

Jeremiah 51:8

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Babylon is suddenly fallen and destroyed: howl for her; take balm for her pain, if so be she may be healed.

Analysis

Babylon is suddenly fallen and destroyed (בָּבֶל נִפְלָה בָּתָה, pit'om naflah Bavel)—the adverb "suddenly" emphasizes the unexpected swiftness of Babylon's collapse. Despite appearing invincible, the empire fell to Cyrus in a single night (539 BC). The perfect tense "is fallen" prophetically declares accomplished fact, demonstrating prophetic certainty.

Howl for her; take balm for her pain—the tsori (צָרִי, balm, balsam) from Gilead was famous medicinal resin. The ironic call to apply balm suggests attempting to heal what God has wounded. Yet the final clause—**if so be she may be healed**—indicates hope's futility. Babylon's wound is mortal because divinely inflicted. This anticipates Revelation 18:2: "Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen." When God judges, no human remedy suffices. This echoes 8:22: "Is there no balm in Gilead?"—spiritual wounds require divine healing, which Babylon refused.

Historical Context

Babylon fell October 12, 539 BC when Cyrus's forces entered through the riverbed of the diverted Euphrates. According to Herodotus and the Nabonidus Chronicle, the city was celebrating a feast when conquered—fulfilling Daniel 5's account of Belshazzar's feast. The sudden collapse shocked the ancient world; seemingly impregnable Babylon fell without prolonged siege. Archaeological evidence confirms Babylon continued as a city but never regained imperial status, eventually becoming uninhabited ruins—fulfilling multiple prophetic declarations.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. What modern 'Babylons' appear invincible but face sudden divine judgment?
2. Why is it futile to apply human remedies to wounds God has inflicted in judgment?
3. How does Babylon's sudden fall warn against trusting in apparent permanence of worldly powers?

Interlinear Text

קָרְבָּן	עַל	יְהִי	הַיּוֹלֶד	נִפְלֵה	בְּכָל	וְתַשְׁבֵּר	פִּתְאָם
is suddenly	fallen	Babylon	and destroyed	howl		H5921	for her take

אָרִי	לְמַכְאֹב הַ	אָל	תְּרִפָּאָן
balm	for her pain	H194	if so be she may be healed
H6875	H4341		H7495

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 21:9 (References Babylon): And, behold, here cometh a chariot of men, with a couple of horsemen. And he answered and said, Babylon is fallen, is fallen; and all the graven images of her gods he hath broken unto the ground.

Jeremiah 46:11 (Parallel theme): Go up into Gilead, and take balm, O virgin, the daughter of Egypt: in vain shalt thou use many medicines; for thou shalt not be cured.

Revelation 14:8 (References Babylon): And there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.

Revelation 18:2 (References Babylon): And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.

Jeremiah 50:2 (References Babylon): Declare ye among the nations, and publish, and set up a standard; publish, and conceal not: say, Babylon is taken, Bel is confounded, Merodach is broken in pieces; her idols are confounded, her images are broken in pieces.

Jeremiah 48:20 (Parallel theme): Moab is confounded; for it is broken down: howl and cry; tell ye it in Arnon, that Moab is spoiled,