

Jeremiah 51:1-33 Not Forsaken Falls Ch. AM 8/13/2023

Back in our study of chapter 50, we talked about a teeter-totter, with 2 outcomes from one action: one child goes down, while the other child goes up. It is similar here in chapter 51: 2 outcomes from God's winnowing. Winnowing was done at harvest time when grain was tossed straight up into the air during a stiff crosswind. The good heavy kernels of grain fell back down to the threshing floor to be kept, while the shells and husks got removed by the stiff wind.

Winnowing illustrates the main pt: **the purpose of The LORD God was to destroy Babylon, in order to uphold His covenant promise to His people.**

**1. God does not forsake His people, but rather takes action to defeat our enemies and to vindicate us! (v.1-11)**

The initiator is The LORD God. Listen to verse 1, "*Thus says The LORD, behold, I will stir up...*" The next Hebrew word is RUACH, which means wind or spirit. Verse 1 says God will "*stir up the spirit of a destroyer,*" and other English translations render it "*a destroying wind.*" Either is correct. The word occurs four times in our passage. Next is in verse 11, The LORD stirred up the spirit (wind) of the kings. Verse 16, "*God will bring forth wind from His storehouses.*" And verse 17, "*the idols have no breath/(wind) in them.*" It is the same Hebrew word RUACH used in Genesis 1:2, the Spirit of God hovers over the waters. The point is clear - God's Spirit can send a creating wind to separate land from water or a destroying wind to separate Israel from Babylon! The theme in Jeremiah 51 is of God stirring up a wind in order to winnow, or to separate.

In verse 2, God sent a winnowing, which required a stiff wind. In verse 3, the destroying wind, will suddenly blow in so swiftly that the archer will not have time to bend his bow, and the man in armor will not have time to stand up. Verse 4, "*they shall fall down slain in the land.*" Why? Verse 5 declared that Babylon was *full of guilt against the Holy One of Israel*. Think of the exiles reading this - it must have been refreshing to read here that God differentiates. In verse 5, where we are told the reason that Babylon will be destroyed is because "*...Israel and Judah have not been forsaken by their God...*" Not forsaken in the original language was literally the phrase "not widowed." God is reassuring His people using strong covenant language. God will not forsake his bride, not leave her, not break His covenant, and so she will not be widowed through any means.

In fact, verse 6 is concerned with collateral damage to God's people - there is so much punishment on its way to Babylon, that the precious people of God are told to run for their lives! In verse 7, Babylon used to be the golden cup in the LORD's hand, to cause an impact on the nations who all must drink it. Suddenly in verse 8, the cup falls and breaks, and surprisingly, there is sadness over the incurable condition of Babylon! Verse 8, "*wail for [Babylon]! Take balm for her pain; perhaps she may be healed...*" and Verse 9, "*We would have healed*

*Babylon, but she was not healed...*” This sounds to us like the time when Jesus said in Matthew 23:37, “*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem,...how often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!*”

Similar to the grief of Jesus over Jerusalem, here in Jeremiah chapter 51, we have a surprising expression of divine grief for the evil city Babylon, and a longing expressed for Babylon to be healed of her desperate sickness! We learn something important here about our God – even while God is filled with fiery wrath in judgment, it is still a reluctant resorting to judgment. All else has failed, and the people refused to turn. That was true for Babylon. Recall that was true for Israel!

The second half of verse 9 shows that when man attempts to build himself up to the skies, such as the famous Tower of Babel in Genesis chapter 11:4, and Babel is Hebrew is the same word in Greek Babylon, instead of man being built up, it ends up only building up his judgment from God. Verse 9, it is not her towers that have reached up high, but instead we read that it was “*her judgment has reached up to heaven, and has been lifted up even to the skies.*” Now see this echoed in Revelation 18:5, “*...[Babylon’s] sins are heaped high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities.*”

It was not enough that the exiles would escape from their role as prisoners of war. What is envisioned here is more - the vindication of the sinning exiles after being fully chastised, are fully reclaimed, fully pardoned, and declared to be fully the people of The LORD. Verse 10, “*The LORD has brought about our vindication; come, let us declare in Zion the work of The LORD our God.*” What is the work of God? The punishing wind or Spirit of God against Babylon is viewed as punishment for her sins, while vindication blows in for exiles! To put it in terms of the language of our modern confessions of faith and doctrinal statements, God provided more than justification – God provided adoption!

**2. God takes differentiating action, because God and we are everything to one another; He is our portion, and we are His inheritance! (v.12-24)**

Differentiating action simply means God is doing one thing for Babylon and God is doing a different thing for His people.

In verse 12, the LORD has purposed against Babylon, so watchmen are set up so that no one can move in or out of Babylon without the LORD’s express purpose being accomplished in it.

In verse 13, as if we were watching a slideshow, there is a new slide. Here is a picture of weaving – the needed length of cloth has been prepared, so now the finished product is going to be cut and taken off of the loom. The length of the reign/life of Babylon has been reached, and so God will now cut them off.

In verse 14, next slide. Just like locusts strip the fields of everything green, so the invading troops will strip Babylon bare of everything of value. The

invading army will enjoy a bountiful plunder from the success of this invasion, which will lead them to shout in triumph.

In verses 15-19, there is a mini-hymn or song of praise that draws attention to the majesty and superiority of the One who issued this double-decree: out with Babylon, home with His own people. Especially, we see how the false gods of Babylon were useless to resist or thwart God's purposes for Babylon. What is remarkable about these verses 15-19 is that they are an exact duplication, word for word, of what God said to Israel in Jeremiah chapter 10:12-16. What God says to spiritually-blind and heathen Babylon, originally needed to be said to God's own people in their deep sin. We are the same in sin, but we are in covenant with God.

Verse 15, God made the earth showing His power, wisdom, and understanding. In verse 16, God's verbal commands control the weather, the sky, the earth, the storms of lightning and rain, and notably, the wind. In verse 17, in contrast, false gods were created by men, and false gods are so far from controlling the movements of the air, that the false gods do not even have breath in themselves, which is, of course a way of saying that they are not alive, not real gods. In verse 18, these fake gods are worthless, and when the big invasion hits Babylon, these gods will be shown to be no help to the citizens, for the gods cannot even save themselves. The false images and metal statues will be destroyed in the war. Compare the usefulness of such false gods to the true God in verse 19, where God makes this beautiful poetic understatement, "*Not like these is He...*" Right. Not like dead idols is the living God! Look at four ways God described Himself in verse 19, "1) the portion of Jacob 2) the One who formed all things (the Creator!) 3) cherishing Israel as His inheritance and 4) having the name the LORD of Hosts, which means He is The Top General of the Armies of heaven!

The emphasis of it all is the closeness and loyalty of the relationship between the Creator God and this small band of former prisoners of war. Exiles reading this get this message from God: right now you are stuck in prison, but you have the God of heaven and earth on your side! He is your portion. He who planned out the downfall of Babylon, has planned out your homeward journey. He who brings forth the destroying wind, brings forth the wind at your back!

In verses 20-24, there is an elegant poem that underscores the same message by repetition – here is the main message – that God formerly used Babylon as a weapon, and now God was destroying that weapon itself. Verse 20, God said to Babylon, "you are my hammer" and then nine times the phrase is repeated, "with you, I smash (fill in the blank). With you I smash nations in pieces, in verse 21, with you I smash horse and rider, chariot and charioteer, in verse 22 with you I smash men and women, old and young, in verse 23, I smash shepherds and flocks, farmers and plowteams, governors and their military commanders." What is the meaning of all this hammering and smashing? It is summarized in verse 24, where

God said, “*I will repay Babylon...*”. It is another Hebrew word you probably know surprisingly this is the Hebrew word Shalom! We think of Shalom as peace, and yet it has the sense of peace by completion. God will complete the circle, to come full circle. Something in the universe is out of sorts while evil Babylon was getting away with it, so God will complete the peace of the universe. Whatever Babylon did, God would do to them. God would make things right in Babylon. There would again be peace in God’s world, because the perpetrator would get the justice that is coming to him. But there is a flip side. Something in the universe is out of sorts while God’s covenant people are detained in exile!

Think of how this played out - there were exiles still alive and returning home, who had originally seen the evil that Babylon did in Zion, in Jerusalem. Some of those exiles would later return and get to see that in God’s world, what goes around, come around.

### **3. The LORD’s purposes stand - both against Babylon and for His people. (v.25-33)**

Verse 25, the whole orientation is in 4 words that God says to a nation, words that you never want to hear. *I am against you!* What more needs to be said?

In this slide in our slideshow, Babylon is described this time not as a wind or weapon in God’s hand, not as a golden cup in the LORD’s hand, but this time Babylon is described instead as a destroying mountain.

We could think of as a volcano in two stages 1) an active volcano that erupts and spews its lava. But then 2) a volcano that ends by blowing itself to bits. In verse 26, no one will even want a souvenir of it. It will be so pulverized that there will not remain anything salvageable, such as some large stone to be used as a foundation or a corner piece for future new construction. No, Babylon was destined to remain “...*a perpetual waste.*”

In verses 27-28, God gave 7 commands. 1) set up a standard, which was a flag or banner carried in front of invading armies 2) blow the trumpet 3) prepare for war 4) summon kingdoms 5) appoint a marshal against her 6) bring up horses 7) prepare for war (a repeated command).

In verse 29, the impact of all these commands is described as the land trembling in pain. Why? Because “*the LORD’s purposes against Babylon stand, to make Babylon a desolation...*”

In verse 30, details are given for how the mighty Babylon fell. How could that happen? Here is how: warriors stopped fighting, completely demoralized, hid in the strongholds, and their courage failed, while their house was on fire.

Verse 31, shows the Babylonian runners provided an efficient relay system by which intelligence was gathered through the empire. Like a relay race, one runner would bring information to the next runner, then the next runner. This time, it is different and memorable for the runners. This time, rather than swiftly

bringing news of the latest Babylonian victory, the runners were meeting each other to bring a message “...to the King of Babylon that his city is taken on every side.” Historians agree with the records in the Book of Daniel, that in the center of Babylon there was holiday dancing and celebrating, unaware that the Persians had already penetrated the outer defenses of the city. But these runners were not the first to inform the king. Instead, it was God, who literally gave the king the writing on the wall, as we know from the famous banquet story in Daniel chapter 5.

Verse 32, the messengers kept coming with more bad news. 1) the river crossings were seized by the Persians 2) the grassy fields were burning. 3) the soldiers were petrified. The smoke from the burning fields would mask the enemy movements. On every side, there was evidence of the effectiveness of the enemy, and their nearness, without the Babylonian soldiers being able to see them, let alone respond. To be continued! All we have left in verse 33 is a reminder of the reason that all this was happening.

Verse 33, God said that “...*Babylon is like a threshing floor at the time when it is trodden...*”

The threshing floor is a fitting picture of this moment in freeze frame, as if a painter provided us with a still picture of a scene of frenzy. The symbolic and familiar picture was of a threshing floor for processing grain from the fields. The threshing floor had been swept clean, and the holes in the floor had been filled in, and then the floor had been trampled hard and flat, fully ready for use. These steps were performed in expectation of an imminent arrival of the harvest. After the harvest would arrive, it was no longer the floor that would be trampled, but rather the grain itself would be trampled. Here is what God says, almost as a caption to the painting of that moment “*Yet a little while and the time of her harvest will come.*”

### **Conclusion:**

1. Be comforted that God is loyal to us. Jesus was forsaken, so that we will never be forsaken. CROSS. The pictures in our passage about destroying wind and the destroying mountain make us think of the hill of Calvary where the best person who ever lived was killed for our wrongdoing. Because we know that Christ was forsaken, we know that we will never be forsaken. So, how do we look at the present and at the future? We look with confidence in God’s loyalty to us! Consider 1 John 2:17, “*The world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.*” Be comforted in God’s grace and loyalty to us.

2. Be loyal to God, not idols. Idolatry is whenever we trust anything/anyone other than God alone for our well-being and safety. Idols can be anything. This is a big deal, and a near danger. God gave it as number 1 out of a list of 10 things on

which we must focus our attention. “*You shall have no other gods before Me.*” 1 Corinthians 10:6, Paul wrote, “*Do not be idolaters...*” and This is a real threat to us. It is not just because idols don’t help us in an emergency, and that false gods don’t actually exist. It is because chasing other gods is disloyal to our God and offensive to Him.

Westminster Larger Catechism Q. 106. What are we specially taught by these words, before Me, in the first commandment? A. These words, before Me, or before My face, in the first commandment, teach us, that God, who seeth all things, taketh special notice of, and is much displeased with, the sin of having any other God:... And in Q105. What are the sins forbidden in the first commandment? A. The sins forbidden in the first commandment, are, ...having or worshiping more gods than one...”

Sometimes we want our Sunday God, and then our different weekday idol. We want to worship God when we come to worship services, and then pursue other things. That is idolatry. Be loyal to God, not idols. 1 John 5:21, John wrote, “*...keep yourselves from idols.*”

Brothers and sisters, by God’s covenant commitment to us, we are not forsaken! Rejoice in the grace of God through Jesus Christ, who was crucified for us and rose again for our permanent acceptance by our Faithful God.