

1. Outline

- a. Background
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2. Passage: Isaiah 21:1-10

The burden against the Wilderness of the Sea. As whirlwinds in the South pass through, So it comes from the desert, from a terrible land. A distressing vision is declared to me; The treacherous dealer deals treacherously, And the plunderer plunders. Go up, O Elam! Besiege, O Media! All its sighing I have made to cease. Therefore my loins are filled with pain; Pangs have taken hold of me, like the pangs of a woman in labor. I was distressed when I heard it; I was dismayed when I saw it. My heart wavered, fearfulness frightened me; The night for which I longed He turned into fear for me. Prepare the table, Set a watchman in the tower, Eat and drink. Arise, you princes, Anoint the shield! For thus has the Lord said to me: "Go, set a watchman, Let him declare what he sees." And he saw a chariot with a pair of horsemen, A chariot of donkeys, and a chariot of camels, And he listened earnestly with great care. Then he cried, "A lion, my Lord! I stand continually on the watchtower in the daytime; I have sat at my post every night. And look, here comes a chariot of men with a pair of horsemen!" Then he answered and said, "Babylon is fallen, is fallen! And all the carved images of her gods He has broken to the ground." Oh, my threshing and the grain of my floor! That which I have heard from the Lord of hosts, The God of Israel, I have declared to you.

3. Background

- a. Babylon
 - i. **Babel** was first founded by Nimrod (**Genesis 10:10**).
 - ii. In **Genesis 11:1-9** we see the people attempt to build the Tower of Babel, likely a ziggurat known for their temples at the top of them.
 1. Likely a spot for pagan/occultic rites
 2. The **Great Ziggurat of Nanna at Ur** as constructed during the reign of Ur-nammu (2113-2095 B.C.) and measured 150 x 200 ft at the base, reaching to a height of 80 ft. with a temple at the top
 3. The invention of mud bricks and "bitumen for mortar" (**Genesis 10:3**) enabled the creation of this ancient structure.
 - iii. **Babylon** rose again in the 18th century B.C. under the reign of Hammurabi (1792-1750 B.C.) and he united most of Mesopotamia under his rule via conquest, finally consolidating his rule in 1763 after an attack against Larsa and capture of its king, Rimsin.
 1. Also known for the "Code of Hammurabi."
 - iv. Babylon began a decline after Hammurabi, and by 1595 the last king of Babylon (Shamshuditana) was defeated by the Hittites under Mursilis I.
 - v. Babylon was destroyed under Sennacherib but rebuilt under his son, Esarhaddon (681-669 B.C.).
 - vi. During the reign of Ashurbanipal II at Ninevah, his brother, Shamash-shumukin, the king of Babylon rebelled. And although Babylon was

defeated, this marked the beginning of a period of extended Assyrian military engagement that weakened the empire.

- vii. In 626, Nabopolassar is king of **Babylon** and goes to war against Assyria. In combination with Median aggressions, they were finally able to destroy Nineveh in 612.
 - 1. In 605, the son of Nabopolassar, Nebuchadnezzar, and general of the army, engaged the Egyptians at their fortress of Carchemish on the Euphrates. He won, and with Assyria recently fallen and Egypt removed as the dominant power, Babylon was left as master of the region.
- viii. In 586, Babylon finally destroys Jerusalem after three sieges and deports prisoners to elsewhere in the empire.
- ix. The city of Babylon reached its peak under Nebuchadnezzar, was massive, had large walls and fortifications, the Euphrates flowed through it and fed a moat, which was dried up in the assault on the city.
 - 1. Covered an area of about 4 square miles and was the largest city in the world at that time.
- b. **Cyrus II The Great** (r. 559-530 B.C.)
 - i. Founded the Achaemenid Persian Empire which lasted until its conquest by Alexander in 331 B.C.
 - 1. Originally started as a vassal of the Medes, but rebelled against them in 550 B.C.
 - ii. Father was Cambyses I (r. 600-559 B.C.). He was the king of Anshan in eastern Elam.
 - iii. Mother was the daughter of the King of Media, Astyages (r. 585-550 B.C.)
 - iv. When his father died, Cyrus inherited the throne and eventually unified the Persian people who later attacked a weakened and corrupt Astyages.
 - 1. Aided by the defection of the Median general, Harpagus, who was wronged by Astyages. This also brought the army of Harpagus.
 - v. Astyages was captured and the capital of Ecbatana was captured without a battle in 550 B.C.
 - vi. **Cyrus** united the Medes and the Persians and expanded westward, finally meeting the wealthy King of Lydia (Croesus) who refused to submit to Cyrus. Cyrus defeated him in battle and took the vast wealth of Lydia in 546 B.C.
- c. Cyrus met the Babylonian army at Opis and defeated them in 539 before going into the city. There the city was spared and generally treated well, but it was clear that he was now the ruler.
 - i. It is important to note that the various cults and religious rites were not interrupted and were even encouraged.
 - ii. It was part of this policy the Cyrus released the Jews to go back to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple (**2 Chronicles 36:22-23**).
 - iii. When Cyrus died, he had the following inscription on his tomb, "O man, whosoever you are, and from wherever you come, for you will come, I know, I am Cyrus, who founded the Persian Empire. Grudge me not therefore this little earth that covers my body."

Isaiah 45:1-7: “Thus says the Lord to His anointed, To Cyrus, whose right hand I have held— To subdue nations before him And loose the armor of kings, To open before him the double doors, So that the gates will not be shut: ‘I will go before you And make the crooked places straight; I will break in pieces the gates of bronze And cut the bars of iron. I will give you the treasures of darkness And hidden riches of secret places, That you may know that I, the Lord, Who call you by your name, Am the God of Israel. For Jacob My servant’s sake, And Israel My elect, I have even called you by your name; I have named you, though you have not known Me. I am the Lord, and there is no other; There is no God besides Me. I will gird you, though you have not known Me, That they may know from the rising of the sun to its setting That there is none besides Me. I am the Lord, and there is no other; I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity; I, the Lord, do all these things.’

a. Conquest of Babylon

iv. The Median general Gobryas altered the flow of the Euphrates with the dams upstream and marched his army across the riverbed and under the city walls.

1. The city was taken by surprise and without a battle (again). Herodotus records that this happened so fast that one side of the city did not even know that anything had happened.

b. **The Feast of Belshazzar (Daniel 5)**

v. Belshazzar was the king at this time, along with his father, Naobidus who was off on various intrigues and foreign matters.

vi. Held a great feast to celebrate what they thought would be a victory.

1. The walls of Babylon were considered impregnable by all contemporary methods.
2. See also **Psalm 20:7**

vii. At this feast, he brought out the vessels from the Temple and used them as part of the festivities. (**Daniel 5:4**)

1. This angered God, especially because these were being used as part of the pagan practices of that time.

viii. Handwriting on the wall

1. Everyone is scared but does not know what is being said.
2. The queen (queen mother, really) has Daniel brought in to interpret the writing.

ix. Daniel gives a lesson in kingship and the power of God (**Daniel 5:17-23**) See also **Acts 17:26**.

x. Daniel interprets the writing

1. MENE = God has numbered your kingdom, and finished it.
2. TEKEL = You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting.
3. UPHARSIN/PERES = Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians
 - a. ““Upharsin”: conjunction + Aramaic plural of Peres.”
 - b. This is a pun of the word for the Persians and the word for divided (perez)

4. **Why could no one else read it?**

- a. Talmudic tradition is that it was written vertically and backwards, while other ancient traditions assume that it was encrypted with an Atbash cypher
- b. Daniel was blessed by God with understanding of these things

4. What is this about?

- a. Local meaning and future meaning in many prophecies. Used to verify that what a prophet said was true. See also **Deuteronomy 13:1-5**.

b. Local Meaning

- i. This is a prophecy regarding the fall of Babylon at the hands of the Medes and Persians (**v. 2**).
 - 1. Per JFB, “chariot, etc.--rather, "a body of riders," namely, some riding in pairs on horses (literally, "pairs of horsemen," that is, two abreast)”
- ii. Isaiah takes the position of a watchman who narrates the events he sees (**v. 6**), both the coming invasion (**v. 9**) and the Feast that is happening at the time (**v. 5**).
 - 1. Note that Babylon had two kings at this time, Naobidus, who was largely involved in foreign policy and diplomacy and thus would not have been physically at Babylon when it fell, and Belshazzar who was involved in domestic matters in Babylon
 - 2. This is why Daniel could be offered a “third” of the kingdom (**Daniel 5:29**).
 - a. This also helps prove not only the date of **Daniel**, but the fact that it had to be written by an eyewitness, because the split kingdom was not known to history for a very long time, and was, in times past, used as a means of discrediting the Bible until archeological evidence proved that the Biblical account was correct.

c. Future Meaning

- i. **V. 19** is quoted in **Revelation 14:8** and **Revelation 18:2** in reference to Mystery Babylon.
 - 1. So, there is clearly more going on here.
- ii. Some claim that this is a reference to the Persians not liking idolatrous practices and seeing them as foolish and, thus breaking the idols, but that does not fit the historical record of what Cyrus did. He did the opposite.
- iii. Nor does it fit with their general policy of tolerance towards conquered peoples.
- iv. Need to understand **Isaiah 13-14**, **Jeremiah 50-51**, and **Revelation 18-19** to understand Mystery Babylon and what is going on there.
 - 1. **Isaiah 13:8** describes the fall of Babylon as being like the birthing pains of a woman, an idiom commonly used of the Great Tribulation.
 - 2. **Isaiah 13:10** speaks of the stars not giving their light, which aligns with **Revelation 8:12**.

3. **Isaiah 13:11-16** speaks of a worldwide judgment that kills many people.
 - a. The following verses have a local meaning that refers specifically to the Medes, but later in **v. 19** we see that the city of Babylon will be overthrown like Sodom and Gomorrah, and in **v. 20** that it will never be inhabited again.
 - b. Babylon remained as a great metropolis for many centuries after the Persian conquest, it was not overthrown never to be inhabited again.
 - i. Cyrus walked into it, Alexander was set to make it his capital before he died there, it survived under Parthian and Sassanid rule and was able to keep a distinct people-group and culture and it was the seat of the Bishop of the Church of the East until after the Islamic conquests, and it was not until the 13th century that the Arab scholar, al-Qazwini described Babylon as a small village.
 - ii. It was not overthrown in a single night/moment/event.
4. **Isaiah 13:19** we see all of this referred to as “the beauty of the Chaldeans’ pride”. Thus, this is literally Babylon, in some capacity.
5. **Jeremiah 50:4** we see the prophetic phrase, “in those days,” which is a reference to the period after the Rapture of the Church.
6. **Jeremiah 50:5** we have Israel making a covenant with God, which did not happen after the return from Babylon, or if it did, it was clearly broken, which does not seem to be the intent of this passage.
7. **Jeremiah 50:9** we have nations coming from “the north country,” but the Medes and Persians were to the East of Babylon.
8. **Jeremiah 50:13** we see that people will be astonished at the destruction of Babylon, but this has not happened yet. Babylon was inhabited for many centuries after the conquest by Cyrus, and when people go there today, the reaction is of scholarly intrigue, not horror.
9. **Jeremiah 50:14** God is instructing the nations to destroy Babylon and pay her back for all the iniquity that she has done and spread. This language is similar in scope and idea to that found in **Revelation 17:15-18**.
10. **Jeremiah 50:25-26** God identifies specifically the “land of the Chaldeans” and says that they will be attacked from the “farthest border,” i.e., from all over the earth. This was not fulfilled in the time of Cyrus, as the Medes and Persians were right next door.
11. **Jeremiah 50:40** God says that the destruction of Babylon will be like Sodom and Gomorrah which, again, did not happen with Cyrus.

12. **Jeremiah 50:41** God says that many kings will come from the north. While Media-Persia had more than one king (sort of) it was really under Cyrus/Darius, and that is hardly many kings. This could also align with **Revelation 17:16** where the kings turn on Mystery Babylon.
13. **Jeremiah 50:45** God again declares that this is Babylon, in “the land of the Chaldeans.”
14. **Jeremiah 51:7** is similar to **Revelation 18:2-6** where Babylon has a cup and is drunk with iniquities.
15. **Jeremiah 51:8** refers to a sudden destruction of Babylon. Babylon was suddenly seized by Cyrus, but it was not destroyed. However, in **Revelation 18:10** we see the destruction of Babylon in “one hour.”
16. **Jeremiah 5:29** speaks of Babylon being “desolate without an inhabitant,” which did not happen with Cyrus.
17. **Jeremiah 51:47** says that God will “bring judgment on the carved images of Babylon,” and yet the Babylonian system was not destroyed there and, in many respects, lies on to this day, it just has different names and forms.
18. **Jeremiah 51:54** again confirms that these things will take place in a literal Babylon “from the land of the Chaldeans.”
- v. The “thrashing floor” is often used as a type or symbol of the Great Tribulation in Scripture (**Isaiah 21:10, Jeremiah 51:33, Hosea 13:3, Micah 4:12, Matthew 3:12, Luke 3:17**).
 1. If this is the case, then it is worth noting that during the harvest, Ruth was at the feet of Boaz (**Ruth 3**).
- vi. Based on all this, it is my personal belief that, just as Babylon has risen before in the past to great heights, so too it will again, and it will be a literal place in what we today call Iraq.
 1. But that is not all, there is more too it than that.

5. What is Babylon all about/Mystery Babylon

- a. Babylon is referred to specifically as “The beauty of the Chaldeans’ pride” in **Isaiah 13:19** which is a very real, literal, place and description, not a metaphorical thing (as we have already discussed).
- b. Some people like to draw a distinction between the “Ecclesiastical Babylon” in **Revelation 17** and the “Commercial Babylon” in **Revelation 18**.
 - i. While there is some merit to this idea, I personally think there is much more to it than that, and that they are linked and part of the same whole; they are parts of the same world system.
- c. In **Zechariah 5:6-11** we have a really weird vision.
 - i. The key point is that “Wickedness” is going to literal Babylon, it is in the “land of Shinar.”
 - ii. If we understand pagan history correctly, this is that religious system returning to its place of origin.
- d. In **Revelation 17-18** we are given more clues as to what is going on.

- i. The Beast and the woman are not the same thing, they are separate, and the Beast will eventually turn on the woman.
- ii. Not just a harlot (spiritually), but is the Mother of Harlots, i.e., the originator of these false religious systems.
- iii. Led people into this false system of worship.
- iv. Had power over kings.
- v. Persecutor of Christians.
- vi. Built on Seven Hills and is a great city.
- vii. Many people stop here and see this as the Roman Catholic Church.
 - 1. There is some merit to this, but it misses some key details.
 - 2. They may be a harlot, but they are not the originator of such practices. They merely inherited that system from the Greeks, who in turn got it from the Babylonian priests that fled from the Persians.
 - 3. Thus, we can see the significance of **Zechariah's** vision and the return of that system to its point of origin. **See Zechariah 5:5-11.**
- e. Instead of being limited to just the Catholic Church (though that is likely part of it), this is the totality of paganism and/or false religion and worship united in opposition to God under a single, united banner.
 - i. The Catholic Church has done much over the last few decades to position itself to lead this system.
- f. But there is an economic aspect to this as well.
 - i. This is easy to see as we become a more globalized society due to economic, political, and technological realities which surround us.
 - ii. Historically, the idea that an economic system could be controlled from a single city is nothing new. The current center of global finance is New York due to the influx of wealth from the World Wars. Prior to this, that center was in London.
 - iii. There are many underlying issues with the current financial and monetary system, and many of those can be solved with a CBDC (Central Bank Digital Currency).
 - iv. This is not a simple process, and it would take a dynamic and powerful leader to make it happen (like the First Beast of **Revelation 13**).
 - v. From Eswar S. Prasad's, *The Future of Money* (2021), "The era of cash is drawing to an end and that of central bank digital currency has begun. Money, banking, and finance are on the verge of transformation. Physical money is slated to become a relic, with digital payment systems becoming the norm around the world. Banking is going to change as other forms of financial intermediation gain prominence. Much of the world's population will gain access to at least basic financial services, improving lives and economic fortunes." p. 354
 - vi. It is worth noting that any Central Bank or government would want to control that money and ensure that it cannot be counterfeited or misused, thus, a digital ledger is helpful in that regard. A government, were it so inclined, could also add flags to each piece of digital currency to ensure that it is only used to buy certain items (this is already done with Food

Stamps), or they could even directly remove funds from an account as a means of raising funds or attempting to stimulate the economy.

1. Capitalism has been described as democracy where you vote with your money.
- vii. All that is to say that what we see in **Revelation** where people can only buy and sell with the Mark of the Beast, that all seems plausible and technological feasible, as much of that technology already exists. All that is required is the necessary set of events to push this possibility forward.
- g. Worth pointing out that the world of the End Times is a globalized and interconnected one, not necessarily one of a single political union.
 - i. Some feel that the Beast does not have control over the area of Petra due to **Mark 13:14**.
 1. He also does not control the area of Edom, Moab, and Ammon (**Daniel 11:42**), what we would think of as Jordan today.
 - ii. Africa beyond Egypt, Ethiopia, and Libya is a dubious thing, given that he invades it and has to turn around at some point (**Daniel 11:44**).
 - iii. China/East Asia does not look like it is part of a political union (**Daniel 11:44**, see also **Revelation 16:12** as a possible cross-reference).
 1. **Chinese Belt and Road Initiative**
- h. In sum, we have a return of a literally Babylonian city in Shinar (Iraq) which economically controls the world, has political dominion over much of it and widespread influence everywhere in the form of a world religion that supports the First Beast, but will ultimately be destroyed.

6. What does this mean for us?

- a. We are told to “come out” of Babylon (**Jeremiah 51:45, Revelation 18:4**).
 - i. We are to have a light touch with the world and the things of it.
 - ii. Do not get too wrapped up in things here and now because they will all fall away. **Read Hebrews 1:10-12**.
- b. No matter how powerful something or someone is, they cannot stand up to God.
 - i. The Antichrist will be the most powerful man on earth in the history of the world and have the power and authority of satan (**Revelation 13:2**), and yet it is nothing for Christ to do away with Him and all his armies (**Revelation 19:19-21**).
 - ii. We are behind Him when this happens (**Revelation 19:14**).
- c. God does judge (**1 Peter 3:9**)
 - i. He judges people, nations, and the whole world.
 - ii. The history of Israel is proof of His judgement.
 - iii. The lack of a present judgment is not proof of no judgment, but rather is a demonstration of God’s longsuffering.
- d. The world has many problems, and people are starting to realize more and more that the solutions to those problems are centralized control on a global scale.
 - i. But this only sets the stage for the End Times Scenario.
 1. Many of the systems currently in the world will be co-opted to form the system of the Beast. While those that made those systems, I do not think, did not know what they were doing (though some might have), it is a simple matter to see the systems

in place and understand how they can impact the End Times Scenario.

- ii. It also shows that even with all the creative energies and genius of man, we still cannot actually solve our problems. Only God can.
- iii. One could look at all of human progress and technology as a means of trying to reverse the effects of the Curse.
- e. The world is dying and will fall away (**Revelation 21:1**), so we should have a very light touch on the world and not get too attached to it.
 - i. This is why we should always be looking for our Coming King.

From **Paul Valery's**, *Crisis of Mind* (1919), "We later civilizations... we too know that we are mortal. We had long heard tell of whole worlds that had vanished, of empires sunk without a trace, gone down with all their men and all their machines into the unexplorable depths of the centuries, with their gods and their laws, their academies and their sciences pure and applied, their grammars and their dictionaries, their Classics, their Romantics, and their Symbolists, their critics and the critics of their critics.... We were aware that the visible earth is made of ashes, and that ashes signify something. Through the obscure depths of history we could make out the phantoms of great ships laden with riches and intellect; we could not count them. But the disasters that had sent them down were, after all, none of our affair. Elam, Ninevah, Babylon were but beautiful vague names, and the total ruin of those worlds had as little significance for us as their very existence. But France, England, Russia...these too would be beautiful names. *Lusitania* too, is a beautiful name. And we see now that the abyss of history is deep enough to hold us all. We are aware that a civilization has the same fragility as a life. The circumstances that could send the works of Keats and Baudelaire to join the works of Menander are no longer inconceivable; they are in the newspapers. That is not all. The searing lesson is more complete still. It was not enough for our generation to learn from its own experience how the most beautiful things and the most ancient, the most formidable and the best ordered, can perish *by accident*; in the realm of thought, feeling, and common sense, we witnessed extraordinary phenomena: paradox suddenly become fact, and obvious fact brutally believed. I shall cite but one example: the great virtues of the German peoples have begotten more evils, than idleness ever bred vices. With our own eyes, we have seen conscientious labor, the most solid learning, the most serious discipline and application adapted to appalling ends."

Questions

7. We have seen in this passage that God is in control of everything. Is there anything in your life that you feel is out of control, and how can you give that to God?
8. Given that everything on earth will eventually be destroyed, how do you treat the things and people around you?
9. How do we have a light touch with the world, while still 'running the race with endurance' as we are told in Hebrews?
10. What is your relation to the world system; are there things that you need to be separated from, are there things interfering with your Walk with Christ?
11. Has God ever judged you, and what was the
12. As we see prophecy unfold before us, how does that make you feel, and why?
13. Many Christians have an instinctive negative reaction to the march of globalism in the world because they see that this is a precursor to the End Times. If this is going to happen anyway, then why fight it?