

Isaiah 47:11

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Therefore shall evil come upon thee; thou shalt not know from whence it riseth: and mischief shall fall upon thee; thou shalt not be able to put it off: and desolation shall come upon thee suddenly, which thou shalt not know.

Analysis

Babylon's Sudden Desolation: This verse forms part of Isaiah's prophetic taunt against Babylon (Isaiah 47), personified as a proud queen about to be humiliated. "Therefore shall evil come upon thee" (uvaat alayikh raah, וּבָאָה עָלֶיךָ רָעָה) announces certain judgment. The Hebrew raah (רָעָה) means "evil," "calamity," or "disaster"—not moral evil but catastrophic judgment. The phrase "thou shalt not know from whence it riseth" (lo ted'i shachrah, לֹא תִדְעִי שַׁחְרָה) literally means "you will not know its dawn" or "origin." Babylon, despite famed astrologers and sorcerers, couldn't foresee or prevent divine judgment.

Babylon's Helplessness Before Divine Judgment: "Mischief shall fall upon thee" (vetipol alayikh hovah, וְתִפֹּל עָלֶיךָ הוֹבָה) uses hovah (הוֹבָה), meaning "disaster" or "calamity." The verb "fall" suggests sudden, unavoidable catastrophe. "Thou shalt not be able to put it off" (lo tukhal khaperah, לֹא תוּכַל כַּפְּרָה) employs khaper (כַּפְּרָה), which can mean "atone for" or "avert through ritual." Despite elaborate religious rituals, Babylon couldn't avert God's decree through magic, divination, or sacrifice.

Unexpected Desolation: "And desolation shall come upon thee suddenly, which thou shalt not know" (vetavo alayikh pit'om sho'ah lo ted'i, וְתָבֹא עָלֶיךָ פְּתָאִם שׁוֹ'אָה לֹא תִדְעִי) emphasizes the unexpected nature of judgment. "Suddenly" (pit'om, פְּתָאִם) means "in a moment," "unexpectedly." "Desolation" (sho'ah, שׁוֹ'אָה) depicts complete devastation and ruin. Babylon, confident in her supposed eternal dominance ("I

shall be a lady for ever," v. 7), would experience swift, unanticipated collapse.

Theological Warning Against Pride: This prophecy warns against arrogant self-sufficiency and occult practices. Babylon represented human civilization's pinnacle—militarily powerful, economically prosperous, culturally sophisticated, and religiously elaborate. Yet all human glory crumbles before God's judgment. The threefold repetition ("evil... mischief... desolation") emphasizes certain, comprehensive destruction. This foreshadows Revelation's depiction of eschatological Babylon's fall (Revelation 18), where her judgment comes "in one hour" (18:10).

Historical Context

Isaiah prophesied during 740-680 BC, serving under Judean kings Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. Isaiah 47 was written before Babylon became the dominant world power, demonstrating remarkable prophetic foresight. When Isaiah wrote, Assyria ruled the ancient Near East; Babylon was a subject state. Yet God revealed that Babylon would rise to supremacy, conquer Judah (which occurred in 586 BC), and then face sudden judgment (fulfilled in 539 BC when Cyrus the Persian conquered Babylon).

Babylon's fall came swiftly and unexpectedly, just as prophesied. On October 12, 539 BC, Persian forces under Cyrus diverted the Euphrates River's flow and entered Babylon through the lowered riverbed while the city feasted, confident in her massive walls (as described in Daniel 5). Babylonian king Belshazzar died that night; Persian rule began immediately. The transition was so smooth that many Babylonians barely noticed—exactly fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy that judgment would come suddenly and unexpectedly.

Babylon was famed for astrology, divination, and occult practices. Archaeological discoveries, including cuneiform tablets containing astrological omens and magical incantations, confirm Babylon's elaborate religious-magical system. Kings consulted astrologers before major decisions. Babylonian priests claimed to predict the future through star-reading, yet none foresaw their empire's fall. This demonstrated the impotence of occult practices against God's sovereign decree, a

theme repeated in Daniel 2 when Babylonian wise men couldn't interpret Nebuchadnezzar's dream but Daniel, empowered by God, could.

Related Passages

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. How does Babylon's sudden, unexpected judgment warn against false security based on wealth, power, or human wisdom?
2. What is the relationship between pride and spiritual blindness, as illustrated by Babylon's inability to foresee her own destruction?
3. How does the impotence of Babylon's astrologers and sorcerers demonstrate the futility of occult practices and New Age spirituality today?
4. In what ways does historical Babylon's fall typologically point to the future judgment of eschatological Babylon in Revelation 18?
5. What warning does this passage give to prosperous, self-confident nations or individuals who trust in their own strength rather than God?

Interlinear Text

תָּדַעַי:	ל א	כֵּן ה	עַל יְיָ וְתָבֹא	
upon thee thou shalt not know	H3808	Therefore shall evil	H5921	come
H3045		H7451	H935	
ל א	הִנֵּה ה	עַל יְיָ וְתָבֹא	וְתָפַל ל	שֶׁחֶבֶה ה
H3808	H1943	and mischief	H5921	shall fall
		H5307	H7837	
פְּתָאֵם	עַל יְיָ וְתָבֹא	כִּפְּרֵה ה	תּוֹכֵל י	
upon thee suddenly	H5921	to put it off	upon thee thou shalt not be able	
H6597	H935	H3722	H3201	
תָּדַעַי:	ל א	שָׁמָּה ה		
upon thee thou shalt not know	H3808	and desolation		
H3045		H7722		

Additional Cross-References

1 Thessalonians 5:3 (Parallel theme): For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.

Revelation 3:3 (Parallel theme): Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.

Luke 12:59 (Parallel theme): I tell thee, thou shalt not depart thence, till thou hast paid the very last mite.