

The Road to Jesus: The Gospel According to Isaiah  
The Fall of Babylon  
December 30, 2015

INTRODUCTION:

Babylon lay on the bank of the Euphrates River in the land of Shinar (Gen. 10:10). This was in the northern area of Babylonia, which is now in southern Iraq. It was called Akkad at one time. The southern area of Babylonia was called Sumer. Babylon covered about 2100 acres and it lay about 50 miles south of modern Bagdad.

The creation of the city of Babylon is attributed in Genesis to Nimrod and this is about 4,000 B. C. The oldest reference to Babylon outside the Bible dates to 2250 B. C. One of the oldest law codes, probably the oldest outside the Bible, is attributed to Hammurabi of Babylon, dating to 1750 B. C.

As we think about the contact that Babylon had with biblical history, there was strife in Babylon around 850 B. C. when Shalmaneser III of Assyria came in to restore order and peace. Assyria kept control of Babylon for a long time. As we have pointed out, in 703 B. C. Merodach-Baladan of Babylon sought an alliance with King Hezekiah of Judah against the Assyrians. Nothing came of that and Babylon stayed under Assyria domination.

Assyria had destroyed much of Babylon but it was rebuilt by Nabopolassar. Nab's son, Nebuchadnezzar (II), restored the prestige of Babylon and eventually led the city and its surrounding lands to dominate the Fertile Crescent and the Assyrian Empire. Following Neb, we have Nabonidus who reigned from 555-539 B. C. with his son, Belshazzar as co-regent when Babylon fell to the Persians and Cyrus in 539 B. C.

The patron god of Babylon was Marduk, called Esagila. There were chapels and shrines to lesser gods around the temple. The ruins of this temple date back to 2100 B. C. There were some 50 other temples in Babylon and Neb claimed to have built 15 of them.

Babylon, of course, plays a major role in biblical history from the time of the invasion of Israel until the New Testament period. After being inhabited by the Persians and the Greeks, it slowly lost its economic power and importance. But, the city was not vacated until the second century of the Christian era, according to the church historian Septimius Severus.

But the influence of the Babylonian exile stayed with the Israelites and Jews in their thoughts and culture all the way into New Testament times. As we all know, John uses Babylon extensively in the book of Revelation to symbolize the predominant anti-Christian power faced by the Christians at the end of the first and beginning of the second century. There are very good reasons to believe Babylon in Revelation symbolizes the city of Rome and the Roman Empire at that time.

The Babylonian Exile. When Isaiah preaches, the exile has not started. Isaiah will be dead by the time it starts. Yet, his message is to encourage that generation to stay faithful through the exile. His message both suggests the return from exile under King Cyrus of Persia and a return to a relationship with the holy God. The physical return from exile is a picture of the spiritual return.

Let us study Isaiah 46-47...

### BABYLON'S IDOLS ARE HUMILIATED - 46:1-2:

“Bel” is another name for the patron god of Babylon, Marduk. “Nebo” was considered Bel’s son, the “keeper of the tablets of the gods,” the god of learning and knowledge. Smith writes that Nebo controlled the “tablet of destiny” so that “Ironically, in this message God announces that he himself will determine the destiny of these two gods” (287). These gods were two thousand years old. Nebo is seen in the names of the Babylonian kings: Nab, Neb, and Nabopolassar. These verses picture the New Year’s procession and festival when the images of the god (Nebo) was brought into Babylon from his temple in Borshippa. The festival lasted 11 days.

Gods have to be carried and when they are made of gold or silver, perhaps even wood, they can be very heavy. Observe the idea of gods being carried by humans in verses 1 and 7 with the statement by Jehovah God that *He* carries the Israelites (vs 3). “When man carries his god, the end is destruction; when the true God carries man, the end is salvation” (Young, 222).

Do you want to trust and worship a god you have to carry or a God who sustains you? Oswalt warns (230): “But his point, as relevant today as twenty-seven hundred years ago, is that once the deity is in any way made part of the creation, once the all-important distinction between Creator and creation is blurred, the end is entirely predictable: creation becomes deified; purpose cannot be defined; existence is meaningless; and transformation is impossible. Make God human, and human God, and all is lost. This is Isaiah’s point, and we disregard it at our peril.”

### GOD'S ASSURANCE TO ISRAEL - 46:3-4:

So God says, verse 3, “Listen [obey] to me.” God has carried the nation of Israel from its birth. From the womb, God has nurtured the nation of Israel. He will, in fact, be with them unto their old age (vs 4), when their hair turns gray. He will continue to bear them. So, we have three images used here: a father carrying a child, a shepherd carrying a lamb, and an eagle carrying its eaglets. But because Jehovah God is *outside* of history, He can carry Israel *throughout* her history. Notice the first person pronouns in verse 4.

Now, how would the Israelite know all of this? How could they have faith in all of this that Isaiah says? Because the Jew had it all written down in the law of Moses, the historical books, and the books of poetry. Some books of the prophets were also already written down, including Isaiah’s own. Faith *always* comes by hearing the word of God! The message of Romans 10:17 does not just apply to the word of Christ.

### THE FUTILITY OF ALL IDOLS ANYWHERE - 46:5-7:

One again, Isaiah points out how silly, ridiculous, pointless it is to worship idols. What comparison is there between Jehovah God and idols?

Today, we want to trust political parties to save our country. I still believe we ought to vote for the man or woman who best reflects the morals revealed in the word of God. But, just like with medical doctors, you trust man only so far. Your ultimate trust and allegiance must be to God and His word. We cannot trust money in our bank accounts; we have to trust God who provides the blessings. We cannot trust our religious neighbors to be the salvation of the church of Christ. There are too many Christians who think we have to become like our denominational neighbors if we are going to survive. Do you not see that that thinking is exactly like the thinking of the Jews during the time of Isaiah? Is it a matter of survival? Jesus promised in Matthew 15:13 that every plant which the heavenly Father has not planted shall be uprooted. No, we

don't become like the denominational world in order to survive. We trust God; we obey His word. We remain faithful and let God take care of the growth.

Trusting in man is futile and eternally dangerous.

### GOD'S UNIQUENESS - 46:8-13:

Why trust the God of heaven? Because He is far and away different from anyone or anything here on this earth. The best word to describe that uniqueness is "holy." Holy means separate and distinct, both morally and in every other way, from anything on earth. No wonder Isaiah calls God the "Holy One" of Israel 30 times.

Observe the three imperatives in verse 8: "Remember." "Be assured" (or, literally "be firm"; see 1 Cor. 16:13). And "recall it to mind" ("heart") - you *transgressors*. Do you think Isaiah is too negative? Does he talk about sin too much?

Remember, Isaiah challenges, the former things long past. "What is the antidote to unbelief? Memory" (Oswalt, 235). Remember, Israel, your history. What has God done for you in the past? Be strengthened by that. Remember SC c of C, what God has done for you in the past. Don't hitch your wagon to the past. Use it to inspire, instruct, and motivate us to the future.

God, in contrast to idols, knows the end from the beginning, even from ancient times things *which have not been done*. Only God or a spokesman approved and guided by God can predict the future. God does this because (vs 10), He has a purpose and a plan. And it will be accomplished. Don't fret over that!

Notice in verses 10 & 11 that the three actions of God are all verbal actions: "declaring" and "saying," in verse 10 and "calling" in verse 11. "They bring us face-to-face again with the uncomfortable claims of the Bible to be a revelation from the uniquely revealing God" (Oswalt, 236). Young adds (227): "Predictive prophecy is a proof of the divine omniscience, and far from being condemned is to be regarded as praiseworthy." We cannot underestimate the role of predictive prophecy in determining the inspiration of the Bible. No other so-called holy book has that characteristic!

The bird of prey from the east, in verse 11, again is likely a reference to King Cyrus, who will be operating under the auspices of God. He is the man of "God's purpose." Please note in verse 11: "Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, surely I will do it." There is not a word in the NT which will not be fulfilled nor a word which will not fall to the ground at the judgment seat of Christ. Not a word will be swept aside because the majority failed to obey it. Notice, again, the first person pronouns in verse 11 and the three adverbs (all the same in Hebrew): "truly" (twice) and "surely."

"Listen," again God commands in verse 12 [obey]. Here, he calls them "stubborn-minded." We would say, "hard-headed." I called a girl that in Romania one time when we talked about the Lord's Supper versus praying to the saints.

In all of God's workings, His righteousness is not far away. His salvation, the salvation He offers and brings, will not be delayed. He will give it. In Zion. When the mountain of the house of the Lord will be established in 2:1-4. He will reveal His glory for Israel - immediately through the return from exile under King Cyrus, eventually through the salvation from sins and reconciliation with the God of heaven through the return from sin under King Jesus.

“The idolater makes a god in his own image; the Lord intends to make his people in his” (Motyer, 334).

#### BABYLON'S SHAME EXPOSED - 47:1-4:

God has already rebuked Babylon back in chapters 13-14. But now with Israel viewed as being under exile in Babylon, the judgment is more personal. Babylon will fall. For two generations, Israel will be dominated by Babylon. But she will fall. God has said so. *Just stay faithful!* Babylon will fall, as we see here in chapter 47, because of God's vengeance (vs 1-7), pride (vs 8-11) and the impotence of her gods (vs 12-15).

The “Chaldeans” mentioned in verse 1 was a tribe in Babylonia which came to dominate the kingdom of Babylon. So, “Chaldean” and “Babylon” are essentially synonyms. “Chaldean” carries the connotation of their ethnic identity.

Do you think the Babylonians could believe that “the course of history is directed by the God of little, insignificant Judah” (Oswalt, 242)?

I like the thoughts of Oswalt (243): “Here is power,” (commenting on verse 4), “power almost beyond comprehension: power to defend, power to deliver, power to revive, power to renew. Yes, he is the Holy One of Israel in regard to Assyria, and he is also the Holy One of Israel in regard to Babylon. Circumstances may change; he changes never. Praise his name!”

#### BABYLON'S ROYALTY DEPOSED - 47:5-7:

When I got a little cocky in my teenage years, my dad use to threaten me, “Son, am I going to have to take you down a notch or two?” Here, God promises that He is going to take Babylon down a notch or two. When He gets finished, others will no longer call her the “Queen of Kingdoms.”

God was angry with people and was using Babylon to punish the Jews. That was all true. But Babylon went further than necessary and was arrogant about it all, even mistreating the elderly and the helpless. Babylon thought to herself, “I will be a queen forever,” but she never gave God any thought.

How dangerous it is for Americans to think that because we are and have been for two generations a world power, that America will last forever. I find myself being tempted to think, who in today's world can conquer the United States of America? Setting the U. S. military aside - the best armed military the world has ever seen - setting them aside, what nation could or even dare invade the U. S. of A.? The 2nd Amendment practically guarantees that no nation can succeed in invading the U. S. of A. But, it's that type of thinking that led to the fall of Babylon and the fall of Rome and every other world power.

We may be able to repel an invasion from the Atlantic or the Pacific or across the Canadian border or the Mexican border but no power will stop an invasion led by the God of heaven. When God decides America has served her purpose and no longer glorifies Him as we should, He will bring the downfall of this great nation. But despite that, the church of Christ will live and continue on. Do not forget that.

“This is the problem of a people whose gods are simply themselves written large. They have no one outside themselves, over against themselves, to remind them that even if they are the greatest the world has ever seen, they are not the standard of greatness” (Oswalt, 247).

## BABYLON'S BEREAVEMENT AND JUDGMENT DISCLOSED - 47:8-15:

You see, just like you and I feel today about our own country, the people of Babylon "dwelt securely" (vs 8). Or so they thought. She never thought she would be a widow. She never thought she would be childless. Babylon believed she had outgrown the need for God. "...any nation that claims to have absolute authority is sure to face the wrath of an angry God who will not share his glory with anyone else" (Smith, 305). I don't know about clinging to guns but I'll continue to cling to my religion, thank you very much. Because my God is greater than the gods worshiped by the politician in Washington.

Babylon's gods, her religion, her "sorceries" and "the great power of her spells" will not save them (vs 9). Of course, we can read in Daniel 5:29-30 that Babylon basically fell in one night. Babylon, as a nation, had an intense interest in astronomy, guided by an interest in astrology. So much so that "chaldean" came to be used as a synonym for "magician" or "sorcerer."

Babylon felt secure in her wickedness, deceiving herself by her own wisdom and knowledge but "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom," (Prov. 9:10; "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge" - 1:7).

"Evil" will come on Babylon, by which Isaiah means "calamity" as the word is used parallel to "disaster" and "destruction" (vs 11).

Verse 12 is sarcasm. "Go ahead and trust in your spells and sorceries." So is verse 13 - "Trust in your astrologers." Let them save you.

But, when God's anger comes, when His wrath hits you like a freight train, when His fury burns, your astrologers will be like stubble (vs 14). They will not even be able to deliver themselves, much less everyone else (vs 15).

As Beyer comments (189): "Nations ruled only by God's grace, and when they had served his purpose, he would bring them down." That applies to the United States as much as it did to Babylon. "No one and no nation can successfully oppose God's plans, for he will only save those people who trust him. The key question is: Who will trust him and be the people he saves" (Smith, 311)?

Next week:  
Israel's Release and Exaltation  
Isaiah 48 & 49