

ISAIAH

Chapter 47

The Humiliation of Babylon

Come down and sit in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon; sit on the ground without a throne, O daughter of the Chaldeans! For you shall no more be called tender and delicate. 2 Take the millstones and grind flour, put off your veil, strip off your robe, uncover your legs, pass through the rivers. 3 Your nakedness shall be uncovered, and your disgrace shall be seen. I will take vengeance, and I will spare no one. 4 Our Redeemer—the LORD of hosts is his name—is the Holy One of Israel. 5 Sit in silence, and go into darkness, O daughter of the Chaldeans; for you shall no more be called the mistress of kingdoms. 6 I was angry with my people; I profaned my heritage; I gave them into your hand; you showed them no mercy; on the aged you made your yoke exceedingly heavy. 7 You said, “I shall be mistress forever,” so that you did not lay these things to heart or remember their end. 8 Now therefore hear this, you lover of pleasures, who sit securely, who say in your heart, “I am, and there is no one besides me; I shall not sit as a widow or know the loss of children”: 9 These two things shall come to you in a moment, in one day; the loss of children and widowhood shall come upon you in full measure, in spite of your many sorceries and the great power of your enchantments. 10 You felt secure in your wickedness; you said, “No one sees me”; your wisdom and your knowledge led you astray, and you said in your heart, “I am, and there is no one besides me.” 11 But evil shall come upon you, which you will not know how to charm away; disaster shall fall upon you, for which you will not be able to atone; and ruin shall come upon you suddenly, of which you know nothing. 12 Stand fast in your enchantments and your many sorceries, with which you have labored from your youth; perhaps you may be able to succeed; perhaps you may inspire terror. 13 You are wearied with your many counsels; let them stand forth and save you, those who divide the heavens, who gaze at the stars, who at the new moons make known what shall come upon you. 14 Behold, they are like stubble; the fire consumes them; they cannot deliver themselves from the power of the flame. No coal for warming oneself is this, no fire to sit before! 15 Such to you are those with whom you have labored, who have done business with you from your youth; they wander about, each in his own direction; there is no one to 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)

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

spare no one. 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.* 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 of hosts. 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. He calls Him by that name on account of the worship at Jerusalem, where He is adored. אֱלֹהֵי 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 ... profaned my inheritance.* 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)

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)

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

47:7 *I shall be mistress 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. (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)

sit securely. 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)

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47:9, 12 *sorceries ... enchantments.* Magical practices to avoid danger and to inflict harm on the enemy. (CSB)

47:9 *come to you...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 **כָּל** 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.* 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 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 *stand fast in your enchantments* – 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 *who gaze at the stars.* 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. (CSB)

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

cannot deliver themselves. In contrast to the mighty Savior of Israel, astrologers and sorcerers are as helpless as idols. (CSB)

no coal for warming oneself. 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)