

The Fall of Babylon
Versus
The Destruction of Babylon
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Nebuchadnezzar's Successors

Nebuchadnezzar's death was followed by a steady weakening of the regime. His successor, Amel-Marduk ("Evil-Merodach" of 2 Kings 25:27; Jeremiah 52:3 1), ruled but two years and was replaced in 560 B.C. after an army coup by the commander in chief, Neriglissar (Nergal-Sharezer of Jeremiah 39:3), son-in-law of Nebuchadnezzar. After frequent absences from active service, he was, in turn, ousted, and his weak son Labashi-Marduk lasted only a few months before another coup d'etat brought Nabonidus to the throne.

Soon after his election, Nabonidus led the army to Palestine and Northern Arabia, leaving his son Belshazzar as co-regent in Babylon. Nabonidus' decision to stay in Arabia resulted from his unpopularity at home as much as from his desire to found a settlement there with exiles from Palestine.

In Babylon there had been inflation brought on both by the continuing military expenditure and by the extensive program of public works begun by Nebuchadnezzar. This inflation rate amounted to 50% between 560 B.C. and 530 B.C., resulting in widespread famine.

In the last year of Nabonidus, the Babylon Chronicle (British Museum) records that the idols of the cities around Babylon, except Borsippa, Kutha, and Sippar, were brought in, an action taken only at the sign of impending war. This cylinder, one of 4 bearing the same text found at the four corners of the ziggurat at Ur, is inscribed in Babylonian cuneiform: prayer to the moon-god Sin, to whom the Ziggurat is consecrated; mentions "Beishazzar, the son first (born) the offspring of my heart (body)." Inscriptions designate Daniel as "the 3rd Ruler in the kingdom." (5:29)

The Rise of Cyrus

Cyrus II ("the Great," 559-530 B.C.) was the founder of the Achaemenid Persian Empire that continued for two centuries until the time of Alexander the Great (331 B.C.).

Cyrus' father, Cambyses I (600-559 B.C.), was king of Anshan, a region in eastern Elam. His mother was Mandane, a daughter of Astyages, king of Media (585 -550 B.C.) When Cambyses I died in 559 B.C., Cyrus inherited the throne of Anshan and, after unifying the Persian people, attacked his father-in-law, the weak and corrupt Astyages. The Median general Harpagus, whom Astyages had previously wronged, deserted the king and brought his army to the side of the young Cyrus. Astyages was soon captured and the Persians took the capital city of Ecbatana in 550 B.C. without a battle. (This was also to be the result at Babylon 11 years later.)

Cyrus succeeded in welding the Medes and Persians into a unified nation. Moving swiftly to the west, he absorbed all the Median territories as far as the Halys River in Asia Minor. When Croesus, the fabulously wealthy king of Lydia, refused to recognize the sovereignty of Medo-

Persia, Cyrus defeated him in battle and took over his empire in 546 B.C. Seven years later, he was ready to launch the great assault against Babylon itself.

Babylon was in no position to resist a Medo-Persian invasion in the year 539 B.C. During the preceding fourteen years, Nabonidus the king had not so much as visited the capital city, leaving the administration of the metropolis to his profligate son Beishazzar, to whom he also "entrusted the kingship." ("Verse Account of Nabonidus," Pritchard, Ancient Near Eastern Texts, 313.) Nabonidus further weakened the empire by incurring the displeasure of the powerful Babylonian priesthood.

Toward the end of September, the armies of Cyrus, under the able command of Ugbaru, district governor of Gutium, attacked Opis on the Tigris River and defeated the Babylonians. This gave the Persians control of the vast canal system of Babylon. On October 10, Sippar was taken without a battle and Nabonidus fled.

Two days later, on October 12, 539 B.C., Ugbaru's troops were able to enter Babylon without a battle. Herodotus describes how the Persians diverted the River Euphrates into a canal upriver so that the water level dropped "to the height of the middle of a man's thigh," which thus rendered the flood defenses useless and enabled the invaders to march through the river bed to enter by night. (Herodotus 1.191.) [Review Daniel Chapter 5.]

The Handwriting on the Wall

The Talmud suggests that the writing was vertical and backwards: MEN E, ME NE, TEKEL, PER ES.

Mene: numbered, reckoned. "God hath numbered thy kingdom and finished it." Your number is up.

Tekel: weighed. "Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting."

Peres: (rendered "upharsin": "u" is Aramaic for "and"; "pharsin" is the plural form of "peres.") broken, divided. "Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and the Persians." (By implying a different vowel, "paras" rather than "peres," it also appears to be a play on words: paras was the word for Persia.) God's Personal Letter to Cyrus Cyrus was able to boast that the conquest was almost bloodless with no significant damage to the city. Daniel (who lived at least until the third year of Cyrus) presented Cyrus with the writings of Isaiah (Josephus, Antiq. XI, i.2) that includes a letter addressed to Cyrus by name, written 150 years earlier: Isaiah 44:27 - 45:7.

The famous Steele of Cyrus: -

"...without any battle, he entered the town, sparing any calamity ...I returned to sacred cities on the other side of the Tigris, the sanctuaries of which have been ruins for a long

time... and established for them permanent sanctuaries. I also gathered all their former inhabitants and returned to them their habitations."

This cylinder, discovered by Hormuzd Rassam in the 19th century, can presently be seen in the British Museum in London.

The Jews were actually encouraged by Cyrus to return to Jerusalem and to rebuild their temple. (2 Chron. 36:22; Ezra 1:1-4.) Furthermore, he gave them back the vessels that Nebuchadnezzar had plundered from Solomon's Temple and he contributed financially to the construction of their second temple. About 50,000 Jews responded to this royal proclamation and returned to Jerusalem under the leadership of Zerubbabel.

A year later, on July 23, 537 B.C., the return of Jewish exiles under Zerubbabel got under way just seventy years after the captivity began just as Jeremiah had predicted. The foundations of the second Temple were laid by the spring of 536 B.C.

It was a successor, Artaxerxes I (465 - 423 B.C.) who issued the specific decree concerning the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. This decree is the trigger for one of the most remarkable prophecies in the Bible: the famous "Seventy Sevens" of Daniel 9.

The Decline

The Achaemenids

Cyrus claimed the title "King of Babylon" and made his son Cambyses to act as his viceroy in Babylon in 538 B.C. Things remained peaceful until his death in 522 B.C.

In the reign of Darius I (521-486 B.C.) a further return of exiles to Jerusalem was allowed. His rule did not go unchallenged and several local Babylonians controlled the city for varying periods, usually taking the throne-name of "Nebuchadnezzar" to bolster their claims. Thus Nidintu-Bel ("Nebuchadnezzar III") held sway October-December 522 B.C. Araka ("Nebuchadnezzar IV") was put to death November 27, 521 B.C.

Darius introduced a rigid royal control with local administrative reforms aimed at curbing corruption and establishing a courier system between Babylon and other capitals. He built himself a palace (Apadana), a house for his crown prince, and an arsenal.

In the fourth year of Xerxes (485-465 B.C.) the Babylonians made another attempt to gain their independence. Bel-shimanni and Shamash-eriba claimed the throne in 482 and this revolt was suppressed with much cruelty and damage to Babylon. On his visit in 460 B.C., Herodotus reported that the city was virtually intact, however.

Xerxes and his successors (Artaxerxes I - Darius III, 464-332) had little to spare for Babylon amid their lengthy and expensive wars with Greece. Irrigation work was neglected and the diversion of trade to the main Persian road from Sardis to Susa aided the decline of the city's influence.

The Rise of Greece

On October 1, 331 B.C. Alexander (III, "the Great") was welcomed by the Babylonians when he entered the city after his victory over the Medes at Gaugamela. He was acclaimed king and on his return from the east nine years later he planned extensive renovations including the creation of a port for the city large enough for 1000 warships. Though the site of Esagila was cleared, work ceased on Alexander's ambitious plans at his death in Babylon on June 13, 323 B.C.

The career of Alexander is detailed in Daniel 8. His successors, in Daniel 11.

His four key generals divided it among themselves: Cassander took over Greece and Macedonia; Lysimachus took Thrace and Bithynia; Seleucus took Syria, Babylonia, and portions all the way to India; Ptolemy took Egypt, Palestine, and Arabia.

The subsequent struggles among his generals did not leave the city unscathed. Seleucus, who claimed the title of king in 305 B.C. was acknowledged from 311 when all documents were dated by his "era." The foundation of a new rival capital city, Selucia, on the River Tigris, expedited the decline of the ancient metropolis.

The dispersal of Jews from Babylon is reported by Josephus. (Antiq. XVIII, ix 6-9.)

Atrophy and Decay

The city subsequently underwent a gradual decay, even though the ruins remained occupied.

Documents on clay from a school for priests indicates that the city continued at least until 100 A.D.

Early in the first century A.D. a colony of merchants from Palmyra brought brief prosperity, but they left about 75 A.D. (Garner, p 7-8.)

The city was visited by Trajan in 115 A.D. Babylon was first reported deserted by Septimus Severus 84 years later.

As recently as the 1800's the village of Hillah, containing over 10,000 inhabitants, stood on the site of ancient Babylon. (Rich, p.1 57.) In the late nineteenth century, the German archeologist Robert Koldewey conducted extensive studies at Babylon and the four Arab villages situated on the site. Babylon had been inhabited for some time even before his arrival.

The great prophecies concerning the city of Babylon in Isaiah chapters 13 and 14 and Jeremiah 50 and 51 have never been fulfilled.

The Destruction of Babylon

The Prophecies of Isaiah

In Isaiah 13 and 14, the destruction of Babylon is predicted. In vigorous terms, Isaiah describes how Babylon will be destroyed and then will never again be inhabited. This identifies the time of the destruction as that particular period known as the "Day of The Lord" that is mentioned throughout the scripture and is associated with the final day of God's vengeance. (Joel 2:10; Mal 4:5; Dan 12:1; Matt 24:21-22.) When God destroys Babylon, he will destroy all the evil in the world.

13:10 This exact imagery is used in Revelation 6 to describe the judgement of the Tribulation just before the Second Coming.

13:11-12 This startling idea parallels Matthew 24:21-22. We can't say that the world's population has been on the brink of annihilation before.

13:13 This clearly is yet future.

13:17 This reference to the Medes is one of the reasons why many have viewed this as referring to the events of 539 B.C. However, nothing prohibits the Medes from being involved in the future. The Medes were a people who occupied the mountainous area of northwestern Iran and northeastern Iraq, presently occupied by the Kurds today. They have been fighting Turkey, Iran, and Iraq in an attempt to establish their own independent country of Kurdistan. Hundreds of Kurdish women and children were the victims of Saddam Hussein's poison gas attacks in 1987 and 1988 and the hatred by the Medes for the Babylonians runs deep.

13:19 "The glory of the Babylonians' pride": not Rome, nor allegorical: literally, the Chaldeans' pride. Overthrown like Sodom and Gomorrah, that is, with "fire from heaven." This has yet to happen to Babylon.

13:20 After the Fall of Babylon under the Persians, it was inhabited, even by Alexander and subsequently.

Isaiah 14

14:1-2 It is also important to note that this judgement on Babylon will take place at a time when Israel is resettled in their own land from many nations. This cannot be applied to the fall of Babylon to the Persians, during which Israel was still in captivity and in exile from the land.

14:22-27 Clearly, this is part of God's climactic scenario as part of the "Day of the Lord" and is part of the final scenes at the end of the "Seventieth Week" of Daniel 9, and that is highlighted in Matthew 24 and Revelation 6 through 19.

The Prophecies of Jeremiah

50:1-3 Does the "nation from the north" refer to Magog or the Russians?

50:4 Again, the spiritual position of Israel is described.

50:9 Again, it appears to be an alliance of many nations that are coming against Babylon.

50:10-3 Again, the absence of subsequent habitation marks this event as yet future.

50:15 Again, the period of time is the "Day of Vengeance" of God, a time of climax described throughout the Scripture and yet future.

50:20 The repeated references to the forgiveness of Israel imply a time that is after the New Testament period alluded to in Romans 11:25. It certainly cannot be applied to Israel at the time of her return from the Babylonian captivity. (Zech 12:10; 13:1.)

50:40 A repeated comparison to the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah, which has never yet happened to Babylon.

50:41,46 A multinational force, not just the Persians.

51:7 A reading of the language clearly links this with Revelation 17 and 18.

51:26 Again, a reference to the non-reuse of remaining materials. When Robert Koldewey arrived in Babylon in the late 1800's, he found entire sections of the old city being mined for bricks. (Kodewey, p.168.)

51:45 Again, remarkably similar language as in Revelation 17 and 18. The destruction of Babylon predicted by both Isaiah and Jeremiah has never been fulfilled.

Revelation 17

Notice that the prostitute is not the beast, but rides the beast. She initially exploits the beast, but is eventually destroyed by him. (Rev. 17:16,17.)

The reference to the "cup" is another link with Jeremiah, et al.

Again, note the distinction between the Woman and the Beast.

Mystery Babylon as a false religious system is here identified with the city of Rome from the first century until this present hour. (Cf. Dave Hunt, *A Woman Rides the Beast*, Harvest House, 1994.)

Revelation 18

The destruction of Mystery Babylon continues in Chapter 18, with commercial as well as religious overtones. Notice that there are three groups that bemoan her fall: kings, merchants, and those who trade by sea. Notice that here are 28 literal commodities listed: perhaps this is to prevent us from allegorizing these references.

The clear references to Rome, in both religious and commercial terms, have caused most commentators to identify "Mystery Babylon" as the Roman religious system commingled with the emerging European Community. This allegorical view has overlooked the re-emergence of a literal city of Babylon as well.

Babylon Re-emerges? Zecharaiah 5:5-15

The strange vision in Zecharaiah 5 suggests that there will be an appropriate time when the commercial and religious power center of the Planet Earth will, once again, migrate back to its original site of the literal city of Babylon.

Note that the "ephah" and the "talent" were the standard commercial measures of volume and weight, respectively. The two carriers had the "wings of a stork" which is an unclean bird. The captive woman called "wickedness" may be a reference to the harlot of Revelation 17 and 18.

Babylon Today: "Nebuchadnezzar V"

Saddam Hussein was born in 1937 in the village of Tikrit, 100 miles north of Baghdad on the Tigris River. (About 800 years earlier, Saladin, the greatest Muslim warrior of the twelfth century, was born in the same village. It was Saladin's capture of Jerusalem in 1187 that resulted in the Third Crusade.) Saddam Hussein's exploits on behalf of the Baath Party became legend and when they seized control in 1968, Saddam Hussein, at the age of 31, became a leader in Iraq. A few weeks after becoming president of Iraq in 1979, he executed some of his closest friends and fellow members of the ruling Baath Party. Utter ruthlessness and brutality has continued in his grasp for power.

Saddam Hussein has spent over 20 years--60 million bricks, and over \$900 million—rebuilding the city of Babylon as a deliberate strategem to identify himself with the Nebuchadnezzar of old. Part of his strategy is to vigorously build his Babylonian identity to appeal to the entire Arab world to unite against Israel and the "infidel West."

Progress to date

Perhaps of greatest interest is the southern palace that includes Nebuchadnezzar's throne room where the famous "handwriting on the wall" took place in Daniel 5. This very large ceremonial room has been used for various state occasions over the past several years. It was used for major cultural ceremonies in fall of 1995.

A replica of the famed Ishtar Gate, the main Processional Way, the Ninmakh Temple, the Ishtar Temple and others are all in various stages of completion. Also being completed is the 4000 seat Greek Theatre (originally established during the reign of Alexander) as well as other facilities.