

Segment 5: Isaiah 47 and 48

Babylon

Isaiah 47:1

Parallel phrase

“Come down and sit in the dust, o virgin daughter of Babylon”

Sit on the ground without a throne, O daughter of the Chaldeans”

Chaldea is the southern area of this region, near the Persian Gulf. Often, Chaldea and Babylon are used interchangeably to describe this kingdom.

Phrase “daughter of Babylon”, “daughter of the Chaldeans”, is a personification of Babylon and its inhabitants.

Sit on the ground , in the dust, without a throne. – A sign of mourning, a loss of power or prestige.

Isaiah 47:5-7 – Queen of the kingdoms.

Isaiah 47:8-15

The queen had power through sensuality (verse 8); use of sorceries and spells- magical practices (verse 9 & verse 12); wickedness (verse 10); wisdom and knowledge (verse 10); charm (verse 11); counselors, astrologers, prophets, & predictors (verse 13), through trafficking, merchandising (verse 15).

Isaiah 48:1-13

Again, as in chapters 43-46, God is the first and the last, the one who created all things. Before these things took place, God declared them long ago. And his people, the house of Jacob, Israel, those who came from the house of Judah, did not worship him in truth, but were obstinate, and put their trust in their idols, graven images.

Isaiah 48:14-22

God will carry out his good pleasure on Babylon. God has called “him” (Verse 15), and “he” will make his ways successful. Again, the scriptures use an ambiguous reference to the one that will bring deliverance from Babylon. In past chapters, this reference can refer to Cyrus the Persian who will defeat the Babylonians. However, the ambiguity here, leaves open the possibility of another one who will deliver God’s people from Babylon.

Babylon History

Approximate Dates	Scripture Ref	Biblical Event	History of Babylon
2300BC-2200BC	Gen 10:9-10	Nimrod	Builds Babel, Erech (Iraq)
2100BC-2000BC	Ge 11:31; Jo 24:2;	Abram leaves Ur of Chaldea	Leaves the gods of Mesopotamia
1800BC-1700BC			Hammurabi – Babylon first great expansion; eventually declines for almost 1000 years
760BC-670BC	Is 1:1	Isaiah	Babylon under Assyrian control
625BC-605BC	Is 10:12; 14:25		Naboplasser: Babylon defeats Assyrians
605BC-560BC	2 Chr 36:17-20; 2 Ki 25:8-11	Judah into Captivity	Nebuchadnezzar – height of Babylonian Empire
540BC-525BC	Dan 5:23-30; 8:20	Daniel	Cyrus/Persia defeats Babylon. Becomes Administrative capital of Persian Empire
350BC-325BC	Dan 8:21		Alexander the Great – defeat Persians. Babylon falls to the Greeks
325BC-320BC	Dan 8:22		Death of Alexander. Greek Empire divided among his generals
320BC-140BC	Is 13:19-22		After decades of infighting, the city of Babylon declines to desolation/obscurity

Babylonian gods

Through the years there may have been over 2000 different deities worshipped in the region of Babylon/Mesopotamia. The Moon, Sun, and five planets were identified with a few of the “major” gods of the Babylonian pantheon. They are as follows:

Sin/Nanna – Associated with the moon. Sin or Nanna is the ancient Sumerian god with ancient temples from Ur of the Chaldeans in the south, to northern Mesopotamia. In one of the world’s earliest religions, Sin Nanna was considered “chief of the gods”. Together with Shamash (god of the Sun) and Ishtar (goddess of the nature-life-giving force of the earth), they formed the early Babylonian triad. He was considered of primary importance in the science of astronomy and practice of astrology.

Shamash – Associated with the sun. The god of justice, just as the sun dispels darkness.

Bel Marduk – Associated with the planet Jupiter. His is the lord of the gods, and during the later Babylonian rule, became the main god of the Babylonian Pantheon. He is the god of magic and sorceries, and used his abilities to seize power over the other gods.

Nabu(Nebo) – Associated with the planet Mercury. He was the god of writing, wisdom, knowledge. He had power over humans in that he is said to have engraved the destiny of each person on his tablets of sacred record.

At the time of Isaiah, and the later Neo-Babylonian empire of Nebuchadnezzar, these two gods, Bel & Nebo, were of primary importance in Babylonian lore. (These two are mentioned together by name in Isaiah 46:1. They are also mentioned in two ancient “non-biblical” historical works (*The Chronicle of Nabonidus*; *The Cyrus Cylinder*).

Ninurta – Associated with the planet Saturn. He was the god of war, champion of the land.

Nergal – Associated with the planet Mars. He was the god of the underworld.

Ishtar – Associated with the planet Venus. She was the goddess of love and fertility, above all associated with sexuality. Her cult involved sacred prostitution. She was the great whore of Babylon, the mother goddess, queen of the nations. Nebuchadnezzar gave great tribute to this goddess, building the famous Ishtar gate around 575 BC. It was part of the great wall of

Babylon, the main entrance into the city. Statues of the deities were paraded through the gate, down the Processional Way each year during the New Year's celebration.

Cyrus did not destroy the gods of Babylon, but rather "freed them", allowing religious freedom in the Persian Empire. The city of Babylon continued to flourish and was of importance until after the death of Alexander the Great. The city eventually declined to desolation and obscurity. (Isaiah 13:19-22).

At the time of the New Testament, when the Apostle John wrote the book of Revelation, Babylon was no more. Either this New Testament reference to Babylon is metaphorical or the city of Babylon will rise again. For over 2000 years, the area known as Babylon has sat in desolation. But the Apostle John, receiving prophecy from the one who was, who is, and who is to come, tells of a future devastation of Babylon (Revelation 18:1ff). Will Babylon Rise Again before the end of the age?

Excerpts from **MEMOIR on the RUINS OF BABYLON**

By Claudius James Rich, Esq. London, 1818

...I thought I should have distinguished some traces, however imperfect, of many of the principle structures of Babylon. I imagined I should have said,, "Here are the walls, and such must have been the extent of the area. There stood the Palace, and this most assuredly was the Tower of Belus."... I was completely deceived: instead of a few insulated mounds, I found the whole face of the country covered with vestiges of buildings, in some places of brick walls surprisingly fresh, in others merely of a vast succession of mounds of rubbish, of such indeterminate figures, variety, and extent, as to involve the person who should have formed any theory in inextricable confusion. This, together with the impossibility, in such a remote situation, of referring to all the authorities I should have consulted, will cause my account of the remains of Babylon to appear very meager and unsatisfactory...

The whole country between Bagdad and Hilla is a perfectly flat and uncultivated waste. That it was at some former period in a far different state, is evident from the number of canals by which it is traversed, now dry and neglected; and the quantity of heaps of earth covered with fragments of brick and broken tiles, which are seen in every direction – the indisputable traces of former population. At present the only inhabitants of this tract are the Zobeide Arabs... half way between... is a small canal, over which a bridge of one arch, now ruinous. Some time ago, a large lion came regularly every evening from the banks of the Euphrates, and took his stand on this bridge, to terror of the traveler: he was at last shot by a Zobeide Arab. Fine hawks, of the species called Balaban, used in hunting antelope, are caught here...

Before entering into a minute description of the ruins, to avoid repetition, it is necessary to state that they consist of mounds of earth, formed by the decomposition of building, channeled and furrowed by the weather, and the surface of them strewn with pieces of brick, bitumen, and pottery.

On the ruins of Babylon there is not a single tree growing excepting the old one which I shall hereafter occasion to mention... It is an everlasting green..., I believe, not common in this part of the country, though I am told there is a tree of the same description at Bassora. All the people of the country assert that it is extremely dangerous to approach this mound after night-fall, on account of the multitude of evil spirits by which it is haunted...

There are many dens of wild beasts in various parts, in one of which I found the bones of sheep and other animals, and perceived a strong smell like that of a lion. I also found quantities of porcupine quills, and in most of the cavities are numbers of bats and owls. It is a curious coincidence that I here first heard of the oriental account of satyrs. I had always imagined a belief of their existence was confined to the mythology of the West, but a Choadar, who was with me when I examined this ruin, mentioned by accident, that in this desert an animal is found resembling a man from head to waist, but having the thighs and legs of a sheep or goat...

Segment 6 – Isaiah 49

Isaiah 49:1-13

This is the second suffering servant song. (Some end it at verse 7, but verses 8 through 13 appear to go together with it.)

Verse 1

Jesus was called from the womb.

Matthew 1:18-21

¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly. ²⁰ But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."

Verse 2

Jesus is God's weapon to conquer evil. In his former ministry, his words divided people into groups. He said, "I did not come to bring peace, but a sword" (Matthew 10:34). However, his ultimate work was largely concealed. Even so, when he returns, his judgment is represented by a sword coming out of his mouth (2 Thessalonians 2:8; Revelation 1:16; 2:12; 19:15).

Verse 3

Remember that the servant of God is sometimes called Israel because he represents Israel and lives up to what Israel should have always been. Consider the following description:

Though Yahweh's representative towards the people, he is even more the representative of the people towards Yahweh. Figuratively speaking he is the channel through which the blessings of the deity flow to the people. But he is also the 'corporate representative' through whom the people approaches Yahweh to partake of the blessing....In the great crises of the people the king *is* the people...The king and the people are inextricably bound together. His piety and greatness constitute the righteousness and happiness of the people. If the king is godless disaster strikes the whole people. In his person the people approaches God, and through him God speaks to the people.¹

¹ Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1962), p. 60.

Verse 4

Many rejected Jesus (Mark 6:1-6; John 11:47-54).

John 1:11-12

¹¹ He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. ¹² But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, *even* to those who believe in His name,

John 3:32

What He has seen and heard, of that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony.

John 5:43

I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, you will receive him.

Verse 5

Jesus focused his efforts on calling the “lost sheep of the house of Israel” back to God (Matthew 15:22; Luke 19:1-10). Jesus’ preaching ministry called people to repentance (Matthew 4:17; Mark 1:15; Luke 13:3, 5).

Verse 6

Jesus’ work opened the way for Gentiles to become God’s people. We have seen this before in Isaiah 42:6 and Luke 2:32. Paul frequently spoke of the inclusion of the Gentiles (Acts 13:45-48; Ephesians 2:11-22; 3:4-6; Romans 11:25; Colossians 1:26-27).

Verse 7

He was a man of sorrows, well acquainted with grief; he was despised and rejected (Is 53:3). God will cause everyone to take notice, even the most powerful people, when He reveals His faithfulness to His servant. Verses 8-13 describe this vindication.

Verses 8-10

It is also the servant’s job to restore the land and the people. Jesus released those bound by physical infirmity and demonic oppression in his ministry (Luke 4:18-20; Matthew 11:5; Acts 10:38), and he will return to bring eternal healing and restoration. He will care for the people as a shepherd (Revelation 7:14-1).

Verses 11-12

God will construct a highway for His people to return to the land (Isaiah 35:8-10).

Verse 13

Although right now creation groans, waiting for the redemption of the children of God, one day all of creation will join in praise to God for comforting His people.

Romans 8:20-22

²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²² For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.

Isaiah 49:14-26

It is important to keep in mind who God is speaking to in this section. As is indicated in verse 14, Zion (i.e. Jerusalem) is the addressee. God's city is here spoken of as a mother who has lost her children. God swoops in as the great Redeemer who brings the people back to Jerusalem. This section is very similar to Isaiah 60.

Verse 14

The scene is one of desolation. The city lies in ruins. No one is there anymore. At this point, Zion (personified as a person) cries out to God that He has forsaken her.

Verse 15-16

God has not forgotten His beloved Zion. In fact, He could not forget her.

Verse 17

The enemy leaves, and the builders come to erect the city walls.

Verses 18-22

The exiles return to Zion. The people are like jewelry to the city. Now the city will be so packed with inhabitants that they will feel cramped. The people continued to multiply while they were in Babylon, and now when they return to the city, Zion does not recognize them. Even so, they are her sons and daughters.

Verse 23

Again Jerusalem will have kings and princesses. Wait for Yahweh, and you will not be put to shame.

Verse 24-25

Although one might think it would be impossible to recover the stolen sheep from a wolf's mouth, God is not so weak. He will rescue His people from the jaws of Babylon and return them to their land.

Verse 26

Not only will God bring His people back to the land, but He will also bring down judgment on the oppressors. Through this judgment, He will receive glory; for all flesh will know that He is Yahweh their Savior, their Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.