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1998

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Recommended Citation

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DO THE PROPHETS TEACH THAT BABYLONIA WILL BE REBUILT IN THE *ESCHATON?*

HOMER HEATER, JR.[*]

Dispensationalists have traditionally argued that "Babylon" in Revelation 14 and chaps. 17–18 is a symbol indicating some form of reestablished Rome.[1] In recent days a renewed interest has been shown in the idea that the ancient empire of Babylonia and city of Babylon will be rebuilt.[2] This conclusion comes from a reading of the prophets—Isaiah and Jeremiah in particular—in a manner that requires the rebuilding of the city and empire of Babylonia in the *eschaton*.

My approach to this question is from three different perspectives: (1) to study the context of the oracles against the nations (OAN) found in Isaiah 13–23 and, in particular, the way the critical thirteenth chapter fits into the *Sitz im Leben* of the eighth century during which Isaiah was prophesying; (2) to study the language of destruction found in this same unit and relate it to the treaty curses found in the ancient Near East and to the rest of the OT; and (3) to examine Jeremiah's prophecies against Babylon containing much of the same language as that of Isaiah.

I. ISAIAH 13 IN ITS EIGHTH-CENTURY CONTEXT

The presence of an oracle against Babylon in the first part of Isaiah must be explained by those who argue that such references originated in a sixth-century prophecy (chaps. 40–66). G. B. Gray is an example of those who deny the chapter to the eighth-century Isaiah since he believes it is a product of the exile or a little earlier:

> Clearly, then, the oracle of Babylon is no earlier than the Exile: it is probably later, for 14:1–4a(22f.) is post-exilic rather than exilic. . . . We may then attribute the oracle in its present form to a post-exilic editor who wrote 14:1–4a to connect two poems (13:2–22 and 14:4b–21).[3]

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[1] See e.g. J. F. Walvoord, "Revival of Rome," *BSac* 126 (1969) 317–328.

[2] C. Dyer and A. E. Hunt, *The Rise of Babylon: Sign of the End Times* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1991). Dyer and Hunt say that the third "signpost" serving as an indicator of God's end-time program is the rebuilding of Babylon. They go on to link Saddam Hussein with the rebuilding of the city and thereby imply that Hussein is implementing this prophecy (pp. 209–210). They say of Hussein: "Like Nebuchadnezzar, he will be the ruler of the Middle East—and beyond" (p. 158).

[3] G. B. Gray, *The Book of Isaiah, I–XXXIX* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1914) 233.

In more recent times some scholars have begun to view the oracles (Isaiah 13–23) as relating to the message of Isaiah during the Assyrian domination of the Levant.[4] Seth Erlandsson is surely correct when he argues that the section on the nations is a response to the Israelite leaders who were trying to form an anti-Assyrian coalition.[5] The section cannot represent a general group of prophecies against the enemies of Judah, for Judah herself is included in the oracles (chap. 22). Erlandsson points out that the conquests of Tiglath-Pileser III created problems for Elam in the east (by cutting off trade routes) and Egypt in the west (by cutting off Phoenician trade). Consequently it was in the interest of these two nations to foment rebellion against Assyria at every opportunity. The Elamites supported the Chaldean sheiks (from around the Persian Gulf), and the Egyptians stirred up trouble in the Levant. The Assyrian king Sennacherib says, "The officials, the patricians and the [common] people of Ekron—who had thrown Padi, their king, into fetters [because he was] loyal to [his] solemn oath [sworn] by the god Ashur, and had handed him over to Hezekiah, the Jew—[and] he [Hezekiah] held him in prison, unlawfully, as if he [Padi] be an enemy—had become afraid and had called [for help] upon the kings of Egypt . . . land of the king of Ethiopia, an army beyond counting—and they actually had come to their assistance."[6]

It should be noted that each nation mentioned in the OAN occurs in the Assyrian annals. Damascus and Samaria were defeated by Tiglath-Pileser (732 BC). Moab, Ethiopia, Egypt, Ashdod, Edom and Tyre are all mentioned in Sennacherib's campaign of 701. The "Valley of Vision" (chap. 22) seems to refer to the preparation for a siege in Hezekiah's time (the Siloam tunnel was probably dug at this time; cf. 2 Chr 32:2–4, 30).

Our focus for an understanding of this unit, therefore, is not on the fall of Babylon to the Persians in 539 BC but on the Assyrians in the eighth century during the time of Isaiah's prophetic ministry.[7]

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[4] S. Erlandsson, *The Burden of Babylon* (Lund: Gleerup, n.d.) 65–105; J. H. Hayes and S. A. Irvine, *Isaiah: His Times and His Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1987). See also G. R. Hamborg, "Reasons for Judgement in the Oracles against the Nations of the Prophet Isaiah," *VT* 31 (1981) 145–159, who says that it is "likely that most of the OAN found in Isa xiii–xxiii contain material which can, with a measure of confidence, be attributed to the prophet Isaiah" (p. 146). But R. E. Clements, *1–39* (NCB; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 131, demurs: "From all of these considerations we must rule out the attempt of S. Erlandsson, *The Burden of Babylon*, Lund, 1970, to claim almost the entire collection of the prophecies against foreign nations in Isaiah 13–23 as authentic to the prophet whose name they now bear."

[5] Erlandsson, *Burden*, 65–108. Hamborg ("Reasons" 149) says, "Once again, however, this oracle [Isa 18:1–6] clearly forms an integral part of Isaiah's preaching: Israel should not dabble in foreign alliances; Assyria was Yahweh's instrument of justice, and coalitions to oppose Assyria were not part of the divine will." Hayes and Irvine (*Isaiah* 236) also agree that these oracles reflect Isaiah's resistance to rebellion against Assyria.

[6] *ANET* 287.

[7] These prophecies in the eighth century, however, have particular relevance to believing Jews in the sixth century, as chap. 14 shows.

II. THESIS 1: ISAIAH 13—14 REFER TO BABYLONIA AND ASSYRIA IN THE EIGHTH AND SEVENTH CENTURIES BC[8]

Isaiah's well-known confrontation with Ahaz in 735/4 BC was an effort to challenge him to trust in Yahweh rather than to lean on the Assyrians for deliverance from the Syro-Ephraimite coalition.[9] There is much debate about the details of Isaiah 7–9, but the crisis of 735 and subsequent Assyrian intervention in the west, resulting in the defeat of both Damascus and Samaria in 732 and the vassalage of Judah under Ahaz, is not disputed.[10] The unit comprising Isaiah 7–12 grows out of this desperate period and is designed to show Yahweh's ability to deliver his people without resort to an alliance with Assyria or any other people. This sets the stage for Isaiah 13–39. The site of Ahaz' rejection of Yahweh's protection ("at the end of the aqueduct of the Upper Pool, on the road to the Washerman's Field," 7:3) was the very spot on which Sennacherib's field commander stood to hurl insults at Hezekiah (36:2). The theological reason for this emphasis on the site was to show that Isaiah's prediction of an Assyrian attack came to fruition. The literary reason was to form an inclusio for the entire Assyrian period of 735–701.

J. H. Hayes and S. A. Irvine have broken new ground in their commentary on Isaiah 1–39. They argue that "with the exception of Isaiah 34–35, practically all of the prophetic speech material in what is traditionally called First Isaiah—that is Isaiah 1–39—derives from the eighth-century B.C.E. prophet." Furthermore, "the prophetic speeches and narratives about the prophet in Isaiah 1–27 are arranged in general chronological order."[11] I agree with the first premise, but I am not convinced that all the prophecies are in chronological order. Hayes and Irvine, for instance, are forced to identify chap. 13 with Tiglath-Pileser's attack on Babylon, but a later attack by Sennacherib better fits the description.[12] Even so, their work supports the idea that we should look for the interpretation of these prophecies in the milieu of the eighth/seventh centuries.

The idea that Babylon of the eighth/seventh centuries is the butt of the prophecy is enhanced by the appearance of the prophecy of Assyria's fall in 14:24–27.[13] Though chaps. 13–14 are a collection of prophecies, the overall

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[8] J. A. Martin, "Isaiah," *Bible Knowledge Commentary* (ed. J. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck; Wheaton: Victor, 1985) 1.1059–1061, agrees with this thesis. The primary thrust of this article is toward Isaiah 13–14, but Isaiah 21 fits into the same scenario.

[9] See Clements, *Isaiah* 78–81, for a summary of the historical situation.

[10] For a recent discussion see S. A. Irvine, *Isaiah, Ahaz, and the Syro-Ephraimitic Crisis* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1990).

[11] Hayes and Irvine, *Isaiah* 13.

[12] Because they identify the king as Tiglath-Pileser III, they must say, "In actuality, Babylon did not fall, and the city was not destroyed as Isaiah had predicted" (ibid. 226).

[13] Some commentators accept the thesis that the oracle in chaps. 13–14 was originally directed against Assyria but redactors have turned it against Babylon (see e.g. A. S. Herbert, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah: Isaiah 1–39* [CBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1973] 98; E. J. Kissane, *The Book of Isaiah* [Dublin: Brown and Noble, 1960] 1.146–147).

theme is indicated by this prediction of Assyria's fall. Further support that eighth/seventh-century Babylon is in view in chaps. 13–14 is found in 23:13: "Look at the land of the Babylonians [Chaldeans], this people that is now of no account! The Assyrians have made it a place for desert creatures; they raised up their siege towers, they stripped its fortresses bare and turned it into a ruin." The tenses are past. At the time of this prophecy, Babylon had already been razed by the Assyrians.[14]

Babylonia was ruled by the Assyrians at this time. Sometimes the Assyrian king came to Babylon to "take the hands of Bel" and thus be sanctioned as the ruler of this ancient religious center.[15] Sometimes an Assyrian was placed on the Babylonian throne.[16] But Babylonia was always a problem for the Assyrians. A well-known nemesis of Assyria was the Chaldean Merodach-Baladan.[17] The Assyrian records reflect ongoing efforts by him to rule Babylonia and by the Assyrians to hunt him down. Therefore when we speak of Babylonia in chaps. 13–23 we must not think of the neo-Babylonian empire (625–539) but of an Assyrian province ever threatening rebellion against her overlord in the eighth/seventh centuries.

There were many states under the yoke of Assyria, but the two most significant powers to which Judah could look for help were Egypt and Babylonia. Both loom large in Isaiah's messages, and the concept of a coalition against Assyria is to be found throughout this section. Several examples come to mind. (1) The date and Assyrian king intended in Isa 14:28–32 are difficult to identify, but the implication is clear enough. The excitement of the people of Philistia over the death of an Assyrian king (always grounds for hopes of freedom) are dashed by Isaiah, who told them that the successor of the Assyrian king would be just as severe as his predecessor. In light of Isaiah's oracle someone asked: "What answer shall be given to the envoys of that nation?" The answer came back in covenant terms: "The Lord has established Zion, and in her his afflicted people will find refuge." (2) The Ethiopian dynasty ruling from Napata[18] is probably the referent in chap. 18. There they were represented as sending envoys by the sea. This was prob-

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[14] *BHS* suggests deleting "Look at the land of the Chaldeans, this people that is now of no account!" This emendation is doubtless posited because the oracle is about Tyre and the reference to the Chaldeans at first glance seems intrusive. But the previous verse says to the Tyrians, "Up, cross over to Cyprus; even there you will find no rest." It may be that Tyre was looking to the Chaldean sheiks as their hope. The purpose would be the same here as in chaps. 13 and 21: to warn Tyre not to trust in this people who would be judged by God working through Assyria. The Hebrew text should be accepted as it is.

[15] A. K. Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles* (Locust Valley: J. J. Augustin, 1975) 5.72, 75. Cf. also D. D. Luckenbill, *The Annals of Sennacherib* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1924) 9.

[16] As in the case of Esarhaddon, one of whose sons (Ashurbanipal) ruled in Assyria and another (Shamash-Shum-Ukin) in Babylonia (Grayson, *Assyrian* 5.33, 86).

[17] See *CAH* 3.47–50, 62–66; J. A. Brinkman, "Merodach-Baladan II," *Studies Presented to Leo Oppenheim* (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1964).

[18] On this remarkable dynasty see K. Kitchen, *The Third Intermediate Period in Egypt (1100–650 B.C.)* (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1986) 148–173.

ably part of the political maneuvering of the day against Assyria. (3) The efforts to gain help from Egypt are condemned in chap. 30: "'Woe to the obstinate children,' declares the Lord, 'to those who carry out plans that are not mine, forming an alliance, but not by my Spirit, heaping sin upon sin; who go down to Egypt without consulting me; who look for help to Pharaoh's protection, to Egypt's shade for refuge'" (vv. 1–2). A similar message appears in 31:1.[19]

Babylon's prominence in the machinations against Assyrian rule are reflected in chap. 13. It seems strange that the prophecy headed "an oracle concerning Babylon" does not mention Babylon until v. 19. The description of the day of the Lord is classic.[20] There are astronomical changes (vv. 10, 13); the whole "world" (*tēbēl*) is involved (v. 11); the havoc wreaked seems to be universal and eschatological.

Without going into the use of the phrase "day of the Lord" (which at times refers to local events), I would suggest that this introduction is placed here at the beginning of the OAN to say that Yahweh has promised to judge the nations. Further, the reason for the discussion about the day of the Lord in cosmic and universal terms is not only that it applies to Babylonia's destruction (in the seventh century) but that it emphasizes God's plan to judge all nations that rebel against him.[21] It is appropriate at this place in the oracles because the following chapters refer to nation after nation against whom Yahweh will align himself. Babylonia, as the most significant and active potential ally for Judah in the late eighth century, is placed at the head of the oracles as an example of how the day of the Lord will bring down those who oppose his will.

What follows in Isaiah is a catalog of oracles against those people who wished to conspire against the Assyrians as though they in their own strength could deliver themselves. The purpose is to show Judah that it is futile to trust other nations for deliverance. The opening statement on the day of the Lord, therefore, applies to the entire group of nations. Since the NT is still looking for an eschatological day of the Lord (2 Thessalonians 2), the meaning was not exhausted in the eighth and seventh centuries. The fact that God will ultimately bring the nations into judgment and destruction is an argument that he will immediately judge those nations with whom Judah was trying to ally herself in Isaiah's time.

The section beginning with Isa 13:17 becomes very specific by referring to the Medes. The usual interpretation relates it to the Medo-Persian defeat of Babylonia in 539 BC. But it is clear in Isa 23:13 that the destruction of

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[19] See Hayes and Irvine, *Isaiah* 246–247, for further discussion of the efforts to break the yoke of Assyria.

[20] See Weiss, "The Origin of the 'Day of the Lord' Reconsidered," *HUCA* 37 (1966) 29–71, for a discussion.

[21] Contra Dyer and Hunt, *Rise* 163–164. J. A. Motyer (*The Prophecy of Isaiah* [Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993] 135) is right in saying that 13:2–16 is a day-of-the-Lord oracle datable to any point in Isaiah's ministry. I believe he is wrong, however, in applying the specific oracle (13:17–22) to the fall of Babylon in 539 BC.

Babylon is attributed to Assyria, not the Medes.[22] Isaiah was referring to a seventh-century destruction of Babylon, and with this oracle God was warning Hezekiah and Judah not to put their trust in Babylon because she would be destroyed. The warning was probably given in light of the overtures of the Chaldean/Babylonian Merodach-Baladan recorded in chap. 39.

The Medes and Elamites, however, were allies of Babylonia in the seventh century, not enemies. How can they therefore be referred to as attacking Babylon? Hayes and Irvine, I believe, are right in arguing that in this context they represent mercenaries in the Assyrian army.[23] The idea of mercenary troops or captive troops in the Assyrian army is supported by Isa 22:6 where warriors from Elam and Kir are seen attacking Judah.[24] This attack probably took place in Sennacherib's invasion of 701. The Elamites and Medes are again depicted as fighting the "Desert by the Sea" (Chaldea) in chap. 21.[25] This attack on Babylon therefore refers to the Assyrian efforts to control their rebellious province. The Chaldean sheik Merodach-Baladan proved to be a continuing nuisance to the Assyrians. Several attacks were made on Babylon, but the most devastating one was led by Sennacherib in 689 or about a decade after his attack on Jerusalem.[26] He speaks of his destruction of Babylon in these words:

> The city and its houses,—foundation and walls, I destroyed, I devastated, I burned with fire. The wall and the outer-wall, temples and gods, temple-towers of brick and earth, as many as there were, I razed and dumped them into the Arahtu canal. Through the midst of that city I dug canals, I flooded its site with water [cf. Isa 14:23], and the very foundation thereof I destroyed. I made its destruction more complete than that by a flood. That in days to come, the site of that city, and its temples and gods, might not be remembered, I completely blotted it out with floods of water [cf. 14:23] and made it like a

[22] Hayes and Irvine (*Isaiah* 222–223) argue that the Assyrians have a regard for Median warriors. Assyria is attacking Babylon, but the Medes are the notable mercenaries. Jeremiah 51:11 also refers to the Medes as attacking Babylonia. There it refers to the kingdom, not merely the city. I would argue for a reused prophecy now being applied to the destruction of the empire in 539 BC by the Persians.

[23] Hayes and Irvine, *Isaiah* 222: "The reference to Medes in 13:17 does not mean that they were the main force attacking Babylon. During Tiglath-Pileser's reign, the Medes, or at least some of them, were subordinate to the Assyrians." H. W. F. Saggs, "The Nimrud Letters 1952—Part II," *Iraq* 17 (1955) 126–160, cites a text showing the use of foreign troops by the Assyrians: "I then appointed, when he came down to me, a tax-collector who (had been) in the warehouses of Sidon. The Sidonians then attacked him. Thereupon I sent the Itu'a contingent to Mount Lebanon: they made the people jump around!" (p. 128). "Such taxes were resented and a civil disturbance ensued, requiring the presence of Itu'a troops, the unit of the Assyrian army frequently employed for police duties" (p. 150). He dates the letters from 740 to 705. Itu'a, say Hayes and Irvine, are Aramean shock troops. See also J. E. Reade, "The Neo-Assyrian Court and Army: Evidence from the Sculptures," *Iraq* 34 (1972) 87–112, for a discussion of Elamite provincials in the Assyrian army. This would obviate M. J. Dresden's statement (*IDB* 320): "The possibility of a Median attack upon Babylon, envisaged in Isa. 13:17–18; Jer. 51:11,28 never materialized (see Jer. 25:25)."

[24] Although Clements relates this passage to 587 BC (*Isaiah* 187).

[25] For an excellent discussion of this chapter in light of Assyrian records see C. Boutflower, "Isaiah XXI in the Light of Assyrian History," *JTS* 14 (1913) 501–515; *JTS* 15 (1914) 1–15.

[26] See Erlandsson, *Burden* 160–166. See also Boutflower, "Isaiah," who refers to the latter part of chap. 21 to the same battle.

meadow. . . . After I had destroyed Babylon, had smashed the gods thereof [cf. 21:9], and had struck down its people with the sword,—that the ground of that city might be carried off, I removed its ground and had it carried to the Euphrates (and on) to the sea. Its dirt reached (was carried) unto Dilmun.[27]

Isaiah himself attributes the fall of the Chaldeans to the Assyrians, using language similar to that in Isaiah 13: "Look at the land of the Chaldeans, this people that is now of no account! The Assyrians have made it a place for desert creatures; they raised up their siege towers, they stripped its fortresses bare and turned it into a ruin" (23:13).[28]

Much of the orientation of Isaiah's messages in chaps. 40–66 is toward the Babylonian exile in 586 BC[29] and the return in 538. Chapter 39 was placed where it is to explain historically why the Jews went into Babylonian exile.[30] The date of the events of that chapter is debated, but all agree that it transpired sometime around the turn of the seventh century or in the Assyrian period of domination.[31] Chapter 13 likewise comes from the same milieu and is a warning, presumably to Hezekiah, that it is futile to lean on Babylon, for she will be destroyed by the hand of Yahweh (day of the Lord) through Assyrian might (23:13).

The prophecy of the fall of Babylon leads to a beautiful statement about the return from the exile in chap. 14. Just as the promise of judgment of the exile in Isaiah 39 is followed by beautiful promises of deliverance in Isaiah 40–66, so the promise of judgment upon Babylon in Isaiah 13 is followed by promises of the blessings of return from exile in Isa 14:1–3. Isaiah 40–66 is anticipated in 14:1–3, and the same questions arise here as in that section: Were these events fulfilled in 538 when the Jews returned? If so, how is the language to be understood?[32]

To some extent the message of Isaiah 14 and chaps. 40–55 must refer to the return from Babylonian exile since this entire section refers to the Chaldeans, Babylonians and Cyrus. But the return of the Jews under Zerubbabel was rather pathetic in comparison to Isaiah's description. Only a relatively small number of Jews returned. They were living among the ruins of Jerusalem, and their efforts to rebuild the temple were met with

[27] Luckenbill, *Annals* 17. For a discussion of this passage in connection with Isaiah 21 see G. Franz, "Babylon Revisited: Isaiah 21—Future or Fulfilled?" (unpublished paper).

[28] Critical scholars usually view this verse as a gloss, but it may be that Tyre was looking to the Chaldean sheiks as their hope. The purpose would be to warn Tyre not to trust in this people, who would be judged by God working through Assyria.

[29] For a recent discussion on this date of the fall of Jerusalem see G. Galil, "The Babylonian Calendar and the Chronology of the Last Kings of Judah," *Bib* 72 (1991) 367–378.

[30] O. Kaiser, *Isaiah 13–39* (OTL; London: SCM, 1974) 410–412, interprets the entire passage as a matter of hubris on Hezekiah's part, but Herbert *(Isaiah* 213–214) recognizes that both Isaiah and Hezekiah were responding to an overture from Babylon to ally against Assyria. Hayes and Irvine *(Isaiah* 385) aptly interpret the literary purpose of chap. 39: "In its present form, chapter 39 is preparatory to the preaching of Second Isaiah in chapter 40 and following. The latter proclaims an imminent return from Babylonian exile. Isaiah 39 declares that exile to Babylon was already predicted by Isaiah and set in motion by Hezekiah."

[31] Cf. e.g. Clements, *Isaiah* 294.

[32] Cf. Motyer, *Prophecy* 141–142.

staunch resistance by the Gentiles (whereas 14:2 says the Gentiles will be servants). The language of the passage forces the interpreter who is trying to take the language seriously to see a future for Israel that far exceeds what happened when Cyrus permitted the Jews to return to Jerusalem (as in 11:11 ff.). The same is true of chaps. 40–55. The language of the second part of Isaiah is so universal and comprehensive and is so often applied to NT situations that the ultimate fulfillment of these promises must be eschatological.

Was it fulfilled in the first century when Jesus was introduced to Israel by John the Baptist who said he was "a voice of one calling in the desert"? In a sense, yes. The ultimate regathering of Israel, however, goes beyond the first century and yet awaits fulfillment.

The identity of the king of Babylonia is not important to the argument of the unit. Whether it refers to an Assyrian king ruling in Babylon or a Chaldean like Merodach-Baladan or to his sixth-century counterpart Nebuchadnezzar, the point is that Babylon will fall.[33] Throughout Isaiah there is an emphasis on the arrogance of individuals and kingdoms who exalt themselves against God.[34] God's ax (Assyria in 10:15, Babylonia in chap. 14) became arrogant toward its wielder. This hubris must be dealt with.[35]

In 14:24-27 the subject switches back to Assyria to show that this mighty threat to God's people will be broken by God. Judah thought she needed help from other nations, but God told her to trust him. Philistia (14:28–32) is warned not to expect relief because the "rod that struck [her] is broken." It sounds as though the rod is Ahaz, but Erlandsson argues (with some difficulty because of the chronology) that it is Assyria. Therefore the Philistine passage continues the warning not to expect deliverance from Assyria until Yahweh brings it.[36]

In summary, chaps. 13–14 teach that (1) eighth-century Babylonia, to whom Hezekiah was looking for help against Assyria, would fall to the Assyrians (in 689 BC) and therefore be utterly unable to support a revolt; (2) Babylonia, looked upon as a potential ally in the eighth century, would actually become an oppressor in the sixth (Isaiah 39); (3) God would ultimately deliver Judah and return her from the exile to be imposed by these same Babylonians; (4) an eschatological deliverance of the people of Israel

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[33] H. Wildberger, *Jesaja* (BKAT; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1978) 541, says it could not refer to Babylon. Kaiser (*Isaiah* 29–32) provides a good overview of the issue. After giving several options he says there is no way of knowing the referent and discusses the various candidates from Assyrians to Greeks. Erlandsson (*Burden* 161) believes it is an Assyrian king. Hayes and Irvine (*Isaiah* 227) believe it is the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser III because he "ascended the throne of Babylon." N. K. Gottwald, *All the Kingdoms of the Earth* (New York: Harper, 1964) 176, believes it to have referred to Sargon II since he "was not buried in his house." H. Barth, *Die Jesaja-Worte in der Josiazeit* (WMANT; Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1977) 137, also believes it is an Assyrian king and that the reference to Babylon is secondary.

[34] See e.g. Isa 9:9; 16:6; 23:9; 25:11; 28:1.

[35] W. S. Prinsloo, "Isaiah 14:12–15—Humiliation, Hubris, Humiliation," *ZAW* 93 (1981) 432–438, shows that the structure of the poem is ABA: The king of Babylonia has been humiliated; the reason is his hubris; he has been humiliated.

[36] Erlandsson, *Burden* 68–69. Kaiser (*Isaiah* 51) argues that the heading is secondary. See *ANET* 286 for the attack by Sargon II on Ashdod in 711.

will take place as depicted in 14:1–3 and in many places throughout Isaiah 40–66.

III. THESIS 2: THE LANGUAGE DESCRIBING THE FALL OF BABYLON SHOULD BE UNDERSTOOD AS DESTRUCTION LANGUAGE

Much of the argumentation for an eschatological Babylon comes from an effort to deal with the language of the prophecies of judgment on Babylon found in Isaiah and Jeremiah. This language has prompted some to argue that the historical destruction of Babylon (certainly in 539 BC and to some extent in the earlier periods) does not fit the language of this section.[37] G. H. Lang says:

> The city has never been thus overwhelmed, but only very gradually decayed. . . . As late as the fifth century A.D. Babylon was still a town of size, and Jews were living there . . . . It is highly doubtful if the site has ever been wholly uninhabited, as is required by Jer. 50:39, 40 and Isa. 13:20. The last passage says that the Arabian shall never pitch his tent there after the destruction. Now in a diary of Dr. W. E. Blackstone, the author of *Jesus Is Coming*, which I read in Egypt many years ago, just after he had toured Babylonia, he stated distinctly that he had tested the point with his Arab guides and they made no objection at all to pitching in the midst of the ruins.[38]

Any effort to determine the meaning of the prophets demands discernment as to the type of material involved. This statement is so obvious as to be gratuitous, but the discussion at hand is brought about by a difference of opinion as to the genre of the passage. We will now turn our attention to the language of these passages dealing with the destruction of cities and countries.

Since the work of George Mendenhall relating suzerainty treaties to the covenant of Deuteronomy,[39] considerable work has been done on curses related to the treaties.[40] Included in many of these treaties is stereotypical language calling for judgment upon those who violate the terms of the treaty.

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[37] G. H. Lang, *Histories and Prophecies of Daniel* (London: Oliphants, 1942) 33–34. See also C. Dyer, "Jeremiah," *Bible Knowledge Commentary* (ed. Walvoord and Zuck); "The Identity of Babylon in Revelation 17–18," *BSac* 144 (1987) 305–316, 433–449; Dyer and Hunt, *Rise*; Dyer, *World News and Bible Prophecy* (Wheaton: Tyndale, n.d.); K. Allen, "The Rebuilding and Destruction of Babylon," *BSac* 133 (1976) 19–27.

[38] Lang, *Histories*, 33. Lang does not seem to be aware of the destruction of Babylon in 689 BC. See also Dyer and Hunt, *Rise* 162, 175–176.

[39] G. E. Mendenhall, "Ancient Oriental and Biblical Law," *BA* 17 (1954) 26–46, 50–76. See also D. J. McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant* (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1978).

[40] Several articles and books were published during the 1960s on this topic; cf. e.g. F. C. Fensham, "Malediction and Benediction in Ancient Near Eastern Vassal-Treaties and the Old Testament," *ZAW* 74 (1962) 1–9; "Common Trends in Curses of the Near Eastern Treaties and *Kudurru*-Inscriptions Compared with Maledictions of Amos and Isaiah," *ZAW* 75 (1963) 155–175; J. Fitzmyer, *The Aramaic Inscriptions of Sefire* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1967); D. R. Hillers, *Treaty-curses and the Old Testament Prophets* (BibOr 16; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1964); D. J. Wiseman, *The Vassal-Treaties of Esarhaddon* (London: British School of Archaeology in Iraq, 1958). For an earlier work that referred to OT parallels see M. Streck, "Ashurbanipal und die letzen assyrischen Könige bis zum Untergange Ninevehs" (*Vorderasiatische Bibliothek* 7; Leipzig, 1916) 58.

The judgment from the gods upon the vassal will result in desolation and destruction of the worst sort.[41]

Isaiah 13:19–22; 14:22–23; 23:13 have been linked with the language of the treaty curses. F. C. Fensham argues that the day of the Lord is retribution for breaking his covenant and that the punishment upon the cities thus judged is described in terms similar to those used in the treaties.[42] I would agree with those who believe that the description of the fall of Babylon belongs to that same genre of literature.[43] For want of a better term we might call it destruction genre. This is not to suggest that the promise of destruction is not real. It is indeed, and, as we have seen, it did happen to Babylon in the seventh century. In the pagan curses it was the hope and expectation of the suzerain that the gods would bring about the curses. When Yahweh speaks, the destruction will take place. But the language was stereotypical, and no one expected to see the implementation of the precise details.[44]

Perhaps the most important treaty in terms of parallels with OT oracles is the Sefire treaty. Sefire is located in Syria, and the inscription (in Aramaic) comes from the middle of the eighth century BC.[45] The following paragraph from this treaty illustrates some of the parallels with OT oracles:

> And if Mati['el] should be false <to Bir-Ga'yah> [and to] his son and to his offspring, may his kingdom become like a kingdom of sand, a kingdom of sand, as long as *Asshur* rules! (And) [may Ha]dad [pour (over it)] every sort of evil (which exists) on earth and in heaven and every sort of trouble; may the locust devour (Arpad), and for seven years may the worm eat, and for seven [years may] TWY come up upon the face of its land! May the grass not come forth so that no green may be seen; and may its vegetation not be [seen]! Nor may the sound of the lyre be heard in Arpad; but among its people (let there rather be) the din of *affliction* and *the noi[se of cry]ing* and lamentation! May the gods send every sort of devourer against Arpad and against its people! [May the mo]uth of a snake [eat], the mouth of a scorpion, the mouth of *a bear*, the mouth of a panther! And may a moth and a louse and a [... become] to it a serpent's throat! May its vegetation be destroyed unto desolation! And may Arpad become a mound to [house the desert animal]:

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[41] Fensham, "Malediction."

[42] Fensham, "Common Trends" 166–167: "The curse of a doomed city and its ruins is directed both against the guilty Judah and enemies of Yahweh and Israel. In Is 24 we have a discussion of the judgment over the earth. This judgment is pronounced because the everlasting covenant is broken (verse 5). The breaking of the covenant brings into effect a curse (verse 6) on the earth and its inhabitants. The effect on various natural phenomena is then stressed and in verse 10 the conception occurs that the city is desolated and the gates battered in ruins. We have, thus, figurative language on the odious and destructive effect of the curse after the covenant is broken. . . . In Is 32:12–14 the growth of thorns and briers on once fertile fields and desolation of the palace with wild-asses and flocks amongst its ruins is described."

[43] See in particular Hillers, *Treaty-curses*.

[44] It is also important to note the differences between the way other literature uses this terminology and the way the Bible uses it. Fensham ("Common Trends" 173) says, "The mechanical, magical execution of the treaty-curse if stipulations of a legal document should be broken, stands in glaring contrast to the ego-theological approach of prophetic writings."

[45] A. Dupont-Sommer and J. Starcky, *Les Inscriptions Araméennes de Sfiré (Stèles I et II)* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1958) 6: "Dans l'ensemble, le type d'écriture situe nos inscriptions de Sfiré vers le milieu du VIIIe siècle av. J.-C., après celles de Bar-Rekoub et d'Azitawadda."

the gazelle and the fox and the hare and the wild-cat and the owl and the [ ] and the magpie! May [this] ci[ty] not be mentioned (any more).[46]

Following are lists of OT verses, as well as examples from ancient Near Eastern texts, describing the destruction of various cities (including the key passages before us) that suggest that there are stereotypical phrases[47] whose individual details should not be pressed for precise literal meaning. The idea is that God will defeat the city. For example, the Edomites continued to exist in the Negev after they were driven out by the Nabateans, who in turn took up residence in Petra—but destruction language is nevertheless used against Edom. The phrase "everlasting wastes" is applied to Jerusalem (Jer 25:9) and Bozrah (49:13), just as "everlasting desolation" is applied to Babylon (25:12; 51:26, 62), Edom (Ezek 35:9) and Moab (Zeph 2:9). The texts are presented *in extenso* so that their impact may be felt.

1. *Object of horror.* King and Jerusalemites: "[I] will make them . . . abhorrent to all the kingdoms of the earth and an object of cursing and horror, of scorn and reproach, among all the nations where I drive them" (Jer 29:18). Bozrah, Edom: "Bozrah will become a ruin and an object of horror, of reproach and of cursing. . . . Edom will become an object of horror; all who pass by will be appalled and will scoff" (49:13, 17). Babylon: "All who pass Babylon will be horrified and scoff" (50:13). "Babylon will be . . . an object of horror and scorn" (51:37). Nineveh: "All who pass by her scoff and shake their fists" (Zeph 2:15). Jerusalem: "I will devastate this city and make it an object of scorn; all who pass by will be appalled and will scoff" (Jer 19:8). "People from many nations . . . will ask one another, 'Why has the Lord done such a thing to this great city?'" (22:8). "I will . . . make them an object of horror and scorn" (25:9). "Jerusalem and the towns of Judah, its kings and officials, to make them . . . an object of horror and scorn and cursing, as they are today" (25:18).

2. *Haunt of wild creatures.* Hazor: "Hazor will become a haunt of jackals" (Jer 49:33). Babylon: "So desert creatures and hyenas will live there, and there the owl will dwell" (50:39). "Babylon will be . . . a haunt of jackals" (51:37). "But desert creatures will lie there, jackals will fill her houses; there the owls will dwell, and there the wild goats will leap about. Hyenas will howl in her strongholds, jackals in her luxurious palaces" (Isa 13:21–22). "I will turn her into a place for owls" (14:23). "The Assyrians have made it a place for desert creatures" (23:13). Edom: "The desert owl and screech owl will possess it; the great owl and the raven will nest there. . . . She will become a haunt for jackals, a home for owls. Desert creatures will meet with hyenas, and wild goats will bleat to each other; there the night creatures will also repose and find themselves places of rest. The owl will nest there and lay eggs, she will hatch them, and care for her young under the shadow

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[46] Translation from Fitzmyer, *Sefire* 15.
[47] Most of these references have already been provided in the literature.

of her wings; there also the falcons will gather, each with its mate" (34:11, 13–14). "I have . . . left his inheritance to the desert jackals" (Mal 1:3). Nineveh: "Flocks and herds will lie down there, creatures of every kind. The desert owl and the screech owl will roost on her columns" (Zeph 2:14). Jerusalem: "Citadel and watchtower will become . . . the delight of donkeys, a pasture for flocks" (Isa 32:14). "I will make Jerusalem . . . a haunt of jackals" (Jer 9:11). "The land of the north . . . will make the towns of Judah desolate, a haunt of jackals" (10:22). "Mount Zion . . . with jackals prowling over it" (Lam 5:18). Other cities: "May Arpad become a mound to [house the desert animal]: the gazelle and the fox and the hare and the wild-cat and the owl and the [ ] and the magpie" (Sefire 32–33).[48] Foxes and hyenas made their homes there" (a letter of Esarhaddon to the god Ashur).[49] "Wild asses, gazelles, and every kind of wild animal I made lie down there" (annals of Ashurbanipal).[50]

D. R. Hillers says, "The following may be cited as further examples of the prophets' use of this same [treaty] imagery: Is 13:19–22 . . . Zeph 2:13–15 . . . Jer 50:39. . . . These and Isaiah 34 are the most extensive Old Testament instances and may be regarded as free variations on a simple theme."[51]

3. *Overthrow as of Sodom and Gomorrah.* Israel: "The whole land . . . will be like the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim, which the Lord overthrew in fierce anger" (Deut 29:23). "We would have become like Sodom, we would have been like Gomorrah" (Isa 1:9). Edom: " 'As Sodom and Gomorrah were overthrown, along with their neighboring towns,' " says the Lord, " 'so no one will live there' " (Jer 49:18). Babylon: " 'As God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah along with their neighboring towns,' " declares the Lord, " 'so no one will live there' " (50:40). "Babylon . . . will be overthrown by God like Sodom and Gomorrah" (Isa 13:19). Moab and Ammon: "Moab will become like Sodom, the Ammonites like Gomorrah" (Zeph 2:9).

4. *Summons to attack.* Babylon: "Summon archers against Babylon, all those who draw the bow. Encamp all around her; let no one escape" (Jer 50:29). "Sharpen the arrows, take up the shields! . . . Lift up a banner against the walls of Babylon! Reinforce the guard, station watchmen, prepare an ambush!" (51:11–12). "Lift up a banner in the land! Blow the trumpet among the nations! Prepare the nations for battle against her; summon against her these kingdoms: Ararat, Minni and Ashkenaz. Appoint a commander against her; send up horses like a swarm of locusts. Prepare the nations for battle against her" (51:27–28). Bozrah: "An envoy was sent to the nations to say, 'Assemble yourselves to attack it! Rise up for battle!' "

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[48] Fitzmyer, *Sefire.*
[49] Borger, "Die Inschriften Asarhaddons Königs von Assyrien," *AfO* 9 (1956) 107.
[50] Streck, "Ashurbanipal" 57–58.
[51] Hillers, *Treaty-curses* 53.

(49:14). Jerusalem: "Sound the trumpet in Tekoa! Raise the signal over Beth Hakkerem! . . . Prepare for battle against her! Arise, let us attack at noon! . . . Cut down the trees and build siege ramps against Jerusalem" (6:1, 4, 6; cf. vv. 22–26).

5. *Desolation.* Judah: "Today they lie deserted and in ruins" (Jer 44:2). "This is how they made the pleasant land desolate" (Zech 7:14). "If it becomes desolate . . . the land would be desolate" (Ezek 14:15). "I will make their land a desolate waste, . . . and the mountains of Israel will become desolate . . . when I have made the land a desolate waste" (33:28–29). Nineveh: "He will stretch out his hand against the north and destroy Assyria, leaving Nineveh utterly desolate and dry as the desert" (Zeph 2:13). "What a ruin she has become!" (2:15). Babylon: "I will make it desolate forever" (Jer 25:12). "Completely destroy her and leave her no remnant" (50:26). "You will be desolate forever" (51:26). "Her towns will be desolate, a dry and desert land" (51:43). Edom: "It will lie desolate" (Isa 34:9–10). "I will make Mount Seir a desolate waste" (Ezek 35:7). Moab: "Moab will become . . . a wasteland forever" (Zeph 2:9).

6. *No one passes through or lives there.* Judah: "I will lay waste the towns of Judah so no one can live there" (Jer 9:11). "The king of Babylon would . . . cut off both men and animals from it" (36:29). "It is . . . without men or animals" (32:43). "It becomes desolate so that no one can pass through" (Ezek 14:15). "The mountains of Israel will become desolate, so that no one will cross them" (33:28). "I have left their streets deserted, with no one passing through. Their cities are destroyed; no one will be left—no one at all" (Zech 3:6). "The land was left so desolate behind them that no one could come or go" (Zech 7:14). Nations: "I have left their streets deserted, with no one passing through. Their cities are destroyed; no one will be left— no one at all" (Zeph 3:6). Egypt: "No foot of man or animal will pass through it; no one will live there for forty years" (Ezek 29:11). Moab: "Her towns will become desolate, with no one to live in them" (Jer 48:9). Edom: "No one will live there; no man will dwell in it" (49:18). Hazor: "No one will live there; no man will dwell in it" (49:33). Babylon: "No one will live in it; both men and animals will flee away. . . . Because of the Lord's anger she will not be inhabited but will be completely desolate . . . so no one will live there; no man will dwell in it" (50:3, 13, 40). "No one will live there" (51:29). "She will never be inhabited or lived in through all generations; no Arab will pitch his tent there, no shepherd will rest his flocks there" (Isa 13:20). "I will cut off from Babylon her name and survivors, her offspring and descendants" (14:22). Philistia: "I will destroy you, and none will be left" (Zeph 2:5).

7. *Scattered everywhere.* Egypt: "I will disperse the Egyptians among the nations and scatter them through the countries" (Ezek 29:12). Elam: "I will scatter them to the four winds" (Jer 49:36).

8. *Removal of sounds of joy.* Judah: "I will bring an end to the sounds of joy and gladness and to the voices of bride and bridegroom" (Jer 7:34). "I will

bring an end to the sounds of joy and gladness and to the voices of bride and bridegroom" (16:9). "I will banish from them the sounds of joy and gladness, the voices of bride and bridegroom, the sound of millstones and the light of the lamp" (25:10) Tyre: "I will put an end to your noisy songs, and the music of your harps will be heard no more" (Ezek 26:13). Other cities: "Nor may the sound of the lyre be heard in Arpad" (Sefire).[52]

9. *Conclusion.* The virtually identical language should be noted in the following phraseology: "All who pass by will be appalled and will scoff because of all its wounds" (Jer 19:8 [Jerusalem]; 49:17 [Edom]; 50:13 [Babylon]). "As Sodom and Gomorrah were overthrown, along with their neighboring towns" (49:18 [Edom]; 50:40 [Babylon]). "So no one will live there; no man will dwell in it" (49:18 [Edom], 33 [Hazor]; 50:40 [Babylon]). These verses alone show that the language is ritualistic and stereotypical. Three different towns are involved, but identical language is used in each case.

It should be noted that the common language is found primarily in Isaiah and Jeremiah in the OT and in Sefire, Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal outside the OT.[53]

The language of destruction belongs to a genre found in treaties that speaks generally and hyperbolically of devastating defeat and destruction without requiring detailed fulfillment. It is used even of Jerusalem, which Jeremiah says would be "an everlasting ruin" (Jer 25:9).[54] The prophecy in Isaiah 13 refers to the terrible destruction of Babylon in 689 BC, and the language does not require a rebuilding of the city of Babylon so that it can be destroyed again.

IV. THESIS #3: THE PROPHECIES OF JEREMIAH ARE DIRECTED
AGAINST THE NEO-BABYLONIAN (CHALDEAN) EMPIRE (625–539 BC)

We have argued that the prophecies against Babylon given by the eighth-century Isaiah referred to eighth/seventh-century Babylon. The historical milieu was appropriate to the message, and the language of destruction does not require a completely detailed fulfillment. But what does one do with the prophecies of Jeremiah that were given at the end of the seventh century and in the beginning of the sixth? Clearly this Babylonia (first mentioned in Jer 20:4) refers to the neo-Babylonian (Chaldean) empire under Nebuchadnezzar II. In Isaiah the prophecies about Babylon are generally hostile.[55] The king of Babylonia is never referred to as a servant of Yahweh

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[52] Fitzmyer, *Sefire*.

[53] Hillers, *Treaty-curses* 77–78.

[54] The term עולם can of course mean "for a long time," but using it for only a seventy-year period suggests hyperbole. Both Jerusalem and Babylon were rebuilt in a relatively short time after their violent destruction.

[55] Oracle against Babylon, Isa 13:1; Babylon will be overthrown as were Sodom and Gomorrah, 13:19; taunt against king of Babylon, 14:4; prediction of cutting off name and survivor, 14:22; Babylon has fallen, 21:9; Merodach-Baladan and captivity of Jerusalem by Babylon, chap. 39; judgment of neo-Babylonian empire, 43:14; 47:1; 48:14, 20. "Chaldeans" occurs in 13:19; 43:14 parallel to Babylon; in 47:5 "Chaldeans" stands alone.

who carries out his purposes. The nearest Isaiah comes to this perspective is in chap. 39 where he says that the Babylonians will come one day and carry off the treasures of the royal palace and make eunuchs of Hezekiah's descendants. In Isaiah's day Judah was to have nothing to do with Babylonia and so avoid alliances against Assyria.

A century later, however, the picture changed dramatically. Jeremiah declared that Nebuchadnezzar was God's servant (25:9; 27:6; 43:10), God would fight on Babylon's side (21:4), all people were required to submit to Nebuchadnezzar's rule (27:8; 28:14), and God would deliver Judah into Nebuchadnezzar's hand (32:28, 36; 46:26). Jeremiah spent the later years of his ministry (intensively from 605 BC) warning Judah that their only escape lay in submitting to Yahweh's divine purposes effected through the neo-Babylonian empire headed by Nebuchadnezzar.[56]

Furthermore, of the approximately 168 references to Babylon and 46 to the Chaldeans in Jeremiah, scattered from Jeremiah 20 through the end, all refer to Babylon in a neutral sense or as a prophecy against Judah and other nations except 25:12; chaps. 50–51.[57] These are the two places in Jeremiah to which we now must direct our attention and ask whether the prophecies against Babylon were fulfilled when Cyrus conquered Babylon in 539 BC.

In Isaiah's time it was "Babylon"—either as the city on the Euphrates or the Assyrian province—that figured largely in the discussion of Israel's international relations. But for Jeremiah "Babylon" was an empire Judah was facing, not a city or a province. Under Belshazzar, who was vice-regent to his absent father Nabonidus, the city of Babylon fell to Cyrus, who proclaimed himself the welcome benefactor of the Babylonians.[58] The city capitulated virtually without a shot being fired, and Cyrus appointed a subordinate ruler in the province, which now became a part of the Persian empire.[59]

Since Jeremiah's ministry contained a pro-Babylonian policy, we must now face the vexing question of the meaning and relevance of Jeremiah's preaching when it was directed against Babylon.

1. *The critical year 605 BC.* The year that Nebuchadnezzar took the throne after his father's death was critical for Judah. Jehoiakim had been a vassal of Egypt since his enthronement by Pharaoh Neco in 609, but 605 saw the Babylonians victorious in the Syrian region, the death of Nabopolassar, and

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[56] The OAN in Isaiah are there to argue against Judahite alliances against Assyria. Similarly the OAN in Jeremiah grow out of God's will that all nations, including Judah, submit to the Babylonian yoke. T. G. Smothers, "A Lawsuit against the Nations: Reflections on the Oracles against the Nations in Jeremiah," *RevExp* 85 (1988) 545–554, argues that the OAN reflect the language of treaty violation. "I further suggest that the empire of Babylon, with Yahweh as suzerain, and with Nebuchadrezzar as Yahweh's servant, is the central reality which can explain the oracles against the nations in Jeremiah" (p. 552).

[57] There are some 55 occurrences of "Babylon" and 10 occurrences of "Chaldean" in chaps. 50–51. "Sheshach" (51:41; 25:26) is usually considered to be a cryptogram for "Babylon." "Leb Kamai" is probably also a cryptogram for "Chaldeans" in 51:1.

[58] *ANET* 315–316.

[59] See *CAH* (2d ed.) 4.125–126.

Nebuchadnezzar's forced march to Babylon to take the throne. Scholars debate the extent of Nebuchadnezzar's involvement with Judah at that time, but we read in 2 Kgs 24:1 that during Jehoiakim's reign "Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon invaded the land, and Jehoiakim became his vassal for three years." The Chronicler says, "Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon attacked him and bound him with bronze shackles to take him to Babylon" (2 Chr 36:6). Daniel 1:1–2 says, "In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia and put in the treasure house of his god."[60] This was Nebuchadnezzar's first contact with Judah. The Babylonian chronicle says, "In the first year of Nebuchadrezzar in the month of Sivan he mustered his army and went to the Ḫatti-territory, he marched about unopposed in the Ḫatti-territory until the month of Kislev. All the kings of the Ḫatti-land came before him and he received their heavy tribute. He marched to the city of Askelon and captured it in the month of Kislev. He captured its king and plundered it and carried off [spoil from it. . . .] He turned the city into a mound and heaps of ruins and then in the month of Sebat he marched back to Babylon."[61] Note that the chronicle does not mention any city but Ashkelon. The statement in Dan 1:1 may indicate only that Nebuchadnezzar treated Jehoiakim as an enemy. Even so, both people and booty were taken to Babylon. Either Nebuchadnezzar did not carry out his threat to deport Jehoiakim or he took him to Babylon and then returned him to Jerusalem. The former is more likely since there is no evidence of a viceroy governing until Jehoiakim returned, although D. J. Wiseman says, "Jehoiakim may have been personally required to go to Babylon to take part in the victory celebrations as a conquered and vassal king <2 Chron. 36:6> as had Manasseh in the days of Esarhaddon <2 Chron. 33:11>."[62] Wiseman believes the removal of Jehoiakim would have been within the first year of Nebuchadnezzar's rule.[63]

2. *Scroll references and the OAN in Jeremiah.* The messages against Babylon (Jeremiah 25 and chaps. 50–51) were written down on special occasions. Therefore it is important to discuss the various scrolls in the book and their relation to one another.

The word *sēper* appears several times in Jeremiah.[64] In chap. 29 it refers to a letter written by Jeremiah to the exiles after the 597 BC debacle. In chap. 32 it refers to the legal document proving Jeremiah's purchase of his

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[60] For a discussion of the problems raised by this reference in Daniel see D. J. Wiseman, "Daniel 1:1," *Notes on Some Problems in the Book of Daniel* (London: Tyndale, 1965) 17–18.

[61] D. J. Wiseman, *Chronicles of Chaldaean Kings (626–556 B.C.) in the British Museum* (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1956) 69.

[62] Wiseman, *Notes* 18.

[63] D. J. Wiseman, *Nebuchadrezzar and Babylon* (New York: Oxford University, 1985) 24–25.

[64] I will refer to these *sĕpārîm* as scrolls in my discussion, although the more precise word for "scroll" (*mĕgillâ*) occurs only in chap. 36.

uncle's land (during the siege that began in 588). In chap. 30 it has reference to the messages of hope. The other four references (chaps. 25, 36, 45, 51) are pertinent to the present discussion. Chapter 25 refers to prophecies against Judah and the nations, presumably written in the fourth year of Jehoiakim (605). The scroll of chap. 36 contained Yahweh's warnings to "Israel, Judah and all the other nations from the time I began speaking to you in the reign of Josiah [627 BC] till now [605 BC]" (v. 2). It also said "that the king of Babylon would certainly come and destroy this land and cut off both men and animals from it" (v. 29). Chapter 45 contains a personal word of challenge and hope to Baruch and refers to the scroll of chap. 36. Finally, in chap. 51 a scroll containing prophecies against Babylon was tossed into the Euphrates River.

Several questions are raised by these references to scrolls. (1) Is the scroll of chap. 25 the same as that of chap. 36? Most scholars believe it is and search for its contents in the first twenty-five chapters of Jeremiah. C. Rietzschel is one of the few who identifies it with chap. 51.[65] (2) Why are references to Babylon missing in the LXX of chap. 25 but not in 36:29? (3) Is the scroll of chap. 51 to be identified with either of the scrolls in chaps. 25 and 36? Or does it contain some of one or both? (4) If the scroll of chap. 51 is to be related to the one(s) in chaps. 25 and 36, why are there no references of judgment on Jerusalem in chaps. 50–51? (5) Should we relate 36:29 to 50:39–40 as a form of reversal?

3. *The OAN in chap. 25 (605 BC)*. Jeremiah was busy during this fourth year of Jehoiakim. The critical chap. 25 saw him challenging the people on the basis of his twenty-three-year ministry. He predicted the defeat of Jerusalem and all the nations by a power from the north—namely, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon.

It goes without saying that the history of the text of chap. 25 is very complex.[66] This is not the place to present the issue,[67] but some general points may be raised without delving into them extensively.

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[65] C. Rietzschel, *Das Problem der Urrolle* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 1966) 40–42.

[66] The reference to Babylon (25:12) falls in the middle of one of the most difficult passages in Jeremiah. The LXX begins the OAN (MT Jeremiah 46–51) after 25:13 and has no references to Babylon or Chaldeans in the entire chapter. LXX 25:11–12: "And all the land will be destroyed, and they shall serve in those nations seventy years. And when the seventy years are fulfilled, I will avenge that nation, says the Lord, and I will make them an eternal desolation." The LXX text as it stands is unsatisfactory, for the absence of references to Babylon leaves a vague allusion to northern powers. When punishment comes in 25:12, however, "the families of the north" have become "that nation," now specific and singular but unidentified. Furthermore in Jer 25:13 the prophet speaks against "that land."

[67] For extensive discussion see J. Bright, *Jeremiah* (AB; Garden City: Doubleday, 1965); W. L. Holladay, *Jeremiah* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986, 1989); R. P. Carroll, *Jeremiah* (OTL; London: SCM, 1986); W. McKane, *Jeremiah* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986). See also L. Stulman, *The Prose Sermons of the Book of Jeremiah* (SBLDS 83; Atlanta: Scholars, 1986) 82–84, for a retroversion of the text with comments. J. G. Janzen, *Studies in the Text of Jeremiah* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1973), is the basic study dealing with the QL and comparing the LXX with the MT. He comes out strongly in favor of the priority of the LXX.

It is possible that the original oral sermon of chap. 25 did not contain the specific references to Babylon.[68] Subsequently, however, Jeremiah may have identified the referent as the king of Babylon[69] and introduced the judgment word against Babylon. Commentators generally do not want to allow judgment speeches against Babylon in the same contexts of judgment on Judah. But the messages of hope preached by Jeremiah (chaps. 30–33), which clearly delineate the restoration and conversion of Israel, must of necessity include judgment on Israel's enemies as the reversal motif is brought into play.[70]

The ambivalence of the MT and LXX in the placement of the OAN has come about because of the emphasis on the nations in chap. 25. "I will bring upon that land all the things I have spoken against it, all that are written in this book and prophesied by Jeremiah against all the nations" (25:13) is the key sentence. The latter part has been used by the LXX as a heading for the oracles, while the MT refers it to the contents of the scroll, otherwise unidentified. Furthermore, at least the Egyptian oracle (chap. 46) was written in 605. This situation should allow a greater connection between chap. 25 and the OAN than is generally allowed.[71]

The cup-of-wine message (25:15–29) is designed to show that all nations will be brought under God's judgment. The tone of the chapter indicates the possibility that Jeremiah actually took a symbolic cup to some of the representatives of the nations in Jerusalem itself (as he later placed yokes on representatives in Zedekiah's day; cf. chap. 27). If so, this unit might well fit in the seventh year of Jehoiakim when he rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar, and there would be representatives in Jerusalem plotting rebellion (2 Kgs 24:1).[72]

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[68] Jeremiah 29:10, the other reference to the seventy years, only obliquely refers to Babylon's judgment, which the LXX includes. Even so, I disagree with Bright (*Jeremiah* 163) when he says, "Thus the nation threatened in vs. 13 was originally Judah, while 'this book' was the scroll of Jeremiah's prophecies (whether in its original or recreated form) now underlying chapters i–xxv." He argues that the phrase "prophesied by Jeremiah against all the nations" was originally a heading for the rest of chap. 25. But the LXX has taken it as a heading for chaps. 41–51. For a good discussion linking chap. 25 with chap. 36 see B. Gosse, "La malédiction contre Babylone de Jérémie 51,59–64 et les rédactions du livre de Jérémie," *ZAW* 98 (1986) 383–399. He argues that chap. 25 was originally a curse against Jerusalem but was later turned into a curse against Babylon. Furthermore 51:49–64 (MT) is the consummation of that process.

[69] T. W. Overholt, "King Nebuchadnezzar in the Jeremiah Tradition," *CBQ* 30 (1968) 44–45, agrees.

[70] For this motif see 30:16–17; 31:13, 19. On the "Book of Comfort" Bright (*Jeremiah* 285) says, "All in all, the safest conclusion is that chapters xxx–xxxi contain genuine sayings of Jeremiah addressed to northern Israel and uttered relatively early in his career (xxxi 2–6, 15–21), together with other words of his uttered much later, and that the material has in certain cases subsequently been expanded and supplemented in such a way as to apply Jeremiah's prophecies more directly to the situation of the exiles living in Babylon." Holladay (*Jeremiah* 2.156) generally agrees. Carroll (*Jeremiah* 572) is much more skeptical and has reverted to the older position of disallowing judgment and blessing in the same context.

[71] Holladay (*Jeremiah* 1.664) says, "Rietzschel [*Urrolle*, 40–42] concludes that 'this book' must then have reference to Babylon, and that therefore the 'book' must have been the oracles against Babylon, part of the oracles against foreign nations that follow in G. Most commentators reject this line of thinking, however."

[72] Although Moabites and Ammonites are involved in the harassment of Jehoiakim in 2 Kgs 24:2, they are also included in the list of Jeremiah 25.

In Jeremiah's final form of his prophecy, the message against Babylon in chap. 25 must find its fulfillment in the fall of the neo-Babylonian empire in 539 BC because it must happen after the seventy years are completed. Furthermore it uses destruction language to describe that fall. The powerful empire built by Nebuchadnezzar, and of which he was so proud, completely collapsed before Cyrus in 539. This is what Jeremiah means when he says, "'But when the seventy years are fulfilled, I will punish the king of Babylon and his nation, the land of the Babylonians, for their guilt,'" declares the Lord, "'and will make it desolate forever. I will bring upon that land all the things I have spoken against it, all that are written in this book and prophesied by Jeremiah against all the nations. They themselves will be enslaved by many nations and great kings; I will repay them according to their deeds and the work of their hands'" (25:12–14). The destruction language of 25:12 is virtually the same as that in 51:62.

The same time element should be applied to the defeat of Judah and the small nations surrounding her. All these nations continued to exist in spite of the hyperbolic language used by Jeremiah. Notice the way he describes Nebuchadnezzar's defeat of these people: "'I will summon all the peoples of the north and my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon,'" declares the Lord, "'and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants and against all the surrounding nations. I will completely destroy them and make them an object of horror and scorn, and an everlasting ruin. I will banish from them the sounds of joy and gladness, the voices of bride and bridegroom, the sound of millstones and the light of the lamp. This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years'" (25:9–11). It is important for our argument to note that the genre "destruction language" is used in a context of Jeremiah that clearly requires a date in the sixth century BC for its fulfillment.

4. *The oracle against Egypt.* The first oracle against Egypt (46:1–12) is placed under the heading of the Carchemish battle in 605. This heading is generally considered legitimate by scholars.[73] The second Egyptian oracle (46:13–26) is dated by W. L. Holladay to 588. He suggests that the setting of the salvation oracle about Jacob (46:27–28 = 30:10–11) "will be not long after that proposed here for vv 14–24, so that it is understandable that the passage would be added as a counter-poise."[74] The composition of this oracle in 605 shows that at least some of the OAN scroll came into being at the same time as the scroll of chap. 36 and yet is not found in chaps. 1–25.

5. *The scroll in chap. 36 (605 BC).* Chapter 36 is the classic chapter that speaks of a scroll containing words "against Israel, Judah, and all the nations" from the beginning of Jeremiah's ministry. This scroll was produced in Jehoiakim's fourth year but was not publicly read until the next year. We know that it contained promises that Nebuchadnezzar would attack and

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[73] The heading is also in the LXX. See Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2.318, for a discussion of the authenticity of this oracle.

[74] Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2.328. See also Wiseman (*Problems* 1) for a discussion of the date.

destroy Jerusalem (36:29).[75] Did it also have promises of the destruction of Babylon?[76]

6. *The scroll of chaps. 50–51 (594 BC).* Jeremiah 51:59–64 tells of a scroll containing words "about all the disasters that would come upon Babylon— all that had been recorded concerning Babylon" that was to be thrown into the Euphrates. The date assigned to the scroll is the fourth year of Zedekiah (594). While Holladay does not accept all the verses in these chapters to be from Jeremiah, he does say that of the 104 verses in chaps. 50–51, eighty-two are authentic to Jeremiah and that the *sēper* of 51:60 probably included all the authentic material of 50:1–51:58.[77] At some point there was surely a separate scroll that contained all the oracles against the nations, but the one referred to in chap. 51 must contain only the messages of Babylon's doom and Israel's deliverance. It did not include messages of judgment on Judah or the other nations. The messages about Judah and Zion reflect the same milieu as that of chaps. 30–33. Zion's conversion and restoration are spoken of in 50:4–7 (cf. 23:1–8), 17, 19–20, 33–34; 51:5, 10, 19, 24, 34–35, 45–47, 51.

The scroll of 594 BC is found within the oracles of judgment against Babylon in chaps. 50–51, but Jeremiah augmented those messages with further promises of hope to Israel and judgment on Babylon. References to the temple (50:28; 51:11, 51) could be interpreted as referring to its destruction in 586, but the attack in 597 during which temple vessels were carried off could be the referent (2 Kgs 24:13). It is also possible that the messages against Babylon were augmented by Jeremiah after the fall of the temple and city in 586.[78]

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[75] The king of Babylon is present in the LXX though absent in 25:9–13.

[76] A comparison of 36:29, "cut off both men and animals from it (Judah)," with its reverse in 50:39–40 would tend to argue against the presence of anti-Babylonian messages in the scroll of chap. 36.

[77] Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2.434. He also believes the OAN were originally in chap. 25 (as in the LXX) but in the MT order (p. 313).

[78] This position on Jeremiah's role in the final formation of the book has been given more credence in recent times. A number of scholars are arguing for much more proximity to Jeremiah for almost all of the material. The trend of the past several years in Jeremiah studies spearheaded by Bright (*Jeremiah*) and Holladay (*Jeremiah* and many articles) has been to push the material of Jeremiah back toward Jeremiah himself. The so-called Deuteronomistic prose is not so Deuteronomistic after all and may represent a style of Jeremiah's day. The prose sections are by one author, says H. Weippert (*Die Prosareden des Jeremiabuches* [BZAW 132; Walter deGruyter, 1973]), and show a close connection with Jeremiah's own poetic diction and theological work. She uses the phrase *Kunstprosa* to describe this style. She concludes that "Source C" (sermons usually attributed to the Deuteronomist) is older than "Source B" (biographical material, often attributed to Baruch), and Holladay ("A Fresh Look at 'Source B' and 'Source C' in Jeremiah," *VT* 25/2 [1975] 394–412) believes she has proven it conclusively. But Carroll (*Jeremiah* 42–44) believes that her linkage of the prose with Jeremiah rather than to a redactor is "surely wrong-headed." He says, however, that her work does show a more sophisticated and complex account of the redaction of Jeremiah and creates caution about attributing so much to the Deuteronomist. Where others are arguing for a recasting of earlier Jeremianic material into a later form (thus making it relevant to the exilic period), Holladay wants to see Jeremiah doing that with his own work ("The Identification of the Two Scrolls of Jeremiah," *VT* 30/4 [1980] 452–467). See also recently J. G. McConville, "Jeremiah: Prophet and Book," *TynBul* 42/1 (1991) 80–95, who argues that the present form of the prophecy came from mature reflection by Jeremiah. Not everyone agrees, as can be seen in Ackroyd, "The Book of Jeremiah—Some Recent Studies," *JSOT* 28 (1984) 47–59; McKane, *Jeremiah.*

V. CONCLUSION

Just as Isaiah used destruction language to describe the fall of the city of Babylon and province of Babylonia in 689 BC, so Jeremiah used much of the same language to argue for the fall of the Babylonian empire in 539. There are several points of contact between the two descriptions. Jeremiah 25:12–13 speaks of the destruction of Babylon in 539 using the same genre as Isaiah 13 and Jeremiah 51. A further connection is that the *sēper* of chap. 25 probably includes at least some of the material in that of chap. 51. It seems a logical assumption that the prophecies about Babylon in Jeremiah were fulfilled in 539 when the neo-Babylonian (Chaldean) empire collapsed before Persian advances. While it is always possible that Babylonia will yet be rebuilt (and that the references to Babylon in Revelation are to be taken literally), it does not seem likely that it will be.