This is by His own soul or life. (Kretzmann)

51:15–19 Repeated almost verbatim from 10:12–16. (CSB)

These verse describe the impotence of idols and warns against "a work of delusion" (v. 18) rather than the Creator God. This warning describes both Israel's folly and Babylon's folly for relying on their god Marduk to defend them against the "Lord of hosts." (TLSB)

51:19 *Lord of hosts is his name* – This paragraph is repeated from chapter 10, 12-16, where the prophet described the almighty power of the living God and pointed to the destruction of the idols at the time of the great judgment. In chapter 10 he intended to combat the fear of the idolatrous people concerning the power of the heathen gods; here he wants to overthrow the confidence of the Chaldeans in their idols, telling them that their gods are powerless before the omnipotence of Jehovah, and that Israel would realize this fact when the judgment would be brought about. By the overthrow of Babylon, Jehovah proved Himself to be the Creator of Israel, the Former of the universe, the one true God. The next paragraph is addressed to Babylon, as the "hammer of nations," chap. 50, 23, and the narrative ought to be given in the present or in the past tense, as a prophetic statement. (Kretzmann)

51:20–23 Illustrates Jeremiah's fondness for the effective use of repetition. (CSB)

51:20 *You are my hammer.*† Cf. Pr 25:18; Babylon, destroyer of nations. (CSB)

AS God once used the Assyrians as rods of His anger (Is. 10:5-11), so the Babylonians were to "break nations in pieces" in their appointed rise to empire status. Babylon, however, committed its own sin, for which God judged her. (TLSB)

break. See vv. 21–23. The Hebrew root for this verb is the same as that for "war club." See also Ex 15:6. The Hebrew verb is translated "dash (to pieces)" in Ps 2:9; 137:9; Hos 10:14; 13:16. (CSB)

51:22 *old man...youth...young woman* – This would include every age and every station. (Kretzmann)

51:23 *I break in pieces* – But at the same time the hammer would itself be overthrown, both actions taking place at the same time in the sight of the eternal God. (Kretzmann)

51:24 *your.* Judah's. (CSB)

51:25 *destroying mountain.* Symbolizes a powerful kingdom (see Da 2:35, 44–45), here Babylon. (CSB)

Behold, I am against thee, O destroying mountain, saith the Lord, Babylon called thus on account of the physical and moral destruction which it brought upon the nations by a false use of its great power. (Kretzmann)

burned mountain. After being judged by the Lord, Babylon will be like an extinct volcano. (CSB)

Babylon was located on a flat plain. (TLSB)

51:26 *desolate forever.* See 25:12; 50:12–13; see also note on Isa 13:20. (CSB)

The great mass of materials of which Babylon was built to this day are lying more or less decomposed in the mountains of rubbish which mark the site of the once magnificent city. Thus the word of the Lord was fulfilled with its usual exactness. (Kretzmann)

51:27 *Prepare ... for battle.* Lit. "Consecrate." (CSB)

these kingdoms. Allies of the Medes (see v. 11 and note). (CSB)

Minni. A region mentioned in Assyrian inscriptions, it was located somewhere in Armenia. (CSB)

Ararat, Minni, and Ashkenaz. Districts in Median territory. (TLSB)

This was a country bordering on Armenia. (Kretzmann)

marshal. The Hebrew for this word appears again in the OT only in Na 3:17 (“officials”). It is a Babylonian loanword meaning lit. “scribe.” (CSB)

This was so that there would be efficient leadership. (Kretzmann)

bristling locusts. These were like hairy-crested grasshoppers. (Kretzmann)

51:28 *every land under their domination.* This detailed enumeration is made for the purpose of increasing the impression of great and irresistible power. (Kretzmann)

51:29 *land trembles and writhes.* At the fearful prospect of war. (CSB)

51:30 *strength has failed.* In the Hebrew there is a play on words. (CSB)

dwelling are on fire – When the stratagem of Cyrus in diverting the stream of the Euphrates succeeded and his soldiers entered the city through its empty bed, they found little or no opposition and could easily open the city gates from within. (Kretzmann)

51:31 *One messenger to meet another.* They run to the palace from all parts of the city. (CSB)

Messengers of disaster will come and go in quick succession. (TLSB)

51:32 *marshes are burned with fire.* To destroy the reeds and prevent fugitives from hiding among them. (CSB)

51:33 *Daughter of Babylon.* The whole empire being included in this figure. (Kretzmann)

threshing floor. The destruction of a city or nation is often depicted as a harvest (see Isa 27:12; Joel 3:13; Mic 4:12–13). (CSB)

Trodden and beaten. (TLSB)

This was done by the customary treading or stamping by means of which the kernels of grain were separated from their hulls. (Kretzmann)

harvest will come – This would be done when she would be trodden under foot. The inhabitants of Israel and Judah are now introduced with a lament showing the reason for the Lord's punishment upon Babylon. (Kretzmann)

51:34 *has devoured me* – Zion's delicacies and treasured possession were removed from Israel and transported to Babylon. Thus, Nebuchadnezzar “devoured” her. Cf 2 Ki 24-25. (TLSB)

monster. The Hebrew for this word is translated “monster” in Isa 51:9, where it symbolizes Egypt. (CSB)

delicacies. See Ge 49:20. (CSB)

With all the finest foods. (Kretzmann)

rinsed me out – The heaping of similar expressions brings out the greatness of the ruin which had come upon Judah. (Kretzmann)

51:36 *take vengeance for you.* The Lord is acting as the Advocate in defending the rights of His people. (Kretzmann)

sea ... fountain. Babylonia is called the “Desert by the Sea” in Isa 21:1. (CSB)

The Euphrates with its canals and reservoirs. (TLSB)

This was the Euphrates with all its channels, canals, and swamps. (Kretzmann)

fountain dry – Babylon would no longer have a rich supply of water to give fertility to her land. (Kretzmann)

51:38-40 The Babylonians acting like ravenous young lions inflamed with feverish craving for prey will be served food by the Lord, which will stupefy them into “a perpetual sleep” and change them from predatory beasts into domestic victims of “the slaughter.” (TLSB)

51:38 *roar like lions’ cubs.* They are growling over their food. This probably is a reference to the fact that Babylon was taken on a night when its rulers and leading citizens were attending a drunken debauch. (Kretzmann)

51:39 *inflamed.* Lit. “heated”; for a similar image see Hos 7:4–7. (CSB)

"For their intoxication I prepare them a drinking-bout," (Kretzmann)

51:40 *lambs ... rams and goats.* Symbolic of the people (see Isa 34:6; Eze 39:18) of Babylon. (CSB)

This would include all the classes of Babylon's population. (Kretzmann)

slaughter. See Dt 32:34; Isa 13:22. (CSB)

Here the prophet inserts a word of astonishment over the downfall of Babylon. (Kretzmann)

51:41 *praise of the whole earth* – Babylon was an object of envy and praise throughout the world. (Kretzmann)

51:42 *sea ... its tumultuous waves.* Wave after wave of enemies will inundate Babylon. (TLSB)

The image is based upon the action of the Euphrates, which, without the restraint of dikes and irrigation canals, would sometimes rise so high as to overflow the entire valley. (Kretzmann)

51:44 *what he has swallowed.* Captive peoples (including Judah) and plundered goods (including vessels from the temple in Jerusalem; see Da 5:2–3). (CSB)

wall of Babylon. A wall of double construction, the outer wall (12 feet thick) being separated from the inner wall (21 feet thick) by a dry moat 23 feet wide. (CSB)

51:46 *be not fearful.* While giving his Olivet discourse, Jesus may have had this passage in mind (see Mt 24:6; Mk 13:7; Lk 21:9). (CSB)

The Israelites are not to worry, though rumors of political convulsions make them fearful that their lot in a foreign country could become even worse. (TLSB)

51:48 *heaven and earth ... shall sing for joy.* The whole universe was called upon to witness God's charges against His people, so it is summoned also to join in celebrating the defeat of His enemies (cf Dt 4:26; 30:19; Is 49:13). (TLSB)

out of the north. In Jeremiah, the foe from the north is almost always Babylon (see, e.g., 1:14–15). Here, however, the reference is probably to Persia. Babylon's nemesis is expanded to "an alliance of great nations" in v. 9, specified by name in 51:27–28.) (CSB)

51:49 Babylon had caused the fall of Israel is being engaged in their slaughter by a just recompense. The representatives of the various nations of the earth were at Babylon at the time of her overthrow. The prophet now summarizes the guilt and the punishment of Babylon. (Kretzmann)

51:50 *escaped.* Having escaped from the sword, the exiles are to consider their liberation as God's calling to return to Jerusalem. (TLSB)

let Jerusalem come into your mind – The thought of the return to their home country and its capital would immediately occur to them. But the prophet now, in the name of the congregation, gives utterance to an objection on their part, with the purpose of removing it. (Kretzmann)

51:51 *foreigners have come into the holy places.* Refers to Nebuchadnezzar's defiling the Jerusalem temple in 586 B.C. The same sacrilege would occur under Antiochus Epiphanes in 168 B.C. and under the Romans in A.D. 70. (CSB)

51:52 judgment upon her images. The idols of Babylon, this being Jehovah's answer upon their taunt in burning His Temple as though He were powerless to avenge Himself. They will be stricken down by the Lord's mighty hand. (Kretzmann)

51:53 *mount up to heaven.* literally, "make inaccessible the height of her firmness," so that her walls would rise up to a precipitous height, apparently impregnable. (Kretzmann)

51:55 *like many waters.* The attack by the enemy will be like the irresistible force of the sea and its deafening roar. (TLSB)

51:56 *God of recompense.* God is rewarding them the evil which they had committed, paying back their wickedness as they deserved. (Kretzmann)

51:57 *officials and wise men.* See 50:35. (CSB)

This would include all those who were at the head of the nation, both in peace and in war. (Kretzmann)

King. The true King is the Lord, not Bel/Marduk. (CSB)

51:58 *broad wall.* These according to some accounts, were so broad that two four-horse chariots could pass anywhere. (Kretzmann)

high gates. The famous Ishtar Gate was almost 40 feet high. (CSB)

There were one hundred magnificent gates of brass. (Kretzmann)

the peoples weary themselves for fire. Very similar to Hab 2:13. (CSB)

The siege will prevail against all preparations. (TLSB)

51:59–64 A prose conclusion to the book in general and to the oracle against Babylon in particular. (CSB)

A written copy of the words spoken concerning Babylon were to be taken to Babylon, tied to a stone, and cast into the Euphrates to symbolize that Babylon will sink, to rise no more. (TLSB)

51:59 *Seraiah son of Neriah.* An ancient seal has been found that bears the inscription “Belonging to Seraiah son of Neriah,” and it no doubt refers to the man mentioned here. He was a brother of Jeremiah’s secretary, Baruch (see 32:12). (CSB)

Baruch’s brother. (TLSB)

he. Seraiah. (CSB)

literally, "prince of the resting-place," that is, marshal of the caravan, he who had charge of the journey. (Kretzmann)

Zedekiah ... fourth year. 593 B.C. Zedekiah may have been summoned to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar to be interrogated by him. (CSB)

Lit, “the prince of rest.” It refers to an administrative position, translated differently over the centuries. (TLSB)

51:60 *book.* A long strip of leather or papyrus on which scribes wrote in columns (see Jer 36:23) with pen (see Isa 8:1) and ink (see Jer 36:18), sometimes on both sides (see Eze 2:10; Rev 5:1). After being rolled up, a scroll was often sealed (see Isa 29:11; Da 12:4; Rev 5:1–2, 5, 9) to protect its contents. Scrolls were of various sizes (see Isa 8:1; Rev 10:2, 9–10). Certain Egyptian examples reached lengths of over 100 feet; Biblical scrolls, however, rarely exceeded 30 feet in length, as in the case of a book like Isaiah (see Lk 4:17). Reading the contents of a scroll involved the awkward procedure of unrolling it with one hand while rolling it up with the other (see Isa 34:4; Eze 2:10; Lk 4:17, 20; Rev 6:14). Shortly after the time of Christ the scroll gave way to the book form still used today. (CSB)

all these words that are written concerning Babylon. Probably the oracle of 50:2–51:58. (CSB)

51:62 *you have said.* This was a reminder to the Lord, as it were, that the threats of His prophecy must be fulfilled. (Kretzmann)

51:64 *Thus far are the words of Jeremiah.*† The next chapter, the account of the fall of Jerusalem, is appended to them. (CSB)

Ch 51 Jeremiah continues speaking God's oracle against Babylon, condemning her for the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple. The Lord called His people to come out of Babylon, lest they share the city's fate. Through Babylon's destruction, God teaches other nations of His dominion over them so they may come to faith. At the same time, He spares those He has called by His name. • Lord, lead us to live with compassion toward others, for You lovingly look upon the whole human race through the redeeming blood of Christ. Amen. (TLSB)