

I Will Take Vengeance

Babylon is called the ‘virgin daughter’ because to the remnant Jews the city and its empire appeared impregnable and invincible. Yet, Isaiah foretells Babylon’s destruction. For all her vaunted glory the Lord will bring her to her knees and humiliate her in the dust. Darius and Cyrus will be instruments in God’s hand but Babylon’s destruction is retribution directly from the Lord for the hurt inflicted on His people. ‘I will take vengeance’, says the Lord, ‘I will not meet thee as a man’. I will meet you as the sovereign, holy God to judge evil and punish sin without leniency or mercy.

A lesson from the past

The fall of Babylon did indeed occur as Isaiah had prophesied but beyond the mere history it is the Gospel application and spiritual instruction supplied by this chapter that interests the church today. Some interpret this as typical of the city of Rome, and the church of Rome, which is mystical Babylon. The Apostle John uses Babylon in Revelation to describe the world-wide anti-Christ system that constantly afflicts the Lord’s redeemed people and sets itself up in opposition to Christ and His church.

A warning for the future

Just as ancient Babylon is humbled and brought low in Isaiah’s prophecy so Babylon the Great and all the anti-Christian systems of this world will be condemned and destroyed by the Lord for the vindication of His elect. Jesus Christ will rise to judge mystical Babylon. Isaiah’s condemnation of the city and empire of his day indicated the crimes for which judgment would come; pride, sorcery, self-confidence – to the point of claiming divine attributes which apply only to God – and for persecuting Christ’s little flock. As Babylon of old fell so judgment will fall on all the wickedness of this world in the day of Christ’s glory.

God’s jealous love

It is true the Lord had given the Jewish people into the hand of the Babylonians to be chastened for sin. However, the ferocity of Babylon’s dealing with His elect remnant did not go unnoticed and could not go unpunished. Isaiah rebukes Babylon for not considering whose people these were and realising that sooner or later the Lord would deliver them again. Even when the elect are under the rod of divine discipline the Lord is jealous for His people’s need, care and protection and designs only trials that work for their good.

Deceived to the end

The end of Babylon was swift. The city was taken by surprise while the people slept and the king and his nobles feasted. In one night Belshazzar was slain, and Darius the Mede took the kingdom. This is likened here to widowhood and the loss of children as when a city is deprived of its king and people. John tells us that right to the end mystery Babylon will imagine herself untouchable, saying in her heart, ‘I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow’ (Revelation 18:7).

The blind leading the blind

There is mocking irony in the Lord’s challenge, ‘Let now the astrologers, the stargazers, the monthly prognosticators, stand up, and save thee from these things that shall come upon thee’. As if to say, you have surrounded yourself with every means of telling the future and warning of danger, but not one of these methods will alert you to your destruction or supply comfort or a means to escape. When the Lord Jesus comes to judge sin no one will see the end coming, save the Lord’s people who hear these prophecies, believe them and trust in God’s faithfulness.

The wrath to come

The message of this chapter is the certainty of judgment and retribution when God shall avenge His people and punish His enemies and theirs. This world’s systems, its politics, morality and ambition, is built on human pride and fleshy pleasure. It has no time for Christ and no time for His people. It is under the control of Satan and the devil’s hatred of Christ and His seed is absolute. Out of this corrupt world God’s elect have been delivered by the blood of a great Redeemer. They alone will be saved when the Lord’s vengeance strikes.

A Gospel shout

One verse stands out as a bright light in this dark passage of judgment. It is verse 4. Here a cry of faith and gratitude springs from the church upon hearing these promises of deliverance, liberty and salvation at the hand of their Lord. They cry, 'As for our redeemer, the LORD of hosts is his name, the Holy One of Israel'. This is a statement of confidence in Christ who is Himself the sovereign Lord and Himself the righteousness of His people. This is 'Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever' (Hebrews 13:8): the Lord our Redeemer, the Lord our Righteousness.

Amen

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