Introduction

This is our final lesson and session in the book of Jeremiah and I want to thank those of you that maybe have watched or participated in part of this. My prayer and my desire is that God maybe in some way through this has increased your love for the book of Jeremiah, but more importantly, that he has given you a deeper love and understanding of the God of the Prophets. That’s ultimately what this project and this goal is about. Our goal is not just to fill people with biblical information, but to help them know God in a deeper and fuller way.

I believe that the prophets help us to do that in a way that’s true of no other part of the canon. Every part of God’s word has a unique contribution to make to us and when we leave some part of God’s Word out we’re going to miss something about what God is revealing to us through that. So, many of us, as Christians, have missed a great deal by not listening to the Prophets. So it has been an honor to be a part of this for those of you that have went through all of it, you deserve some type of medal. But for those of you maybe that have just bits and pieces, I hope that it’s been helpful.

I want to follow up on our last lesson with a second lesson on “The Oracles Against the Nations,” and focus specifically on the judgment of Babylon in chapters 50 and 51. Before we get into those specific chapters, let me remind you of something that we talked about last time.

Prophecy and Us: Application

I think one of the problems with prophecy, and especially when we begin thinking about eschatology and prophecy about the end times, is that we often want to go to the prophets and find very detailed and specific information about end time events or about things that are going on in our political situation today.
We may seek almost kind of coded information that’s giving us insider truth on what’s going on. Sometimes it’s things simply to satisfy our curiosity, or sometimes a concern for things that are going on in the world that’s very general but that may be a misunderstanding of what the Bible is designed to convey to us. I do not believe that the prophets are designed to give us detailed and specific information about end time events. More of what the prophets do are reflect to us some general patterns and things that we can be certain of that God is doing in the future, that God has done in the past, and many times there are recurring patterns. What God has done in the past? How God has dealt with peoples and nations, and these nations in Jeremiah 46-51? How are they being judged? Why God judged them is paradigmatic for how God judges nations today; and also representative of the type of judgment that God is going to bring in the future. Similarly, the experiences that Israel had as the people of God are very much related to our experiences as Christians and believers today. Prophecy is there more to give us general patterns than it is to always give us specific information.

I remember back during the days of the Cold War, and even as a young person, hearing my first sermons and messages on biblical prophecy it was often titles like “The Coming War With Russia,” and how this war between Israel and Russia was prophesied in passages like the Gog of Magog passage in Ezekiel 38 and 39.

In 1999, as the pastor, I had the opportunity to teach the prophets in Moscow in a Bible Institute they had there. We got to the book of Ezekiel and then we got to Ezekiel 38. Before we had even gotten into the passage, one of the students who used to be a news commentator during the Soviet era said, “You know I’ve always wanted to ask an American pastor this question: ‘Why do you people always preach that we are Gog of Magog?’” So talking to them about that issue is an interesting reflection and an interesting perspective on the prophets. They were not all that happy about the association of Russia with Gog of Magog. Of course the real issue is: what does the text really say, not whether we like it or
not. But as I’ve studied those kinds of passages, as I’ve studied the prophets, as I’ve studied these oracles about things that are going to happen in the end times, they often are more there to give us general pictures or anchors that we can hold on to. So I don’t think Ezekiel 38-39 prophesies for us something as specific as a coming war with Russia.

But what the prophets do tell us is that there does appear to be in God’s plans an eschatological battle. There is going to be an assault on the nations that resembles what happened with Babylon and Judah in the days of Jeremiah. The nations are going to come again. God is going to use that eschatological battle to bring judgment both against the nations, and against the people of God. You can read about that battle in places like Ezekiel 38, Micah chapter 5, Joel chapter 3, Zephaniah chapter 3, Zechariah chapter 12, Zechariah 14, Revelation 16 and 19, as it talks about the Battle of Armageddon. But it is more to give us a general picture that God is going to execute judgment on the nations and on Israel. What prophecy is not designed to do is to give us a program with the numbers and the names of all of the players that are going to be there.

When I go to a baseball game I always appreciate teams that have the names of their players on the backs of their uniforms; it’s easier to recognize. But in prophecy the players generally do not have their names on the uniform. Even in a passage like the Gog of Magog passage in Ezekiel 38, there are specific nations that are mentioned as allies of this king who is named “Gog of Magog.” But I believe the nations there are simply representative of a worldwide coalition that, again, is going to attack God’s people in the last days and God will bring judgment on them. There are seven nations mentioned in that passage; they come from four directions on the compass. So instead of trying to specify for us, it is going to be these people and this group and the nations that live in this particular geographical area. If you don’t live in those geographical areas it doesn’t have much to say to us. But if the passage is picturing for us worldwide rebellion against God, and where human pride and the counter kingdom that man has set up in opposition to
God, where that is ultimately leading us, then it ultimately has something to say to every one of us.

The greatest thing that prophecy does and what it has to say about the judgment of nations, the salvation of God’s people is that it gives us an assurance that ultimately, as God’s People, God wins. We’re on the winning team. We are part of God’s Kingdom. Ultimately these empires are going to come and go. These nations are going to come and go. The counter kingdom that man has set up in opposition to God’s true kingdom is going to defy God, and is going to oppose and persecute God’s people until the very end. That battle is always there; the same thing that is going on in Jeremiah’s day. God ultimately wins.

Again I will apologize for one more sports illustration, and this will be the last one. Since we are on the last video I can make that a promise. But when I watch a video or a recording of a game where my favorite team is playing, if I know the outcome of that game, I don’t really get bothered if there is a fumble in the second quarter or if they are behind at half time because I know the eventual outcome. I believe that prophecy is designed give us an assurance of the eventual outcome and to say, “No matter what God’s people face, God is ultimately going to deliver them. God is ultimately going to judge and to destroy the wicked.”

Judgment of Babylon

As we come to Jeremiah chapters 50 and 51, we are focusing on the judgment of Babylon as the final part of the book of Jeremiah. As we talked about in the judgment of these other oracles against the nations, I believe that we are primarily talking about a judgment that occurred in history. We are talking about the judgment of the Neo-Babylonian Empire that was established by Nabopolassar and that Nebuchadnezzar was king over and that carried away the people of Judah in the exile. It is the judgment on that specific group of people.

This is not a coded eschatological message about something that is going to happen in the end times. But just like we talked about in the previous video, even though this is a judgment on a specific nation that lived a long time ago, there are
applications and implications of this passage that have huge significance for us as Christians today. It has applications and implications that help us to think about not just our relationship with God, but the world that we live in and where humanity is heading, and finally and ultimately where history itself is heading.

The judgment of Babylon in the book of Jeremiah is very important because this is going to be the thing that brings about the deliverance and the salvation of God’s people. Jeremiah’s message is that the Lord has had a plan; he has elevated Babylon, he has given Nebuchadnezzar hegemony and control over the nations and over Judah itself for a specific reason: to execute judgment on the people of Judah for their covenant unfaithfulness toward the Lord. The Lord directs nations and circumstances and political events and armies and all of those things. The Lord is sovereignly in control of that and the Lord used the Babylonians to judge the people of Judah, but the promise in 50 and 51, and this goes back to also what Jeremiah preaches in chapter 50, is that God is also going to judge Babylon and through that, he is going to bring about the salvation of his own people.

Israel’s Return

Here’s the promise that is given to Judah and to Israel at the beginning of this section on Babylon: the Lord says in chapter 50 verses 4 and 5, “In those days and in that time, declares the Lord, the people of Israel and the people of Judah shall come together, weeping as they come, and they shall seek the Lord their God.” So what we’re talking about here is the spiritual restoration of Israel, the renewal of that relationship to God; it is finally going to be at the place where it needs to be because the people repent and come to God and acknowledge their sin. This is the new covenant; this is the berit that we read about in Jeremiah 30 to 33.

It says, “They shall ask the way to Zion with faces turned toward it and saying, ‘Come let us join ourselves to the Lord in an everlasting covenant that will never be forgotten.’” In Jeremiah chapter 31, the Lord promises that he will make a new covenant with the people of Israel. Here it says the people initiate, and they
come to the Lord and make an everlasting covenant with him. That relationship is
going to be restored, but what ultimately is going to have to happen for that
relationship to be restored would have to happen in the days of Jeremiah for the
people to come back to the land is that God would have to deal with the
Babylonians and God would have to bring an end to this empire.

Chapter 51 verse 10 is going to say this “The Lord has brought about our
vindication, come, let us declare in Zion the work of the Lord our God.” So,
Babylon has been the enemy of Judah; they have attacked the people of God; the
Lord will ultimately vindicate his people. Whatever attacks, whatever oppression,
whatever persecution the people of God will go through, God ultimately will
vindicate them and deliver them. These empires come and go, as Daniel portrays,
but ultimately a great stone is going to crush them. That stone is God’s kingdom.

Judgment Reversal

So, there’s the promise in the judgment of Babylon of the ultimate
deliverance of God’s people. To bring about or to highlight this idea of reversal:
how that God is first going to use Babylon to judge Judah and then the Lord is
going to judge Babylon in order to save Israel. This complete reversal we see in
these judgment speeches against Babylon in chapters 50 and 51 is a direct reversal
of things that we have read about Judah in the earlier parts of the book. The
judgment that is described and portrayed as coming against Judah in the first part
of the book is described using even some of the same passages and terminology to
derive the judgment of Babylon.

So, let’s take a look at how this works. In the earlier parts of the book of
Jeremiah as God is bringing judgment against the people of Judah, he warns them
that a boiling pot is tilting out of the north and is about to scald them with this
burning liquid. It is a powerful description of an enemy army. In Jeremiah chapter
50 verses 3 and 9, now an enemy from the north is going to invade and to destroy
Babylon. Babylon was the enemy from the north who attacked Judah. There is
also going to be an enemy from the north that attacks Babylon. Jeremiah chapter
21 verses 1-5 pictures God as a warrior going out to fight holy war against the people of Judah. So, when the Babylonians come and they lay the siege against Jerusalem, Nebuchadnezzar is technically not the leader of the army; the Lord is. The Lord uses the series of “I will” verses in 21:1-5 to say, “it’s not just the Babylonians, it’s the Lord that’s fighting against you.”

Numbers of times in the book of Jeremiah the idea is the Lord has given Jerusalem into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar. In Jeremiah 50 and 51 what we have going on here is the Lord is leading a holy war against Babylon. The Lord says in: Jeremiah chapter 50 verses 25 and 27, “The Lord has opened his armory and has brought out the weapons of his wrath, for the Lord God of hosts, [Lord of armies] has a work to do in the land of the Chaldeans. Come against her from every quarter; open her granaries; pile her up like heaps of grain, and devote her to destruction, let nothing be left of her.” So, in the same way that God fought holy war against Judah, The Lord is about to fight holy war against Babylon.

In chapter 50 verses 41 to 43 there is a message that is delivered there against the daughter of Babylon. Ironic! She is even described as a young woman in the same way as Judah and Jerusalem, who were described as the daughter of Zion. So, what’s going to happen in the book of Jeremiah, in the early parts of the book, the daughter of Zion is going to be judged. In the second half of the book or in this last section here, it’s the daughter of Babylon who’s going to be destroyed. In Jeremiah chapter 50 verses 41 to 43, is a direct quotation of what we have in chapter 6 verses 22 to 24. Now the message is no longer about Judah; the message is about Babylon. Now, let me read the passage there: “Behold, a people comes from the north; a mighty nation and many kings are stirring from thefarthest parts of the earth. They lay hold of the bow and the spear, they are cruel and have no mercy. The sound of them is like the roaring of the sea; they ride on horses, arrayed is a man for battle against you, O daughter of Babylon.”

Now I’ve had sermons that I’ve tried to use before. Apparently, Jeremiah does the same and you know that message I preached against Jerusalem? That was
a good one. I’m going to bring it out and preach it against Babylon. Beyond a pastor simply recycling his sermon or a prophet recycling his sermon here, I think we have a theological message; the exact same kind of judgment that was brought against Judah at the beginning is going to be brought against Babylon at the end. There is absolute justice in what God does here. Babylon was used by God to carry out his purposes but that wasn’t Babylon’s intention. They weren’t there to do the will of the Lord; they were there to carry out their own, greedy plans to establish an empire and prophetic justice is going to demand that they receive the same thing back from God that they inflicted on Israel.

In the earlier parts of the book, in chapters 4 to 6, there are these pictures of an invading army that is coming into Judah and sometimes not even identified exactly who this army is. There are calls to the people in Jeremiah 4 to 6: Sound the trumpet, note the alarms, go inside the fortified cities and hide yourself, there’s an enemy army coming and they’re ferocious, you better watch out for them. Well, in chapter 51 verse 27, here is the message that’s given to Babylon: “Set up a standard on the earth; blow the trumpet among the nations; prepare the nations for war against her.” Now it’s Babylon that is having to sound the trumpet, get behind their fortified walls because now the invasion is against them.

Earlier in the book the warriors of Jerusalem are compared to women who are bending over in child labor because of the pain that they are going to experience. The promise or the warning in chapters 50 to 51 is that the warriors of Babylon are going to become like women in their fear. So God is going to bring about the execution of absolute justice.

Now we hear that, we read this, we know that that has historically taken place, but I want you to imagine the impact that this message must have had on the people of Judah themselves, or the exiles maybe who are living in Babylon and are living in the midst of this. Babylon is the greatest city in the world at that time.

Babylon is an empire; and for Jeremiah to stand there and say, “God is about to deliver this poor group of exiles and bring them back and reform them
and reestablish them into a nation, and, on the other hand, God is about to destroy the most powerful city and the world.” There’s an incredible surprise element. How in the world is the Lord ever going to bring this about? But the Lord is going to bring down a nation like Babylon even at the height of its power and we know that the Neo-Babylonian Empire didn’t last for very long.

   Babylon’s Walls

In several places in these oracles, Jeremiah is going to make mention of the walls and the fortification that surround the city of Babylon and I wanted to note a couple of these. Chapter 51 verse 53 says this: “Though Babylon should mount up to heaven,” and I can’t help but think of the tower of Babel in the book of Genesis “and though she should fortify her strong height, yet destroyers would come from me against her, declares the Lord,” Chapter 51 verse 58, also making reference to the walls of Babylon: “Thus says the Lord of armies. 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.” The fortifications and the defenses of Babylon are not going to protect them.

Now I was reading, in preparation for this lesson, a description of the fortifications of the city of Babylon during the time of Nebuchadnezzar in the Zondervan Illustrated Bible Background Commentary and they give this description. It says that “at the time of Nebuchadnezzar, the inner wall of the city of Babylon measured about 21 feet thick, and the outer wall measure about 12 feet in thickness. Along with that Nebuchadnezzar, is as a warrior and a conqueror in extra-biblical records. He’s portrayed as a builder and an innovator and a creator in that way. Nebuchadnezzar also had a protective moat dug around the wall and filled it with water. He advanced the security of the walls with a system of artificial lakes and flooded areas, that again would make it very difficult for an army to invade the city. The walls were fortified with a number of gates the Ishtar gate that you often see pictures of is the most famous example of that. You can see a model of that in the museum in Berlin. And there were 250 towers around that
wall. We’re talking about an impressive city.

Empires Passing Away

As an exile or maybe someone who would look from the outside the city of Babylon, How is God going to bring this about? How is God ever going to carry this off? It was an impressive city. You had Nebuchadnezzar’s hanging gardens inside the city, the temple of Etemenanki that was built to the Babylonian gods, the representations of the dragons, and the lions, and the bulls that represented the powerful gods of Babylon. How’s all this going to come down? God is going to make this happen. God is going to bring this about. What’s very interesting about all of this, when thinking about biblical prophecy? Within a few hundred years of the time of Jeremiah, the city of Babylon for all practical purposes had essentially ceased to exist.

In the second century AD Lucian makes this comment. He says “Nineveh has vanished without a trace and soon men will search in vain, even for Babylon.” So here’s this city, in that day and in that time, how is this ever going to happen? Within a few hundred years Babylon was forgotten. It’s a great warning to us. We think our nation is strong because of our military or our economic status or whatever yet within a few hundred years, we may no longer be standing.

There’s a description of the empires of the world, or the empires of the ancient near east at least, in Ezekiel chapter 32 and this is, to me, just one of the most chilling passages. It just makes you stop and think because it’s a passage that is announcing judgment on the Egyptians, and judgment on the Pharaoh. Again it is powerful nation, an empire; not the nation that it once was, but still a significant player. But at the end of this judgment against the Pharaoh and Egypt, the prophet says, “on that day the cedar went down to Sheol and caused mourning.” There’s this sadness over the fact that the king of Egypt is going down to Sheol. When the king of Egypt arrives in Sheol, it’s interesting to see what he discovers there. Chapter 32, verse 22, “Assyria is there and all of her company.” Verse 24: “Elam is there, in all her multitude around her grave.” Verse 26: “Meshech-Tubal is there
and all of her multitude.” One of the people that’s mentioned in the Magog passage in Ezekiel 38. Verse 29: “Edom is there, her kings and all of her princes, who for all of their might are laid with those who were killed by the sword.” Verse 30: “the princes of the north are there, all of them, and the Sidonians.” Verse 31: “When pharaoh sees them, he will at least be comforted” that they’re with him.

Now I heard last week about someone that’s writing a Texas Bible to update the Bible for Texans and using their idioms. You know, if we were to write an updated version of the book of Ezekiel, we could write out all of the nations and all of empires that have fallen in history and say, “they’re there with the Egyptians.” Someday, someone will write, “The United States is there with all of its multitudes.” So these passages may be historical judgments that God executed in the past, but they are a reminder of what is coming for the nations and what God is still doing in the present. God still judges nations, sometimes within history and ultimately all of them at the end of history.

In 1899, when the German archeologists who were doing the excavations on Babylon began their work, the whole city had become covered over and was practically undetectable. In fact, there were people, even at that time, who read about Nebuchadnezzar in the Bible and questioned whether or not he was a historical figure. This powerful nation is going to fall and its city seems immovable and inviolable, but when the judgment of God comes their walls are not going to protect them.

I’ve emphasized this point maybe enough but I want to say it one more time. This is a judgment in chapter 50 and 51 that describes something that has taken place in history. Again I do not believe that this is a coded eschatological message. This is the fall of the Neo-Babylonian Empire and the fall of Babylon and that empire and what it represented to Persians and to Cyrus in 538 BC.

Babylon’s Fall: Persians or Eschatological?

Now some people have questioned whether that’s an accurate way to describe or to portray what’s going on there and there’s a reason why that’s an
issue. As Jeremiah is describing the fall of Babylon here, the fall of the city is described in terms of an absolute destruction. The city’s going to fall, no one’s going to be left there, it’s going be turned into a heap of ruins a haunt of jackals and all these kinds of things. So some people have argued that the judgment of Babylon in the past couldn’t possibly be the complete fulfillment of what is described here. When Cyrus and the Persians captured the city of Babylon, they took it without a shot. In fact, many of the people that were living in Babylon at that time viewed the Persians as deliverers. So how can this passage that’s talking about this catastrophic judgment where the city’s going to be turned into a heap of ruins, no one’s going to be left there? How was that fulfilled by what happened in history?

So as a result of this and because of this destruction language that’s used with reference to Babylon here, many people have argued that what this passage is talking about is a rebuilding of Babylon and a destruction of Babylon that takes place in the end times. In Revelation 17 and 18 it’s also going to talk about the fall of Babylon the Great in connection with anti-Christ. So, many have taken this not to be a historical passage, but to be an eschatological passage. There were several popular treatments of Jeremiah 50 and 51 and other Old Testament prophecies back during the Gulf War and the conflict with Iraq. The idea was that the conflict between the United States and Saddam Hussein and everything that was going on at that time was a fulfillment of these passages in Jeremiah and Isaiah that talk about the destruction of Babylon. This is the prelude or this is the beginning of the end times and the last days.

Something that added fuel to this is that Saddam Hussein during his regime also made a decision that he was going to attempt to rebuild the ancient ruins of Babylon. He put inscriptions there as he was doing this and rebuilding the cities “This was built by Saddam Hussein the son of Nebuchadnezzar to glorify Iraq.” However Saddam Hussein’s plans were interrupted. So that idea that this was the beginning of the end times, was very popular during the time when Saddam
Hussein and was empowered while the Iraq war was going on. But I think there is a better explanation of the destruction language that is here. The destruction language here is portraying the fall of Babylon to the Persians in a way that we see throughout prophetic literature. These things about the city being left without inhabitants, its turning into a haunt of jackals and all those kinds of things. It’s curse language that is recurring throughout the ancient Near East. Often times when Kings would make covenant treaties with each other, they would pronounce these types of curses on each other: “If you don’t keep this covenant, may your city be turned into a haunt of ruins and may your body be consumed by the birds of the air.”

When God had made his covenant with Israel during the time of Moses, he had implemented the covenant curses that sound, in many ways, like these ancient Near Eastern curses. So, we have statements in Jeremiah 50 and 51 about the destruction of Babylon that read like this [chapter 50, verses 39 and 40] “Therefore, wild beasts shall dwell with hyenas in Babylon, and ostriches shall dwell in her. She shall never again have people, nor be inhabited for all generations.” Chapter 51 verse 37, listen to what it says there, “Babylon shall become a heap of ruins, the haunt of jackals, a horror and a hissing without inhabitant.”

Fall Description: Literal or Curse Language?

So, how can these types of descriptions be used to talk about what happened when Cyrus, basically without a shot, took the city of Babylon? The answer again is that the prophet is simply using the curse language of the ancient Near East that makes the fall of the Babylonian empire vivid. We do not necessarily expect to see, ostriches flying out of the hanging gardens of Babylon. This is simply covenant curse language. So the fulfillment of this prophecy was carried out by Cyrus and the Persians. The prophecy was essentially fulfilled even if it was not fulfilled in an absolutely literal way by the demise of the Neo-Babylonion Empire. That is what this passage is about.
It is important to remember that when you look elsewhere in the book of Jeremiah, the same type of curse language is used with reference to Jerusalem. We don’t always interpret that in an absolutely literal manner either. It says in Jeremiah chapter 9 verse 11, “no one will live in the city of Judah” Or “in the city of Jerusalem” or “in the cities of Judah”, I think’s what it says there. Jer 25:9 says, “Jerusalem will become an everlasting ruin.” That creates some problems in light of The Book of Consolation; it says that they are going to rebuild and return and restore their cities. So, it is curse language used to describe, in a vivid way, the destruction of Judah. Here in 50 and 51 this is curse language to describe in a vivid way the fall of ancient Babylon and the kingdom that was reigned over by Nebuchadnezzar.

In the book of Daniel, it tells us that there was one day that Nebuchadnezzar goes out and he looks at the city and he says, “Isn’t this Babylon, the great city that I have built with my own strength and my own power?” God ultimately humbles him about that, but God is also going to ultimately humble the Neo-Babylonian Empire completely by giving it over into the hands of the Persians. That is what Jeremiah 50 and 51 is about. We interpret Scripture in light of its surrounding historical context and in light of the literary conventions and language of that. I hope that helps us to understand that a little more effectively.

Application: Babylon as a Paradigm/Model

If that’s our approach to the book we might walk wistfully away from this saying, “We got another history lesson.” And interesting that all of this happened in Jeremiah’s day; it’s interesting what happened to Nebuchadnezzar and the Neo-Babylonian Empire, but so what! What does that mean to us? Well, as I begin to look at the name and the title and the place of Babylon I realized that, as I’m studying this in Scripture, Babylon in Scripture represents something more than just the ancient city. So I think there is an applicational significance to this. Even though this is not describing specific eschatological events, there is eschatological significance to this because the geographical place of Babylon, in fact, represents
something more than just a city.

I believe that if you go all the way back to Genesis, what Babylon represents in Scripture is that Babylon is a paradigm nation that reflects humanity, kings, kingdoms and rulers that stand in opposition to God and to God’s people. The ultimate enemy of Israel in the Old Testament is Babylon, as they take the people into captivity and destroy the temple. Babylon in that sense represents human opposition to God’s purposes. That goes all the way back to Genesis chapter 11 where Babylon is the place that the people gather together in defiance of the Lord’s command. They attempt to build a tower that reaches and stretches into the heavens. What they are doing there is they are setting up a counter kingdom; they are setting up an alternative form of religion where they can manipulate God in the way that they want. They are living in defiance of God.

God had made Adam his vice-regent, and Adam as the image of God would live under God’s rule. Adam rebelled against that and wanted to go outside of God’s rule and God’s dominion. The people in Babylon who build this tower in Genesis chapter 11, they represent that same kind of defiance toward God’s kingdom and God’s authority. Babylon is home base throughout the Old Testament for human opposition to God.

This idea about Babylon and the king of Babylon is also reflected in a taunt song about the king of Babylon that is found in Isaiah chapter 14. Here is the king of Babylon, in his hubris, in his pride, in his defiance against God, and remember that in these oracle against the nations, that is the primary reason why God is going to bring judgment. But listen to what the king of Babylon says and you get the idea that the king of Babylon is pretty impressed with himself. And here is his statement as he finally falls, here is how the people react to this. “How you are fallen from heaven, O day star, the son of dawn.”

Now many people have seen the fall of Satan being described here. In context, it’s the death of the king of Babylon, and he is the one who is like Venus. He was at the top of the skies, the morning star in the early morning, but when the
sun comes up after the dawn, he falls from the sky. That is the demise of the king of Babylon, but listen to his hubris: “You said in your heart, I will ascend into heaven above the stars of God, I will set my authority and my throne on high, I will sit on the mount of the assembly in the far reaches of the north,” and one of the reasons that people have seen Satan here is that this seems like someone that’s extra-human, but that’s what the king of Babylon thinks about himself. “I am godlike in my power, and I will set my throne up in the heavens, where I want I will def[y] God. I will defy his kingdom; I will ascend about the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the most high.” It is the same thing that Satan said to Adam, ‘eat the fruit and you will be like God.”

Here's what actually happens to the king of Babylon: "That you are brought to Sheol, to the far reaches of the pit. Those who see you will stare at you and they will ponder over you." So here's this guy who thinks that he's godlike, and he's going to sit in the divine assembly and make himself like the Most High God. What's going to happen to him? The problems with his pretensions to deity are that he is a man and he's ultimately going to die and go down to Sheol. In an almost humorous way, we have the descent of the king of Babylon to Sheol here in Isaiah 14. The other people and the rulers and the kings that are there. The king of Babylon was put there with his armies. They are surprised, "have you seen who showed up today?" It is almost like the police officer that shows up at the prison block. He has become one of them, "come to your place of royal dignity; we have a bed of maggots for you to lie down on for the rest of eternity." The passage starts out with him saying, “I will set my throne on high.” The passage ends with him going down to Sheol and lying down on his maggot bed. That's the pretension of Babylon; that's the hubris of humanity in rebellion against God.

In Daniel chapter 2, Daniel pictures history as the working at the time of the Gentiles involving four great empires: there are the Babylonians, the Medes/the Persians, the Greeks, and then a fourth empire that either represents Rome or some eschatological power or a combination of the two. At the end of
these four empires, the kingdom of God comes down like a mountain and will be there forever, and God's kingdom will be established permanently. These nations are there and they're here and then they're gone. They may appear to have great power but they will ultimately be destroyed. Babylon, in this passage, doesn't just represent one kingdom; it’s a reminder to what happens to all of humanity, and every human empire, every human kingdom that stands in defiance of God. It's paradigmatic of what God is going to do to every kingdom, to every empire that stands in opposition to him.

Jeremiah chapter 51 verses 34 and 35, again reflect, what does Babylon represent here? Some very interesting imagery is used to describe Nebuchadnezzar and his kingdom. The Lord says, Judah says, “Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, has devoured me, has crushed me. He has made me like an empty vessel. He has swallowed me like a monster. He has filled his stomach with my delicacies. He has rinsed me out.” So in this passage, Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian empire is described like the chaos monsters of the Old Testament. Like these monsters, like leviathan, and the sea monsters that God fights against, controls and subdues because they represent the forces of evil. I think what this ancient Near Eastern imagery is ultimately pointing to is the fact that these nations are inspired by the great dragon, Satan; the dragon that is described for us in Revelation chapter 12. Babylon is a depiction of that chaos monster that hates God; that opposes God, and God’s people. The Lord is ultimately going destroy all of these monsters.

In Daniel chapter 7, the final empire that rises out of the sea is not described as a man; it's described as a beast, as a hideous monster. That's really what human government becomes, and what this human counter-kingdom becomes. As it defies God, it seeks to establish its own power, the Lord will ultimately destroy that final power in the same way that he destroyed Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians.

I believe this representation of Babylon as the symbol and the paradigm of
evil carries over into the New Testament as well. As the early Christians and as the early church, as they’re engaged in a conflict with Rome, and Rome is persecuting the church. The early church comes to look at Rome as another embodiment of Babylon. I mean, they're not in the same geographical place, but they represent the same spiritual reality: nations, kingdoms, empires that defy God and persecute God's people.

So Babylon becomes paradigmatic of any nation that stands in opposition to God, and again as we assess where does America stand in all of this? There's not a specific reference to the United States anywhere in Scripture, but Peter Leithart again says, "we're somewhere between Babel and Beast." We're somewhere between those people that built that tower, defying God in Genesis chapter 11, and that beast that builds an empire at the end of time in Revelation as he goes out to wage war on the saints and on God's people. We're somewhere there. Rome in the first century was an embodiment of what Babylon was all about.

So 1 Peter 5:13, Peter as he is closing this book sends greetings and he says, "She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings and so does Mark my son." There's no evidence that Peter ever went to Babylon. So the reference here to Babylon is Peter in Rome and he makes reference to Rome as the city of Babylon. Why? Because there is a typology that goes on throughout Scripture. The Tower of Babel, Babylon is the seat of opposition against God. For Isaiah and Jeremiah, the Bablonians, are God's instrument. They hate God's people, they oppose, they persecute them. Revelation and in the New Testament, Rome is simply another embodiment of what Babylon represented.

So in Revelation 17 to 18, the final aspect of this is that Babylon the Great becomes the center of the kingdom of Anti-Christ. I'm thankful that I don't have to address all the interpretive issues that are in the Book of Revelation, and I'm glad I can leave that for someone else, but I believe that there are actually both historical and eschatological references there. Rome is a representation of what John is
speaking of there.

In Revelation 17:9, the city of Babylon is described as being a city that is on seven hills. That seems to be a representation of Rome, not of Babylon. But again, what we have being portrayed there is not just Rome, it is the opposition to God and God's people that will continue to the very end of time and that will ultimately culminate in the rebellion of the man of sin who would lead the world astray again.

So is there any relevance or significance to the historical lesson that we have about the judgment of Babylon in Jeremiah 50 and 51? Absolutely; it’s a representative of a conflict that wages itself throughout the entirety of Scripture: the counter kingdom of man versus the kingdom of God. Babylon represents that counter kingdom; God ultimately wins. All of those empires that stand in rebellion against God, Ezekiel chapter 31, all of them will ultimately go down to Sheol. So there's an incredible promise here given to God's people, that we're on the winning side.

Revelation and Jeremiah: Babylon and Jerusalem

Now I believe that the book of Revelation and the book of Jeremiah, as they speak of these two counter kingdoms. Again these are not just giving us eschatological information, but it's asking us to think about our lives and where do we align ourselves? In a symbolic way, let's not just think about Babylon and New Jerusalem in the book of Revelation as giving us eschatological information. Let's think about what those cities symbolically represent and where do we align ourselves.

Desmond Alexander, in his book From Eden to the New Jerusalem, writes this, he says, "The Babylon of Revelation is often taken to be a cipher for Rome: the greatest city or the great city in the first century AD. There's no doubt that Rome is included within the image of Babylon. However, Babylon as a symbol should not be restricted to the capital of the Roman Empire because it represents and embodies what human beings strive after when they are separated from God.
Babylon is the antithesis of the city that God himself desires to construct upon the earth.

He goes on to say later on the next page, "In Revelation, the city of Babylon symbolizes humanity's obsession with wealth and power, which becomes a substitute for knowing God. History witnesses to the ongoing existence of Babylon, as one nation after another has used its power to grow rich at the expense of others. We live in a world where economic power dominates national and international politics."

James Resseguie, in his commentary on *Revelation, a Narrative Commentary*, says something very similar about Babylon and new Jerusalem in his commentary as well. Let me read just a couple of quotes there and we'll tie this all together. "The two cities, Babylon and new Jerusalem, are symbolic. The new Jerusalem is the ideal city, the city of God, the new promise land. The other symbol, Babylon, is the satanic parody of Jerusalem. Babylon looks like Rome with its seven mountains, claims divinity, blasphemous names are plastered on its throne, the scarlet beast. Yet Babylon is more than the imperial city. It is Babylon, the ancient city of Israel's exile and alienation. It is Sodom, and a symbol of wickedness."

He goes on to say: "Babylon and Jerusalem represent the two choices of the Apocalypse. Babylon, the city of this world, the place of exile and alienation for Christians, is the spiritual capital for those who are earthbound, whose point of view is from below, and from this world. The earthbound includes not only those outside the church, but also those within it. Babylon is where the inhabitants of the world dwell and the followers of the beast make their throne, and make their home. Yet Babylon is not only the home of the earth's inhabitants. It is also where, in this present evil age, Christians live, although it cannot be called their home. In John's world, Christians are exiled to Babylon. Thus, John calls Christians to come out of Babylon and not to take part in her sins."
Warning to America

So I believe there's an eschatological message in all of this. There's a warning to America. There's a warning to every nation in the world. What happens to nations like Babylon? They will ultimately be destroyed, but there's a practical application for all of us even as individuals now. Where do we align ourselves? Do we live in the sphere of this world and love this world and live with the values and thoughts and world system that reflects Babylon, or do we live with the values and the kingdom priorities that reflect the new Jerusalem? Just kind of a practical, personal application of all this, but God's message in Jeremiah 46-51 is that God was going to judge the nations of the earth. God was going to judge the nations of Jeremiah's day, and it's a message for the nations that come after them as well. It may not be Scripture directly to us, but it is Scripture that ultimately is applicable to us.

Promise, Hope, and Restoration

Now if that's all we had in Jeremiah 46-51, I think we'd hear an important message, but one that's pretty depressing. The nations are coming under God's judgment, but in the last couple of minutes that I have, this is my last shot to teach you anything out of the book of Jeremiah. There's also, incredibly, in the midst of these messages of judgment, there is also a promise that is given to certain of these nations. Now, there is no hope given to Babylon here, but in Jeremiah chapter 48 verse 47 it says this, and it is just interesting to note this passage. After God judges the Moabites, who had been rivals of Israel for a long time, the Lord says this: "Yet I will restore the fortunes of Moab and in the latter days, declares the Lord." Thus far is the judgment on Moab." God says after I've judged the Moabites I'm going to restore their fortunes; I'm going to shuv shevut. I'm going to do the same thing for those pagan people that I did for my people.

Chapter 49 verse 6: the Ammonites, and remember, they had encroached on Israel's territory and that's why they were being judged, but at the end of this passage on the Ammonites in chapter 49 verse 6 the Lord says: "But afterward, I
will shuv [return]. I will restore the fortune of the Ammonites. declares the Lord." Chapter 49 verse 39 the Lord says this: "But in the latter days, I will restore the fortunes of Elam. declares the Lord."

Now, we don't know the specific reasons. Why does God say that he's going to restore the fortunes of some of these people and not of the others? Again, I'm not sure. It's making a distinction between specific groups of people. I think it's simply reflecting that even when God carries out his judgment on the nations of the earth, his ultimate plan and his ultimate design is to bring people from those nations into the kingdom of God. They will have their fortunes restored as they come to know Israel's Messiah - as God does his great work for Israel in restoring their fortunes. The Lord is going to do absolutely the same for the nations that surround them; they are going to be included in God's kingdom.

There's one last passage that I want us to look at in Jeremiah that I think reflects exactly the same idea. God has plans of salvation for the nations that are just like the plans and the designs and the intentions that he has for the people of Israel. Missions, in the Bible, does not begin with the Great Commission in Matthew 28. Missionary endeavor does not begin with Acts 1:8 in God sending his people out to be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth. Missions begins with Genesis chapter 12. "Through you I will bless all nations on earth." To the prophets, as they talk about the restoration of Israel, they are also going to talk about the restoration of the nations.

One of the great missionary passages in all of the Old Testament that we will use to close our study of the book of Jeremiah is found for us in Jeremiah chapter 12 verses 14-17. Listen to this passage: "Thus says the Lord, concerning all of my evil neighbors who touch the heritage that I have given my people, Israel to inherit, 'Behold, I will pluck them up from their land, and I will pluck up the house of Judah from among them..." What's God going to do to the house of Judah? He's going to pluck them up, overturn, destroy; those are the verbs that describe that work of judgment. God is going to do the same thing to the nations,
but here's the promise: "…After I have plucked them up, I will again have compassion on them…" And that verse doesn't just talk about Judah, it's talking about the nations. "And I will bring them again each to his inheritance, and each to his land. And it shall come to pass that if they will diligently learn the ways of My people, to swear by my name as the Lord lives even as they taught my people to swear by Baal, then they shall be built up in the midst of my people."

Again, the same words that are used to describe the salvation of Israel, to plant and to build, describe the nations as well. An amazing thing is God's salvation even extends to the Canaanites, who taught the Israelites to swear by Baal. The people that were supposed to have been destroyed when the Israelites came into the promised land, even they get in on the blessings of salvation. This is a reminder to us that God is ultimately going to build his kingdom from every tribe, every nation, every people group, and for the people of Israel that kingdom was going to include people and nations that they would have never envisioned ever coming under the sphere of God's blessing.

Jeremiah, what a great book and what a powerful book. It's been an honor to be able to teach it and to be involved in this video series, but Jeremiah is a prophet of both judgment and salvation and that judgment is for Israel and for the people of Judah, and that salvation is for the people of Israel and Judah as well. But God's judgment and God’s salvation are for the nations, and that's why the book of Jeremiah continues to speak to us and why it continues to have a powerful message that's relevant and applicable to us today, just as it was in the context in which it was first given. Thank you again for being with us and being a part of this study.

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