

THE BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY

The Scriptures teach that there is no one like God, who knows the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done (Is. 46:10.) The 28th chapter of Deuteronomy provides one of many examples where God predicted the future. In this passage the Bible predicts what would happen to the Jewish nation hundreds of years before it came to pass.

- If they obeyed the Lord and carefully followed His instructions they would be blessed. (Deut. 28:1-14) The Bible records many times when this promise came true.
- If they did not obey the Lord they would be cursed. (Deut. 28:15-68) The Bible also provides many examples when this promise came true.

One specific curse relates to our study today. God promised the Hebrews that if they disobeyed Him, they would be taken captive by a foreign nation. **“The LORD shall bring thee, and thy king which thou shalt set over thee, unto a nation which neither thou nor thy fathers have known; and there shalt thou serve other gods, wood and stone.” (Deut 28:36)**

This prediction came true in the days of Jeremiah the prophet. Jeremiah mentions three different times when the people of God were taken captive to Babylon:

“This is the people whom Nebuchadrezzar carried away captive: in the seventh year three thousand Jews and three and twenty: In the eighteenth year of Nebuchadrezzar he carried away captive from Jerusalem eight hundred thirty and two persons: In the three and twentieth year of Nebuchadrezzar Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carried away captive of the Jews seven hundred forty and five persons: all the persons were four thousand and six hundred.” (Jer 52:28-30)

The Jews were carried away into captivity just as the Lord predicted. For seventy long years they lived in that pagan land. In order to survive there they learned the language and customs of the Babylonians. They used Babylonian money, and Babylonian terminology. The hearts of the godly, however, were back in Jerusalem. They may have been in the corrupt city of Babylon, but their hearts were in the Holy City of Jerusalem. They longed for the time when they would again be back home where they belonged.

The exile of God’s people to Babylon is very significant, for it illustrates what Christians are going through in the world today. We too are living like captives in a world where we do not belong. Every human government seems strange to us for we are citizens of heaven. We may speak their language, and use their money, and adapt as much as possible to their laws, but our home is in heaven with the Lord Jesus Christ. We are only strangers and pilgrims here. We long for the day when we will be delivered from this bondage and be at home with Jesus.

The Babylonian captivity is mentioned three times in the genealogy of Jesus: (Matt. 1:11,12,17.)

THE HISTORY OF BABYLON

Babylon has been called the “cradle of the human race.” Some believe it was near the Garden of Eden. One reason for this belief is that the Euphrates River flowed through Babylon, and also out of the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:10-14.) Adam, Noah, and Abraham all came from this area.

The city was originally called “Babel” and was founded by a mighty warrior named “Nimrod” (Gen. 10:8-10.) The name “Babel” literally means “gateway to God.”

It was at Babel that a rebellious world decided to build a magnificent tower. This was not a watch tower, it was to be a tower that would reach to the heavens (Gen. 11:1-9.) This tower was an act of rebellion against God. After the flood, God commanded the people to be fruitful and fill the earth (Gen. 9:1.) God wanted his people to scatter and fill the earth. This tower, however, was

designed to keep them from scattering. These wicked men wanted to make a name for themselves and to not be scattered over all the earth (Gen. 11:4.)

God stopped them from building the tower by confounded their language. When they were not able to understand one another they stopped building the tower and were scattered over all the earth. All the different languages of the earth are the result of what God did at Babel.

At this time the word "babel" received another meaning. It came to mean "confusion." The original project that was intended to be a gateway to God became the very symbol of confusion.

The city of Babel, however, did not cease to exist. In fact, it became such a great city, with such influence, that it impacts our modern world in many ways.

Here are some of the things we take for granted in our modern world that can be traced back to Babylon.

- The sexagesimal system (i.e. Base 60) which divides a circle into 360 degrees, a degree into 60 minutes, and a minute into 60 seconds.
- The division of the day into 24 hours, with 60 minute hours and 60 second minutes.
- The calculation of the solar year comprising 365 days, 5 hours, 49 minutes and 30 seconds.
- The twelve constellations of the Zodiac.
- The division of the year into 12 months , based upon these constellations.
- The days of the week, Sun's Day, Moon's Day, etc.
- The worship of the goddess Ishtar which became our modern Easter.
- The observance of the winter solstice which has become our modern Christmas.
- Astrology, palmistry, and fortune telling.
- Brick making.
- Etc.

Babylon was a very important city. It is mentioned 286 times in the Bible. Isaiah, however, predicted that the city of Babylon would be destroyed and never rebuilt

"And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees' excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation: neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there; neither shall the shepherds make their fold there. But wild beasts of the desert shall lie there; and their houses shall be full of doleful creatures; and owls shall dwell there, and satyrs shall dance there. And the wild beasts of the islands shall cry in their desolate houses, and dragons in their pleasant palaces: and her time is near to come, and her days shall not be prolonged." (Isa 13:19-22)

The city was destroyed, just as Isaiah predicted, and it has never been rebuilt. The word "Babylon," however, does not just refer to a physical city, it is used in the Bible as a symbol of worldly corruption and confusion. Consider, for example, these references to Babylon in the book of Revelation. The physical city had been destroyed for centuries, but the spirit of Babylon lived on in Rome. Just as Babylon had persecuted the Jews, Rome persecuted the Christians. Therefore John wrote that:

- Babylon is that great city who made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication (Rev. 14:8.)
- God will give to Babylon the wine of the fierceness of His wrath (Rev. 16:19.)
- Mystery, Babylon is called the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth (Rev. 17:5.)
- Babylon is fallen and become the habitation of demons and foul spirits (Rev. 18:2.)
- The judgment of the great city Babylon will come in a single hour (Rev. 18:10.)
- The great city of Babylon will be thrown down with violence and be found no more (Rev. 18:21.)

JERUSALEM

Just as Babylon became a symbol of corruption and confusion, the city of Jerusalem became a symbol of truth and righteousness. The city was called "Salem" in the days of Abram. It was here that Abram came to pay tithes to Melchizedek. Melchizedek was the King of Salem and the priest of the most high God (Gen. 14:18.) His priesthood came hundreds of years before the priesthood of Aaron and was much superior to it. Jesus, as you know, was a priest after the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 7:1-21.)

As we have said before, the people of God were only to worship at one place during the days of the Mosaic dispensation (Deut. 12:5-14.) That place was Jerusalem. It was here that Solomon was directed by God to build the temple. No matter where the people of God lived, they had to journey to Jerusalem in order to worship. The book of Acts, for example, records that on the Day of Pentecost, when the church began, there were Jews who had come to Jerusalem to worship from every nation under heaven (Acts 2:5.)

Isaiah received a vision concerning Judah and Jerusalem:

"And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." (Isa 2:2-4)

Just as ungodly people would be symbolized by Babylon, godly people would be symbolized by Jerusalem.

The word Jerusalem occurs 811 times in the Bible. Just as Jews considered the earthly Jerusalem as their place of worship, Christians are identified with the "heavenly" or "spiritual" Jerusalem.

- Paul identified the earthly Jerusalem with Judaism, but called Christianity the Jerusalem from above (Gal. 4:25-26.)
- The writer of Hebrews said that Christians worship at the heavenly Jerusalem (Heb. 12:22.)
- The book of Revelation describes the "New Jerusalem" (Rev. 3:12.)
- He said that the New Jerusalem would come down from heaven as a bride prepared for her husband (Rev. 21:2.)
- John was carried away in the spirit to see the holy Jerusalem descend out of heaven (Rev. 21:10.)
- Condemnation is pictured as being taken away from the blessings of the "holy city" (Rev. 22:19.)

CHRISTIANS ARE STRANGERS AND PILGRIMS ON THIS EARTH

In Old Testament times the Jewish people were the "chosen people." God chose them to be His people. He promised them a land which flowed with milk and honey. God allowed them to be in Babylon because of their sin, but He did not want them to stay there forever. He promised to bring them back to the Promised Land.

Today, Christians are the chosen people of God. Peter wrote:

“But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy. Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.” (1 Pet 2:9-12)

Paul said it like this:

“For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.” (Phil 3:20-21)

Every form and manifestation of Babylon will be destroyed, but the new Jerusalem will last forever!