

# CHAPTER 47

Infinite Wisdom could have ordered things so that Israel might have been released and yet Babylon unhurt; but if they will harden their hearts, and will not let the people go, they must thank themselves that their ruin is made to pave the way to Israel's release. That ruin is here, in this chapter, largely foretold, not to gratify a spirit of revenge in the people of God, who had been used barbarously by them, but to encourage their faith and hope concerning their own deliverance, and to be a type of the downfall of that great enemy of the New-Testament church which, in the Revelation, goes under the name of "Babylon." In this chapter we have,

**I.** The greatness of the ruin threatened, that Babylon should be brought down to the dust, and made completely miserable, should fall from the height of prosperity into the depth of adversity (v. 1-5).

**II.** The sins that provoked God to bring this ruin upon them.

1. Their cruelty to the people of God (v. 6).
2. Their pride and carnal security (v. 7-9).
3. Their confidence in themselves and contempt of God (v. 10).
4. Their use of magic arts and their dependence upon enchantments and sorceries, which should be so far from standing them in any stead that they should but hasten their ruin (v. 11-15).

## ~~297~~ ISAIAH 47:1-6

### BABYLON THREATENED

In these verses God by the prophet sends a messenger even to Babylon, like that of Jonah to Nineveh: "The time is at hand when Babylon shall be destroyed." Fair warning is thus given her, that she may by repentance prevent the ruin and there may be a lengthening of her tranquility. We may observe here,

**I.** God's controversy with Babylon. We will begin with that, for there all the calamity begins; she has made God her enemy, and then who can befriend her: Let her know that the righteous Judge, to whom vengeance belongs, has said (v. 3), *I will take vengeance*. She has provoked God, and shall be reckoned with for it when the measure of her iniquities is full. Woe to those on whom God comes to take vengeance; for who knows the power of his anger and what a fearful thing it is to fall into his hands? Were it a man like ourselves who would be revenged on us, we might hope to be a match for him, either to make our escape from him or to make our part good with him. But he says, "*I will not meet thee as a man, not with the compassions of a man, but I will be to thee as a lion, and a young lion*" (<sup><354></sup>Hosea 5:14); or, rather, not with the strength of a man, which is easily resisted, but with the power of a God, which cannot be resisted. Not with the justice of a man, which may be bribed, or biassed, or mollified by a foolish pity, but with the justice of a God, which is strict and severe, and can never be evaded. As in pardoning the penitent, so in punishing the impenitent, he is *God and not man*, <sup><319></sup>Hosea 11:9.

**II.** The particular ground of this controversy. We are sure that there is cause for it, and it is a just cause; it is the *vengeance of his temple* (<sup><283></sup>Jeremiah 50:28); it is for *violence done to Zion*, <sup><265></sup>Jeremiah 51:35. God will plead his people's cause against them. It is acknowledged (v. 6) that God had, in wrath, delivered his people into the hands of the Babylonians, had made use of them for the correction of his children, and had by their means *polluted his inheritance*, had left his peculiar people exposed to suffer in common with the rest of the nations, had suffered the heathen, who should have been kept at a distance, to *come into his sanctuary and defile his temple*, <sup><370></sup>Psalms 79:1. Herein God was righteous; but the Babylonians carried the matter too far, and, when they had them in their hands (triumphing to see a people that had been so much in reputation for wisdom, holiness, and honour, brought thus low), with a base and servile spirit they trampled upon them, *and showed them no mercy*, no, not the common instances of humanity which the miserable are entitled to purely by their misery. They used them barbarously, and with an air of contempt, nay, and of complacency in their calamities. They were brought under the yoke; but, as if that were not enough, they *laid the yoke on very heavily*, adding affliction to the afflicted. Nay, they laid it *on the ancient* — the elders in years, who were past their labour, and must sink under a yoke which those in their youthful strength would easily bear —

the elders in office, those that had been judges and magistrates, and persons of the first rank. They took a pride in putting these to the meanest hardest drudgery. Jeremiah laments this, that the *faces of elders were not honoured*, <sup>25:12</sup>Lamentations 5:12. Nothing brings a surer or a sorer ruin upon any people than cruelty, especially to God's Israel.

**III.** The terror of this controversy. She has reason to tremble when she is told who it is that has this quarrel with her (v. 4): “*As for our Redeemer, our God, that undertakes to plead our cause as the avenger of our blood, he has two names which speak not only comfort to us, but terror to our adversaries.*”

1. “He is *the Lord of hosts*, that has all the creatures at his command, and therefore has *all power both in heaven and in earth.*” Woe to those against whom the Lord fights, for the whole creation is at war with them.

2. “He is the *Holy One of Israel*, a God in covenant with us, who has his residence among us, and will faithfully perform all the promises he has made to us.” God's power and holiness are engaged against Babylon and for Zion. This may fitly be applied to Christ, our great Redeemer. He is both Lord of hosts and the Holy One of Israel.

**IV.** The consequences of it to Babylon. She is called a *virgin*, because so she thought herself, though she was the mother of harlots. She was beautiful as a virgin, and courted by all about her; she had been called *tender and delicate* (v. 1), and *the lady of kingdoms* (v. 5); but now the case is altered.

1. Her honour is gone, and she must bid farewell to all her dignity. She that had sat at the upper end of the world, sat in state and sat at ease, must now *come down and sit in the dust*, as very mean and a deep mourner, must *sit on the ground*, for she shall be so emptied and impoverished that she shall not have a seat left her to sit upon.

2. Her power is gone, and she must bid farewell to all her dominion. She shall rule no more as she has done, nor give law as she has done to her neighbours: *There is no throne, none for thee, O daughter of the Chaldeans!* Note, Those that abuse their honour or power provoke God to deprive them of it, and to make them *come down and sit in the dust.*

3. Her ease and pleasure are gone: “She shall *no more be called tender and delicate* as she has been, for she shall not only be deprived of all those

things with which she pampered herself, but shall be put to hard service and made to feel both want and pain, which will be more than doubly grievous to her who formerly *would not venture to set so much as the sole of her foot to the ground for tenderness and for delicacy,*”

<sup>4585</sup>Deuteronomy 28:56. It is our wisdom not to use ourselves to be tender and delicate, because we know not how hardly others may use us before we die not what straits we may be reduced to.

**4.** Her liberty is gone, and she is brought into a state of servitude and as sore a bondage as she in her prosperity had brought others to. Even the great men of Babylon must now receive the same law from the conquerors that they used to give to the conquered: “*Take the mill-stones and grind meal* (v. 2), set to work, to hard labour” (like beating hemp in Bridewell), “which will make thee sweat so that thou must throw off all thy head-dresses, and *uncover thy locks.*” When they were driven from one place to another, at the capricious humours of their masters, they must be forced to wade up to the middle through the waters, to *make bare the leg* and *uncover the thigh*, that they might *pass over the rivers*, which would be a great mortification to those that used to ride in state. But let them not complain, for just thus they had formerly used their captives; and *with what measure they then meted* it is now *measured to them again*. Let those that have power use it with temper and moderation, considering that the spoke which is uppermost will be under.

**5.** All her glory, and all her glorying, are gone. Instead of glory, she has ignominy (v. 3): *Thy nakedness shall be uncovered and thy shame shall be seen*, according to the base and barbarous usage they commonly gave their captives, to whom, for covetousness of their clothes, they did not leave rags sufficient to cover their nakedness, so void were they of the modesty as well as of the pity due to the human nature. Instead of glorying she *sits silently, and gets into darkness* (v. 5), ashamed to show her face, for she has quite lost her credit and *shall no more be called the lady of kingdoms*. Note, God can make those sit silently that used to make the greatest noise in the world, and send those into darkness that used to make the greatest figure. Let him that glories, therefore, glory in a God that changes not, and not in any worldly wealth, pleasure, or honour, which are subject to change.

## BABYLON THREATENED

Babylon, now doomed to ruin, is here justly upbraided with her pride, luxury, and security, in the day of her prosperity, and the confidence she had in her own wisdom and forecast, and particularly in the prognostications and counsels of the astrologers. These things are mentioned both to justify God in bringing these judgments upon her and to mortify her, and put her to so much the greater shame, under these judgments; for, when God comes forth to take vengeance, glory belongs to him, but confusion to the sinner.

**I.** The Babylonians are here upbraided with their pride and haughtiness, and the great conceit they had of themselves, because of their wealth and power, and the vast extent of their dominion; it was the language both of the government and of the body of the people: *Thou sayest in thy heart* (and God, who searches all hearts, can tell men what they say there, though they never speak it out) *I am, and none else besides me*, v. 8, 10. The repetition of this part of the charge intimates that they said it often, and that it was very offensive to God. It is the very word that God has often said concerning himself, *I am, and none else besides me*, denoting his self-existence, his infinite and incomparable perfections, and his sole supremacy. All this Babylon pretends to; and no wonder if she that assumed a power to make what gods and goddesses she pleased for the people to worship made herself one among the rest. It is presumption to say of any creature, “It is, and there is not its like, there is none besides it” (for creatures stand very nearly upon a level with one another); but it is insufferable arrogance for any to say so of themselves, and an evidence of their self-ignorance.

**II.** They are upbraided with their luxury and love of ease (v. 8): “*Thou that art given to pleasures*, art a slave to them, art in them as in thy element, and, that thou mayest enjoy them without disturbance or interruption, *dwellest carelessly* and layest nothing to heart.” Great wealth and plenty are great temptations to sensuality, and, where there is fulness of bread, there is commonly abundance of idleness. But if those that are given to pleasures, and dwell carelessly, would but hear this, that *for all these things God will bring them into judgment*, it would be a damp to

their mirth, an allay to their pleasure, and would find them something to be in care about.

**III.** They are upbraided with their carnal security and their vain confidence of the perpetuity of their pomps and pleasures. This is much insisted on here. Observe,

**1.** The cause of their security. They thought themselves safe and out of danger, not because they were ignorant of the uncertainty of all earthly enjoyments and the inevitable fate that attends states and kingdoms as well as particular persons, but *because they did not lay this to heart*, did not apply it to themselves, nor give it a due consideration. They lulled themselves asleep in ease and pleasure, and dreamt of nothing else but that *to-morrow should be as this day, and much more abundant*. They did not remember the latter end of it — the latter end of their prosperity, that it is a fading flower, and will wither — the latter end of their iniquity, that it will be bitterness, that they day will come when their injustice and oppression must be reckoned for and punished. *She did not remember her latter end* (so some read it); she forgot that her day would come to fall and what would be in the end hereof. It was the ruin of Jerusalem (<sup><2019></sup>Lamentations 1:9) that *she remembered not her last end, therefore she came down wonderfully*; and it was Babylon's ruin too. The children of men are easy, and think themselves safe, in their sinful ways, only because they never think of death, and judgment, and their future state.

**2.** The ground of their security. They trusted in their wickedness and in their wisdom, v. 10.

**(1.)** Their power and wealth, which they had gotten by fraud and oppression, were their confidence: *Thou hast trusted in thy wickedness*, As Doeg. <sup><1517></sup>Psalm 52:7. Many have so debauched their own consciences, and have got to such a pitch of daring wickedness, that they stick at nothing; and this they trust to carry them through those difficulties which embarrass men who make conscience of what they say and do. They doubt not but they shall be too hard for all their enemies, because they dare lie, and kill, and forswear themselves, and do any thing for their interest. Thus they trust in their wickedness to secure them, which is the only thing that will ruin them.

**(2.)** Their policy and craft, which they called their *wisdom*, were their confidence. They thought they could outwit all mankind, and therefore

might set all their enemies at defiance. But their *wisdom and knowledge perverted them*, and turned them out of the way, made them forget themselves, and the preparation necessary to be made for hereafter.

**3.** The expressions of their security. Three things this proud and haughty monarchy said, in her security: —

**(1.)** *“I shall be a lady for ever,”* v. 7. She looked upon the patent of her honour to be not merely during the pleasure of the sovereign Lord, the fountain of honour, or during her own good behaviour, but to be perpetual to the present generation and their heirs and successors for ever. She was not only proud that she was a lady, but confident that she should be a lady for ever. Thus the New-Testament Babylon says, *I sit as a queen, and shall see no sorrow,* ~~xxxv~~ Revelation 18:7. Those ladies mistake themselves, and consider not their latter end, who think they shall be ladies for ever; for death will shortly lay their honour with them in the dust. Saints will be saints for ever, but lords and ladies will not be so for ever.

**(2.)** *“I shall not sit as a widow, in solitude and sorrow, shall never lose the power and wealth I am thus wedded to; the monarchy shall never want a monarch to espouse and protect it, and be a husband to the state; nor shall I know the loss of children,”* v. 8. She was as confident of the continuance of the numbers of her people as of the dignity of her prince, and had no fear of being either deposed or depopulated. Those that are in the height of prosperity are apt to fancy themselves out of the reach of adverse fate.

**(3.)** *“No one sees me when I do amiss, and therefore there will be none to call me to an account,”* v. 10. It is common for sinners to promise themselves impunity, because they promise themselves secrecy, in their wicked ways. They trust to their wicked arts and designs to stand them in stead, because they think they have carried them on so plausibly that none can discern the wickedness and deceit of them.

**4.** The punishment of their security. It shall be their ruin; and it will be,

**(1.)** A complete ruin, the ruin of all their comforts and confidences: *“These two things shall come upon thee* (the very two things that thou didst set at defiance), *loss of children and widowhood,* v. 9. Both thy princes and thy people shall be cut off, so that thou shalt be no more a government, no more a nation.” Note, God often brings upon secure sinners those very mischiefs which they least feared and thought

themselves in least danger of. “*They shall come upon thee in their perfection, with all their aggravating circumstances and without any thing to allay or mitigate them.*” Afflictions to God's children are not afflictions in perfection. Widowhood is not to them a calamity in perfection, for they have this to comfort themselves with, that their Maker is their husband; loss of children is not, for he is better to them than ten sons. But on his enemies they come in perfection. Widowhood and loss of children are either of them great griefs, but both together great indeed. Naomi thinks she may well be called *Marah* when she is *left both of her sons and of her husband* (~~Gen~~ Ruth 1:5); and yet on her these evils did not come in perfection, for she had two daughters-in-law left, that were comforts to her. But on Babylon they come in perfection; she has no comfort remaining.

(2.) It will be a sudden and surprising ruin. The evil shall come *in one day*, nay, *in a moment*, which will make it much the more terrible, especially to those that were so very secure. “*Evil shall come upon thee* (v. 11) and thou shalt have neither time nor way to provide against it, or to prepare for it; for *thou shalt not know whence it rises*, and therefore shalt not know where to stand upon thy guard.” *Thou shalt not know the morning thereof*; so the Hebrew phrase is. We know just when and where the day will break and the sun rise, but we know not what the day, when it comes, will bring forth, nor when or where trouble will arise; perhaps the storm may come from that point of the compass which we little thought of. Babylon pretended to great wisdom and knowledge (v. 10), but with all her knowledge she cannot foresee, nor with all her wisdom prevent, the ruin threatened: “*Desolation shall come upon thee suddenly*, as a thief in the night, *which thou shalt not know*, that is, which thou little thoughtest of.” Fair warning was indeed given them, by Isaiah and other prophets of the Lord, of this desolation; but they slighted that notice, and would give no credit to it, and therefore justly is it so ordered that they should have no other notice of it, but that partly through their own security, and partly through the swiftness and subtlety of the enemy, when it came it should be a perfect surprise to them. Those that slight the warnings of the written word, let them not expect any other premonitions.

(3.) It will be an irresistible ruin, and such as they will have no fence against: “*Mischief shall come upon thee* so suddenly that thou shalt have no time to turn thee in, so strongly that thou shalt not be able to make head against it and to put it off and save thyself.” There is no opposing the



judgments of God when they come with commission. Babylon herself, with all her wealth, and power, and multitude, is not able to put off the mischief that comes.

**IV.** They are upbraided with their divinations, their magical and astrological arts and sciences, which the Chaldeans, above any other nation, were notorious for, and from them other nations borrowed all their learning of that kind.

**1.** This is here spoken of as one of their provoking sins, which would bring the judgments of God upon them, v. 9. “These evils shall come upon thee to punish thee *for the multitude of thy sorceries, and the great abundance of thy enchantments.*” Witchcraft is a sin in its own nature exceedingly heinous; it is giving that honour to the devil which is due to God only, making God's enemy our guide and the father of lies our oracle. In Babylon it was a national sin, and had the protection and countenance of the government; conjurors, for aught that appears, were their privy counsellors and prime ministers of state. And shall not God visit for these things? Observe what a multitude, what a great abundance, of sorceries and enchantments there were among them. Such a bewitching sin this was that when it was once admitted it spread like wildfire, and they never knew any end of it; the deceived and the deceivers both increased strangely.

**2.** It is here spoken of as one of their vain confidences, which they relied much upon, but should be deceived in, for it would not serve so much as to give them notice of the judgments coming, much less to guard against them.

**(1.)** They are here upbraided with the mighty pains they had taken about their sorceries and enchantments: Thou hast *laboured in them from thy youth*, v. 12. They trained up their young men in these studies, and those that applied themselves to them were indefatigable in their labours about them — reading books, making observations, trying experiments. Well, let them stand up now with their enchantments, and try their skill in the critical moment. Let them make a stand, if they can, in opposition to the invading enemy; let them stand to offer their service to their country; but to what purpose? “*Thou art wearied in the multitude of thy counsels* of this kind (v. 13); thou hast advised with them all, but hast received no satisfaction from them; the different schemes they have erected, and the

different judgments they have given, have but increased thy perplexity and tired thee out.” In the multitude of such counsellors there is no safety.

(2.) They are upbraided with the variety they had of such kinds of people among them, v. 13. They had their *astrologers*, or viewers of the heavens, that did not consider them, as David, to behold the wisdom and power of God in them; but, under pretence of foretelling future events by them, they viewed the heavens and forgot him that made them and set *their dominion on the earth* (~~1388~~ Job 38:33), and has himself dominion over them, for he rides on the heavens. They had their *star-gazers*, who by the motions of the stars, their conjunctions and oppositions, read the doom of states and kingdoms. They had their *monthly prognosticators*, their almanac-makers, that told what weather it should be or what news they should have each month. The great stock they had of these was what they valued themselves much upon; but they were all cheats, and their art was a sham. I confess I see not how the judicial astrology which some now pretend to, by the rules of which they undertake to prophecy concerning things to come, can be distinguished from that of the Chaldeans, nor therefore how it can escape the censure and contempt which this text lays that under; yet I fear there are some who study their almanacs, and regard them and their prognostications, more than their Bibles and the prophecies there.

(3.) They are upbraided with the utter inability and insufficiency of all these pretenders to do them any kindness in the day of their distress. Let them see whether with the help of their enchantments they can prevail against their enemies, or profit themselves, inspirit their own forces or dispirit those that come against them, v. 12. Let them see what service those can do them who make a trade of divination: “*Let them stand up*, and either by their power save thee from these evils that are coming upon thee or by their foresight make such a discovery of them beforehand that thou mayest by needful precautions save thyself;” as Elisha, by notifying to the king of Israel the motions of the Syrian army, enabled him to *save himself, not once nor twice*, ~~1390~~ 2 Kings 6:10. This baffling of the diviners was literally fulfilled when, the night that Babylon was taken and Belshazzar slain, all his astrologers, soothsayers, and wise men, were quite nonplussed with the handwriting on the wall that pronounced the fatal sentence, ~~2188~~ Daniel 5:8.

(4.) They are upbraided with the fall of the wise men themselves in the common ruin, v. 14. Those are unlikely to stand their friends in any stead

who cannot secure themselves; they are as stubble at the best, worthless and useless, and *they shall be as stubble* before a consuming fire. The Persians, to make room for their own wise men, will cut off those of Babylon; that *fire shall burn them*, and *they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame*. Those can expect no other than to be devoured by their sins make themselves fuel to a devouring fire. When God kindles a fire among them it *shall not be a coal to warm at*, and *a fire to sit before*, but a coal to burn them. Or, rather, it denotes that they shall be utterly consumed by the judgments of God, burnt quite to ashes, and there shall not remain one live coal to do any body any service; for *when God judges he will overcome*.

**(5.)** They are upbraided with their merchants, and those they dealt with (v. 15), such as they dealt with from their youth, either,

**[1.]** In a way of consultation. These astrologers, that dealt in the black art, they always loved to be dealing with, and they were in effect their merchants; fortune-telling was one of the best trades in Babylon, and those that followed that trade probably lived as splendidly and got as much money as the richest merchants; yet, when some of them were devoured, others fled their country, *every one to his quarter*, and there was none to save Babylon. Miserable comforters are they all. Or,

**[2.]** In a way of commerce. As their astrologers, with whom they had laboured, failed them, so did their merchants; they took care to secure their own effects, and then valued not what became of Babylon. They *wandered every one to his own quarter*; each man shifted for his own safety, but none would offer to lend a helping hand, no, not to a city by which they had got so much money. Every one was for himself, but few for his friends. The New-Testament Babylon is lamented by the merchants that were made rich by her, but they very prudently stand afar off to lament her (~~685~~ Revelation 18:15), not willing to attempt any thing for her succour. Happy are those who by faith and prayer deal with one that will be a *very present help in time of trouble!*