

Jeremiah 51:26

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And they shall not take of thee a stone for a corner, nor a stone for foundations; but thou shalt be desolate for ever, saith the LORD.

Analysis

And they shall not take of thee a stone for a corner, nor a stone for foundations; but thou shalt be desolate for ever, saith the LORD—This prophecy declares Babylon's permanent ruin. Unlike typical ancient cities that were rebuilt after destruction (Jerusalem was rebuilt after Babylonian conquest), Babylon would become so desolate that not even its stones would be salvaged for new construction. The corner stone (pinnat, פִּנְתָּחָה) and foundation stones (mosadot, מָסָדֹת) were the most valued stones in ancient construction—yet Babylon's ruins wouldn't even yield these.

The phrase "desolate for ever" (shemamot olam, שְׁמָמֹת עוֹלָם) appears repeatedly in Jeremiah regarding Babylon (50:13, 26, 39-40; 51:26, 37, 43, 62). This isn't hyperbole but literal prophecy: Babylon would never again function as an imperial capital. The emphasis on stones connects to Jesus's words about Jerusalem's temple: "There shall not be left here one stone upon another" (Matthew 24:2)—fulfilled in 70 CE.

Theologically, the cornerstone imagery gains significance through Christ, "the chief cornerstone" (Ephesians 2:20; 1 Peter 2:6). Earthly kingdoms may reject the true cornerstone (Psalm 118:22; Acts 4:11), but those kingdoms become perpetual ruins while Christ's kingdom endures forever (Daniel 2:44).

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern cities were typically rebuilt after conquest, with conquerors often reusing building materials from previous structures. Babylon's bricks, many stamped with Nebuchadnezzar's name, were prized building materials. Yet the prophecy states these wouldn't be used for cornerstones or foundations in future building projects.

Historically, Babylon's decline was gradual. After Persian conquest (539 BCE), it remained a provincial city. Alexander the Great died there (323 BCE) planning to rebuild it as his capital, but his successors chose other locations. The Seleucids built Seleucia on the Tigris nearby (circa 305 BCE), drawing population away. By the first century CE, classical writers (Strabo, Pliny) described Babylon as mostly deserted. While some settlement continued sporadically, Babylon never regained significance—fulfilling "desolate for ever" in the sense of permanent loss of imperial status and glory.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. How does Babylon's permanent desolation demonstrate the certainty of God's prophetic word?
2. What does the contrast between Babylon's worthless stones and Christ the cornerstone teach about true foundations?
3. Why does God decree permanent ruin for some cities/nations while allowing others to be rebuilt?

Interlinear Text

וְלֹא	יְלִכְמָה	מִמֶּבֶן	לֹא	לְפָנֶה	לֹא	לְפָנֶה
H3808	And they shall not take	H4480	nor a stone	H68	for a corner	H68
	H3947			H6438		H68
לְמִזְבֵּחַ וְתִתְמַצֵּה	שְׁמַמְתַּה וְתִתְמַצֵּה	עַזְלֵם	נָאָם	תְּהִלֵּה	עַזְלֵם	סָאָת
for foundations	but thou shalt be desolate	H8077	for ever	H1961	saith	H5002
H4146			H5769			
יְהוָה :						
the LORD						
H3068						

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 51:43 (Parallel theme): Her cities are a desolation, a dry land, and a wilderness, a land wherein no man dwelleth, neither doth any son of man pass thereby.

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