

Jeremiah 51:42

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The sea is come up upon Babylon: she is covered with the multitude of the waves thereof.

Analysis

The sea is come up upon Babylon: she is covered with the multitude of the waves thereof. This prophecy employs vivid oceanic imagery to depict Babylon's overwhelming destruction. The Hebrew *yam* (יָם, sea) typically refers to literal seas, but here functions metaphorically for invading armies—a common biblical image for foreign military forces (Isaiah 8:7-8, Daniel 11:40). **The multitude of the waves** translates *hamon galav* (חֹמֶן גָּלַיִם), literally "the roar of its waves," emphasizing both number and violence.

This imagery reverses Babylon's position: the empire that overwhelmed nations like flood waters (Jeremiah 51:55) now experiences the same fate. The Medo-Persian conquest under Cyrus (539 BC) fulfilled this literally—Cyrus diverted the Euphrates River and entered Babylon through the riverbed, using water against the city. The sea "coming up" suggests divine intervention, recalling how God used seas for judgment (Noah's flood, Red Sea against Egypt). Revelation 17-18 applies Babylon imagery to the final destruction of God's enemies, showing this prophecy's eschatological significance. The "sea" ultimately represents all hostile powers God will judge.

Historical Context

Written around 594-570 BC, this oracle predicts Babylon's downfall with remarkable accuracy. At the time, Babylon was the world's dominant superpower, having conquered Assyria, Egypt, and Judah. The prophecy seemed impossible—

how could such power be overwhelmed? Yet in 539 BC, the Medo-Persian army under Cyrus the Great conquered Babylon in a single night (Daniel 5). The strategic diversion of the Euphrates River allowed troops to enter through the riverbed, giving literal fulfillment to the "sea" imagery. Isaiah prophesied the same event 150 years earlier (Isaiah 44:27-28, 45:1-3), naming Cyrus specifically. This demonstrates God's sovereign control over history and His ability to judge even the mightiest empires.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How does God's judgment of Babylon demonstrate His sovereignty over all earthly powers, no matter how dominant they appear?
2. What does the reversal of Babylon being overwhelmed by 'waves' (as it had overwhelmed others) teach about divine justice?
3. How should Revelation's application of 'Babylon' imagery to the end times shape our understanding of this prophecy's ultimate fulfillment?

Interlinear Text

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|------------|-------|--------------|---------|--------------------|--------------|
| עַל הַ | עַל | בָּבֶל | הַיָּם | בְּהֵמָה וְאִתּוֹ | גַּל יָם |
| is come up | H5921 | upon Babylon | The sea | with the multitude | of the waves |
| H5927 | | H894 | H3220 | H1995 | H1530 |

| |
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| נִכְסְתָהּ: |
| she is covered |
| H3680 |

Additional Cross-References

Daniel 9:26 (Parallel theme): And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined.

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