

# Triennial Torah Study – 2<sup>nd</sup> Year 04/02/2012

 sightedmoon.com /triennial-torah-study-2-year-04042015 /

By Joseph F. Dumond

This week's Triennial Torah reading can be found at:

<https://sightedmoon.com/files/TriennialCycleBeginningAviv.pdf>

<b>Lev 14</b>	<b>Jer 51</b>	<b>Prov 26</b>	<b>Acts 23</b>
---------------	---------------	----------------	----------------

## Leviticus 14

Laws Regulating Disease and Bodily Discharges (Leviticus 13-15)

Modern leprosy, also called Hansen's disease, is, according to Mosby's Medical, Nursing, & Allied Health Dictionary, a "chronic, communicable disease... that may take either of two forms, depending on the immunity of the host. Tuberculoid leprosy, seen in those with high resistance, presents as thickening of [skin] nerves and [insensitive], saucer-shaped lesions. Lepromatous leprosy, seen in those with little resistance, involves many systems of the body, with widespread [deposits forming hardening] and [small lumps] in the skin, [eye inflammation], [corneal inflammation], destruction of nasal cartilage and bone, testicular atrophy, [swelling of extremities], and involvement of the [immune] system. Blindness may result. Death is rare unless... tuberculosis [or a related illness] occurs concurrently. Contrary to traditional belief, leprosy is not very contagious, and prolonged, intimate contact is required for it to be spread between individuals" (4th ed., "Leprosy").

Still, it is contagious nonetheless. As the Encyclopaedia Britannica states in its article on the disease: "The prevention of leprosy rests upon the recognition of bacteriologically positive cases so that they may be isolated and treated" (1985, Vol. 7, p. 287). And this is quite biblical.

While treatment is not emphasized in Leviticus, the priests, as medical control officers, were to diagnose individuals and then take action to protect the community from further infection—by isolating those displaying the disease's symptoms.

It may even be that the "leprosy" identified in Leviticus 13-14 was far more communicable than the modern disease of that name. "There is some debate among medical scholars about whether the Hebrew word translated 'leprosy' in the Bible is exactly the same disease as the modern variant. It may have been another deadly infectious disease that differs from modern forms of leprosy" (Grant Jeffrey, *The Signature of God: Astonishing Biblical Discoveries*, 1996, p. 147). Indeed, The Nelson Study Bible notes on the word "leprous" in Leviticus 13:2, "Hebrew saraath, disfiguring skin diseases, including leprosy." So there may have been an immediate concern about a very infectious disease at the time God inspired Moses to write Leviticus.

Of course, it is also possible that the leprosy of the time was the same as today. In that case, God may have simply been instituting a general way of dealing with communicable illness—that is, quarantine. In any case, He was also illustrating the need for removing spiritual uncleanness by the lesson of such physical separation—and made this even clearer by certain ritual or ceremonial ordinances. "Leprosy" on house walls and garments, it should be

pointed out, was almost certainly “decomposition by mildew, mold, dry rot, etc.” (Nelson Study Bible, note on 14:34)—spreading fungus. “All of these were harmful growths, whether on human skin, clothing, or the wall of a house.”

It is especially interesting to read the requirements of shaving and washing in water. Incredibly, the idea of microscopic germs passing on illness, which Leviticus seems to take for granted, was not even generally believed in until very modern times. Indeed, Ignaz Semmelweis, a Hungarian doctor, was ridiculed by the entire medical establishment in the mid-1800s for instituting handwashing before examining patients—as if there were some invisible infectious agents to be worried about. Thankfully, his notion eventually caught on—but not until many died unnecessarily and until he died as well, following decades of rejection that, sadly, drove him into a mental institution (Jeffrey, pp. 145-146, from S.I. McMillen, *None of These Diseases*).

Yet consider the time during which Moses wrote the Pentateuch. Ancient Egyptian medical knowledge was primitive compared to that of the 1800s. It is obvious from the Papyrus Ebers manuscript and other ancient sources that there was no sense of sanitation in Egypt whatsoever. For instance, dung, from many different animals, was a primary ointment ingredient for all manner of ailments. The ancient laws of the Israelites, on the other hand, show nothing but concern for sanitation. They would have protected against microscopic pathogens. Yet how could Moses have known of the existence of such germs? The Egyptians certainly did not—nor did any other ancient culture.

In fact, “until this century, all previous societies, except for the Israelites who followed God’s medical laws regarding quarantine, kept infected patients in their homes—even after death, exposing family members and others to deadly disease. During the devastating Black Death [or bubonic plague] of the fourteenth century, patients who were sick or dead were kept in the same rooms as the rest of the family. People often wondered why the disease [which killed half of Europe and seemed unstoppable] was affecting so many people at one time. They attributed these epidemics to ‘bad air’ or ‘evil spirits.’ However, careful attention to the medical commands of God as revealed in Leviticus would have saved untold millions of lives. Arturo Castiglione wrote about the overwhelming importance of this biblical medical law, ‘The laws against leprosy in Leviticus 13 may be regarded as the first model of a sanitary legislation’ (Arturo Castiglione, *A History of Medicine...* 1941, p. 71). Fortunately, the church fathers of Vienna finally took the biblical injunctions to heart and commanded that those infected with the plague... be placed outside the city in special medical quarantine compounds. Care givers fed them until they either died or survived the passage of the disease. Those who died in homes or streets were instantly removed and buried outside the city limits. These biblical sanitary measures quickly brought the dreaded epidemic under control for the first time. Other cities and countries rapidly followed the medical practices of Vienna until the Black Death was finally halted” (Jeffrey, pp. 149-150).

No, Moses simply could not have understood the need to institute such laws through the natural means available to him at the time. But the Creator God did understand. And in commanding that His instructions for handling such situations be preserved in the Bible, the Eternal has given us one more amazing proof that this wonderful book is truly His inspired Word.

## **Jeremiah 51**

Seraiah’s Mission (Jeremiah 51:59-61; 50:1-46)

Jeremiah 50-51 is a long prophecy against Babylon. At the end of the prophecy is an account of the context in which it was first delivered (51:59-64). Though obviously written down after the prophecy itself, our reading starts with part of this account (verses 59-61) to give us that context up front.

The time frame is the fourth year of Zedekiah, 593 B.C. The Jewish king, we are informed, traveled to Babylon at this time. As was suggested in the Bible Reading Program comments on Jeremiah 29, Zedekiah may have made this trip to allay Nebuchadnezzar's concerns over his involvement in the international plotting addressed in chapter 27. Whatever the reason for the journey, we are told that Zedekiah is accompanied by Seraiah the son of Neriah (51:59), apparently the brother of Jeremiah's scribe Baruch. Seraiah was serving as the "quartermaster" or, as the Contemporary English Version translates the term, "the officer in charge of arranging for places to stay overnight" ("quiet prince" in the King James Version is evidently a mistranslation).

Prior to the departure of the entourage, Jeremiah writes on a scroll what God has revealed to him about the future downfall of Babylon—the words recorded in Jeremiah 50:1-51:58. The prophet sends the scroll with Seraiah to read aloud when he gets to Babylon. No doubt, God intends that a representative number of Babylonians hear this message, as there are numerous statements in it addressed directly to Babylon. However, His main purpose in directing Jeremiah to send the message to Babylon is probably to console the Jewish captives there.

"Move From the Midst of Babylon" (Jeremiah 51:59-61; 50:1-46)

The Neo-Babylonian Empire of the Chaldeans would be destroyed. Repeated reference is made to an assembly of nations invading Babylon from the north (50:3, 9, 41; 51:48). In the next chapter we will see that one of the principal nations involved in this invasion is that of the Medes (51:11, 28), who were located to the northeast of Babylon in ancient times. This must surely refer in part to what happened 54 years later, in 539 B.C., when Cyrus of Persia, in alliance with the Medes, defeated the Chaldeans and took over their empire.

However, while these two chapters of Jeremiah portray a violent overthrow of the city of Babylon, "the Nabonidus Chronicle, a text describing the fall of Babylon, reports that 'Cyrus entered Babylon without a battle'" (Nelson Study Bible, note on 51:29-32). The Expositor's Bible Commentary states: "It has troubled some scholars that chapters 50-51 predict the violent destruction of Babylon, whereas its defeat by Cyrus in 539 B.C. took place without a battle and with no damage to the city. But as with other predictive prophecies, if a fulfillment does not occur in one period, it is to be sought for in another and future one" (introductory notes on chap. 50).

Indeed, these two chapters also show that Babylon would be left desolate and perpetually uninhabited (50:39-40; 51:43). And yet the Persians made it their winter capital. Some, therefore, look to events that followed. "Cyrus took away its supremacy. Darius Hystaspes [a later successor of Cyrus] deprived it, when it rebelled, of its fortifications" (Jamieson, Fausset & Brown's Commentary, note on 50:39). His successor, Xerxes, sacked Babylon in 497 B.C. This best fits the picture of Jeremiah 50-51 in an ancient context. Still, Alexander later resurrected the city as an Asian capital. His successor in the region, Seleucus, made it his capital for a while but soon relocated. "Seleucus Nicanor removed its citizens and wealth to Seleucia, which he founded in the neighborhood; and the Parthians [later] removed all that was left to Ctesiphon. Nothing but its walls was left under the Roman emperor [H]adrian" (JFB Commentary, note on 50:39).

Yet even this does not fully fit the utter destruction and sense of desolation that is prophesied. We should compare Jeremiah's prophecy with what we saw earlier in Isaiah 13. The mention of wild animals living at the site is found in both Jeremiah 50:39 and Isaiah 13:21-22. Now note the verse that follows in Jeremiah: "As God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah and their neighbors,' says the LORD, 'So no one shall reside there, nor son of man dwell in it" (verse 40). Compare that with Isaiah 13:19-20: "And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldeans pride, will be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It will never be inhabited, nor will it be settled from generation to generation..." And notice particularly the end of the verse: "...nor will the Arabian pitch tents there, nor will the shepherds make their sheepfolds there." This just has not come to pass on the site of ancient Babylon. Bedouins have ranged over the area for centuries. People involved in archaeological excavation have lived at the

site in more recent times. Moreover, in the past several years, Saddam Hussein of Iraq began a monumental restoration project at ancient Babylon, even though Jeremiah prophesied that none of the city's stones would be used for rebuilding (Jeremiah 51:26). And certainly people have been living at the site to carry this out.

How do we explain this? As was pointed out in the Bible Reading Program comments on Isaiah 13, the prophecy there was primarily referring to the fall of end-time Babylon—the coming European-centered economic, politico-military and religious world power bloc called the “Beast” and “Babylon” in the book of Revelation. So it is with these chapters of Jeremiah as well. Notice the phrase “daughter of Babylon” (50:42), wording that indicates an end-time counterpart to the original (compare Isaiah 47:1, 5). The expression “Behold, the days are coming,” points to events that are yet future (Jeremiah 51:47; 52). We can especially see the latter-day context here in the references to the return and restoration of both Judah and Israel (50:4-5, 19-20; 51:5)—which has never happened.

Thus, while much of Jeremiah 50-51 is applicable to ancient times—as is clear from the references to Nebuchadnezzar (50:17; 51:34) and the fact that Jeremiah sent Seraiah to read the prophecy to people of that time—these chapters also point to events that are yet future. “Babylon was employed as the rod in God’s hand for the chastising of all the other nations, and now at length that rod shall be thrown into the fire. The destruction of Babylon by Cyrus was foretold, long before it came to its height, by Isaiah, and now again, when it has come to its height, by Jeremiah.... And as [with] Isaiah’s prophecies...Jeremiah’s prophecies of the same events seem designed to point at the apocalyptic triumphs...over the New-Testament Babylon, many passages in the Revelation being borrowed hence” (Matthew Henry’s Commentary, introductory notes on Jeremiah 50).

With this in mind, let us notice some of the particulars in the first part of the prophecy, chapter 50. (We will go through the rest of the prophecy in our next reading.)

Verse 2 mentions the Babylonian deity names Bel (which, like Baal, means “Lord”) and Merodach (the Hebraic form of Marduk, chief god of Babylon). These names referred to the same deity—often styled Bel-Marduk. It and the other false gods of Babylon are referred to using a word translated “images” (NKJV) or “idols” (NIV), but which actually denotes “dung pellets” or “animal droppings” (Expositor’s, note and footnote on verse 2; Nelson, note on verses 2-3). Idols are utterly revolting to the true God and should be to everyone else as well. God actually refers to the worship of idols as “insane” (verse 38)—completely irrational.

Interestingly, the humiliation and shame foretold for Babylon’s gods in verse 2 (compare 51:44, 47, 52) did not come with Cyrus’ takeover—except in the sense that they were powerless to prevent it. For Cyrus allowed their temples and priests to continue unmolested. But the idols were “broken in pieces,” as it says, by Xerxes, whose attack was directed at the Babylonian religious establishment. In a modern context, Bel-Marduk or Baal has come down to us as the false “Lord” of the Babylonian counterfeit Christianity (see Revelation 17). This religious system still worships powerless idols. But these idols will be utterly destroyed at the coming of the true Lord to rule all nations.

God issues warnings to His people to leave Babylon so as not to be corrupted by it and suffer its destruction (verse 8; 51:6, 45; compare Isaiah 48:20). This was not meant in a literal sense for the time Jeremiah’s prophecy was given. We can be sure of that because he had already written to the captives instructing them to settle down where they were (Jeremiah 29:4-7). Furthermore, they could not leave until they were later freed. Certainly the message would still have applied in a figurative, spiritual sense—that is, though they dwelt in Babylon, they were to come out of its ways. On the other hand, the instruction to leave would have applied literally once the Jews were eventually freed. That is, they needed to leave Babylon before it was afterward sacked. Most significantly, the same warning is issued

regarding end-time Babylon in Revelation 18:4: “Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues.”

As mentioned, God would bring great forces against the Babylonians. They are pictured as archers (Jeremiah 50:9, 14, 29, 42; 51:3)—though sword, lance and ax are also mentioned. The shooting of arrows may relate to Persian forces elsewhere described with bow and quiver (49:35; Isaiah 22:6). This probably meant literal bows and arrows in the ancient application of this prophecy. But what about an end-time fulfillment? Perhaps the image is simply one of dealing destruction from afar. The “arrows” or “missiles” used in today’s warfare are mechanical ones. Note this statement: “Their arrows shall be like those of an expert warrior; none shall return in vain” (Jeremiah 50:9). This almost sounds like modern smart missiles.

Verse 17 says that Israel has been partially devoured and scattered by the king of Assyria and is being finished off, so to speak, by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. This definitely applied to Jeremiah’s day. “Therefore,” God says in the next verse, “...I will punish the king of Babylon and his land.” This seems to still be referring to Nebuchadnezzar. And indeed, God did punish him by causing him to go crazy for seven years (see Daniel 4). However, God then restored him to sanity and glory—and Nebuchadnezzar never saw the fall of Babylon. So perhaps a successor ruler is meant. Belshazzar was killed at the time of the Medo-Persian takeover for his arrogant defiance (Daniel 5).

Yet this verse, Jeremiah 50:17, may also have an end-time application—and it does seem to, given its juxtaposition with the verses that follow concerning Israel’s future return.

“Nebuchadnezzar” could denote not just the ruler with that name in Jeremiah’s day, but also an end-time Babylonian ruler of any name (for just as a prophecy of a future Elijah in Malachi 4 did not refer to Elijah himself, but simply to one in the same spirit, so it could be in this case). In fact, the name itself could have broader application. Consider that, according to some scholars, “the -ezzar of Nebuchadnezzar means Assyria, and appears in such words as Nabonassar, Bel-ch-azzar, Nebo-pol-assar, Tiglath-Pil-eser, Esar-haden, and so on.... Nebuchadnezzar is Nebo-chah-adun-Assar (Nebo, royal prince-of Assyria)” (E. Cobham Brewer, Dictionary of Phrase and Fable, 1898, “Nebuchadnezzar”). Nebo was a god whose name meant prophet or spokesman, thus equating him with the Greek Hermes or Roman Mercury, messenger of the gods. So Nebuchadnezzar (“Spokesman for the god of this world, royal prince of Assyria”) could conceivably be a general descriptor for the end-time AssyroBabylonian “Beast” dictator. Even if not, the original Nebuchadnezzar was certainly a precursor of this future ruler. Just as Nebuchadnezzar’s pride brought God’s punishment on him, once again we see pride and haughtiness as a major reason the wrath of God will be unleashed on the end-time Babylon (verses 29-32).

In verse 21, Merathaim, “i.e., ‘double rebellion’—signifies Babylon. Southern Babylon was known as mat marrati (‘Land of the Bitter River’). ‘Pekod’ means ‘visitation’ or ‘punishment.’ An eastern Babylonian tribe was named Puqudu” (Expositor’s, note on verse 21). The JFB Commentary says Pekod was “a chief province of Assyria, in which Nineveh, now overthrown, once lay.... The visitation on Babylon was a following up of that on Assyria” (note on verse 21).

Babylon is to receive “the vengeance of the LORD our God, the vengeance of His temple,” which the Babylonians destroyed (verse 28). The end-time Babylonians will also defile the temple through the setting up within it of the future “abomination of desolation” (see Matthew 24:15). Jeremiah 51 mentions the shame suffered by the Jews because “strangers have come into the sanctuaries of the LORD’s house” (verse 51). As this provokes divine vengeance on Babylon’s “carved images” (verse 52), perhaps such images will be set up in God’s temple.

The drying up of waters in Jeremiah 50:38 refers, at least in part, to the diversion of the River

Euphrates by Cyrus as a means of access into Babylon. This was explained in the Bible Reading Program's comments on Isaiah 45:1. As was further explained there, the Euphrates will also be dried up in the end time in preparation for the final destruction of Babylon (see Revelation 16:12).

As already stated, Babylon will be left wasted and desolate. In an end-time context, this would appear to refer to the capital of the future empire, probably Rome. Notice again the description of wild animals dwelling there (Jeremiah 50:39; compare 51:37; Isaiah 13:21-22; 14:23). While probably literal on one level, The Expositor's Bible Commentary reports that at least one scholar "attempts to render the assonance of tsiim 'eth 'yim (siyyim et- iyyim, 'desert creatures and hyenas') by 'goblins and ghouls'.... [Another scholar] considered them, not as animals, but probably demons of the desert" (footnote on Jeremiah 50:39). This is certainly interesting given the parallel—as mentioned in the Bible Reading Program comments on Isaiah 14:23—with Revelation 18:2, which mentions the future Babylon becoming "a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird!" (the latter also apparently referring to demons). This parallels the abyss or bottomless pit where Satan and his demons are confined after they are bound at Christ's return (Revelation 20:1-3).

Jeremiah 50:44-46 is adapted from the prophecy against Edom in 49:19-21, substituting Babylon for Edom (Review the Bible Reading Program comments on this other passage for alternative suggestions regarding its meaning.)

The Prophecy Against Babylon Continues (Jeremiah 51:1-58, 61-64)

Chapter 51 begins with a reference to "Babylon...those who dwell in Leb Kamai" (verse 1).

The King James Version renders Leb Kamai as "the midst of them that rise up against me." The Hebrew expression literally means "the heart of my enemy." Many argue that this is the first of two cryptograms in this chapter. The explanation is that a code is used wherein the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet is expressed by the last, and so forth, so that Leb Kamai corresponds to Chasdim, the Hebrew word for Chaldeans. The other possible cryptogram in the chapter is Sheshach in verse 41, where, as mentioned in the Bible Reading Program comments on Jeremiah 25:26 (the other place where this expression occurs), using the same letter substitution system would produce the word Babel. However, as in chapter 25, it is clear in both cases here in chapter 51 who is being described anyway—so it is not apparent why such a code would be needed. The word Sheshach, as explained in previous comments, has been interpreted variously by scholars, with perhaps the most likely meaning being, as noted before, "thy fine linen," which, again, would seem to tie in with the description of end-time Babylon in Revelation 18:16: "that great city that was clothed in fine linen, purple, and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls."

Babylon is going to be punished. God is going to rescue Israel and Judah—again showing an end-time context. The Lord has not forsaken His people "though their land was filled with sin against the Holy One of Israel" (Jeremiah 51:5). God has always intended Israel to be a godly, model nation for the world. And He will not be thwarted from His purpose. Despite the failings of the Israelites, the omnipotent God will yet confront them and lead them to repentance. (This does not mean that all Israelites will ultimately respond in a right way to God—but undoubtedly the vast majority will.)

Verse 7 uses the imagery of Babylon as a cup of wine being poured out on the nations by God. This is a symbol of divine wrath taken from 25:15-29. The nations are made drunk (to reel and stagger) through suffering conquest. Also, we can see this as God giving the nations over to Babylon's spiritual wine, thus making them drunk with false religion (compare Revelation 17:2).

Yet now God will break the cup of Babylon. "Babylon has suddenly fallen" (verse 8; compare Isaiah 21:9; Revelation 18:2).

Jeremiah 51:9 states: "We would have healed Babylon, but she is not healed.... Let us go everyone to his own country." From the next verse we can see that it is God's people who are pictured speaking here. "The people of

God that were captives among the Babylonians endeavoured, according to the instructions given them (Jer. 10:11), to convince them of the folly of their idolatry, but they could not do it; still [the Babylonians] doted as much as ever upon their graven images, and therefore the Israelites resolved to quit them and go to their own country” (Matthew Henry’s Commentary, note on 51:9).

Verse 10 states, “The LORD has revealed our righteousness.” This may just mean that, through punishing Babylon, God has shown the Israelites to be the ones in the right in the present circumstances. Babylon’s treatment of them has been unjust. And the Israelites’ abandonment of the Babylonians to suffer destruction is appropriate. However, the wording could also perhaps refer to the Israelites being reconciled to God through repentance—and God making this manifest through His deliverance of them.

Verses 11 and 28 identify the forces that would invade Babylon from the north as those of the Medes. And the Medes, as was noted in the previous highlights, did invade ancient Babylon in 539 B.C. under the Persian king Cyrus the Great. Verse 27 mentions other nations that are joined with the Medes in the invasion—Ararat, Minni and Ashkenaz. In the sixth century B.C. these peoples lived in northwestern Iran and contiguous areas. “The first are the Urartu of the Assyrian inscriptions, practically Armenia, north of Lake Van. The second are the Mannaeans of the Assyrian records, who lived south of Lake Urmia. The last, the Ashguzai of the Assyrian inscriptions, were nomads living east of Lake Urmia (cf. Gen. 10:3 [where Ashkenaz is listed as a nation descended from Noah’s son Japheth, see verse 2])” (Expositor’s Bible Commentary, note on Jeremiah 51:27-33).

While the ancient invasion was no doubt intended by the prophecy, we should also look beyond that. For given the clear latter-day context of much of this chapter and the previous one, it is evident that the modern descendants of these same peoples will play a part in the fall of end-time Babylon. As was pointed out in the Bible Reading Program comments on a parallel prophecy concerning Babylon’s downfall, Isaiah 21, while some of the Medes probably still live in their ancient homeland, many today may be found north of the Black Sea in what is now the Ukraine. Concerning the Urartians and Mannaeans, today’s Armenians and neighboring peoples would seem to be indicated.

Ashkenaz is commonly identified with the Scythians—though it should be understood that various nomadic groups near the Caspian Sea were known as Scythians, including the Israelites who came out of Assyrian captivity (see our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*). The people of Ashkenaz appear to have ranged eastward, becoming scattered throughout East Asia. One source explains that many of those who live today in “south-east Asia, Bhutan, Nepal, Tibet, southern China and a few of the population of Japan are descendants of Ashkenaz” (“The Origin of the Nations of South-East Asia,” [cgca.net/coglinks/origin/oon2.1/vol2\\_1p4.html](http://cgca.net/coglinks/origin/oon2.1/vol2_1p4.html)). The book of Revelation describes a 200million-man army from beyond the Euphrates River that will inflict great destruction on all mankind, including end-time Babylon, shortly before the return of Christ (see 9:13-19). Later, as referred to in the previous highlights, the Euphrates is “dried up, so that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared” (16:12). As mentioned, Cyrus dried up the Euphrates to enable Babylon’s invasion in his day. Both events seem to be indicated by Jeremiah 50:38.

Babylon is said to “dwell by many waters” and to have a “sea” with “waves” (51:13, 36, 42, 55). Recall from Isaiah 21:1 that Babylon was there referred to as the “Wilderness of the Sea.” This was apparently a reference to the lakes and great marshes surrounding the Euphrates to the south of Babylon—the region bordering the Persian Gulf known as the Sealands. However, this could also be a reference to the later Babylon, Rome, which sat beside the Mediterranean, calling it Mare Nostrum (“Our Sea”), as the Roman Empire encompassed it. A similar situation may exist in the end time. The image is also quite likely a figurative one. The RomanoBabylonian Beast power is described as rising from the “sea” and as one that “sits on many waters” (see Daniel 7; 13; 17), these waters representing “peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues” (verse 15).

Jeremiah 51:15-19 contrasts the omnipotent God with powerless idols and the foolishness of worshiping them. The words here are taken from an earlier prophecy God gave Jeremiah in 10:12-16. Both sections end by describing God as the “Portion” of His people—their livelihood and reward.

Then notice the next section. God says, “You are My battle-ax and weapons of war...” (verse 20). And He goes on to show how He would use this battle-ax to do great damage (verses 20-23). But just whom is He talking to and about? Verse 24 answers, “And I will repay Babylon and all the inhabitants of Chaldea for all the evil they have done in Zion in your sight.” Clearly, Babylon is the one being broken and destroyed—and, surprisingly, the Jews are the ones being used to accomplish this (and probably all Israel since Jacob is the last people referenced just prior to this section—verse 19). This did not happen in ancient times. Israelite Scythian forces did help to bring down ancient Assyria and its capital of Nineveh, but there was no parallel with the fall of ancient Babylon.

However, we do have other indications that such a resurgence of Israel and Judah will happen in the end time. For instance, Zechariah 14:14 says that at the time of Christ’s return, “Judah also will fight at Jerusalem.” Isaiah 41:14-15 says: “Fear not, you worm Jacob, you men of Israel.... You shall thresh the mountains [kingdoms] and beat them small, and make the hills [smaller nations] like chaff.” (Babylon is described in Jeremiah 51 as a mountain that will be threshed—verses 25, 33). Micah 4:13 says, “Arise and thresh, O daughter of Zion...you shall beat in pieces many peoples.” This last reference is likely dual, as it could also refer to spiritual Israel, the Church of God, glorified at Christ’s return and executing God’s judgment on the nations.

Yet we might wonder how physical Israel and Judah, enslaved and decimated peoples, could become resurgent prior to Christ’s return. Realize that this does not mean restoration to greatness. That will not come until after Christ establishes His Kingdom on this earth. Rather, resurgence simply implies a slight regaining of strength—and probably in pockets rather than all Israel. As we saw from Hosea 6:1-2, the time of Jacob’s trouble will apparently last about two and a half years, to be followed by the “day of the LORD’s vengeance, the year of recompense for the cause of Zion” (Isaiah 34:8)—the final year prior to Christ’s return. According to the book of Revelation, “the great day of His wrath” (6:17), which follows the Great Tribulation (compare verses 9-11), will encompass the great calamities of the seven trumpets (see Revelation 8-9).

Consider then: The people of end-time Babylon will be preoccupied by the catastrophic events of that final year, which may direct their attention away from their slaves to some degree. This could allow many Israelites scattered throughout Europe and other places to escape and pockets of resistance to form (think of the French resistance of World War II). These pockets of resistance may secure weapons with which to fight. When forces from the East—apparently including the latter-day Medes—come to wreak havoc on Europe (Revelation 9:13-21), this would likely free up even more Israelites. And the Israelite resistance forces would then be able to help in the destruction of end-time Babylon. Perhaps they will, in particular, help destroy the Babylonian capital of the last days, probably Rome. (Again, such Israelite participation would parallel the fall not of ancient Babylon, but of ancient Nineveh—which still makes sense when we realize that end-time Babylon will be fused together with end-time Assyria in the same power bloc.) Whether or not events turn out exactly this way, we should be able to see that a somewhat resurgent Israel can well fit in the panorama of end-time events laid out in Bible prophecy. And indeed, we are told here in Jeremiah 51 that it will help to bring about the final Babylon’s downfall.

Babylon stands guilty of great evil. The “slain of Israel” (verse 49) may refer also to “the blood of the saints...and of the martyrs of Jesus” (Revelation 17:6). For all she has done, swift punishment is coming. “Babylon is compared to lions’ cubs (v. 38). She will be given a feast, followed not by the usual drunken sleep, but by a perpetual sleep of death (vv. 39-40)” (Expositor’s, note on verses 34-44). We see this specifically applying to Babylon’s leaders and



prominent people in verse 57. It should be clarified that the statement “They shall sleep a perpetual sleep and not awake” does not mean they will never be resurrected, as they surely will be. Again, the point is simply that their “sleep” is death—long and ongoing. They will not awake from it as from typical slumber.

In part, this seems to be a reference to Belshazzar’s drunken feast (Daniel 5), which facilitated the downfall of the city of Babylon that very night. Of course, as with the rest of the prophecy, a greater fulfillment will come at the end of this age, during the Day of the Lord.

“The broad walls of Babylon” (Jeremiah 51:58) refers to the literal massive walls of the ancient city of Babylon, as well as to the exalted confidence in the strength and security of “Babylon the great” of the last days. She will think she “will not see sorrow” (Revelation 18:7), but “her plagues will come in one day” (verse 8).

After reading the prophecy, Seraiah is to visually enact the symbolism of Babylon’s fall by throwing the scroll, with a stone tied to it, into the Euphrates (Jeremiah 51:63). Babylon will sink to never rise again (verse 64; see also verse 42).

The section ends with the statement, “Thus far are the words of Jeremiah.” The Good News Bible renders this, “The words of Jeremiah end here.” This is because the next chapter of the book, Jeremiah 52, the last chapter, was evidently added by a later editor. However, we are not yet finished reading other parts of the book of Jeremiah.

## **Proverb 26**

First Part of Hezekiah’s Solomonic Collection Cont’d (Proverbs 25:28?26:28)

8. Portrait of a Fool (25:28?26:12)

“TYPE: THEMATIC, CATCHWORD....These verses describe the fool in all his destructiveness. The word for ‘fool’ is something of a catchword here as well, as indicated by its frequent repetition.

? “25:28?26:2 The collection begins with three similes (25:28?26:2) on foolish actions” (NAC). The person without self-control (25:28)?certainly a foolish person?is vulnerable to destruction in various forms. Proverbs 26:2 shows that curses don’t happen by themselves. They cannot “land” (come down on people) without some cause. A parallel is drawn here with something else that cannot happen?a bird cannot land (literally speaking) if it is flitting and fluttering about. In context, the point seems to be either that fools are responsible for curses that come or that dealing improperly with fools?contrary to the warnings here?results in curses. As an example of the latter, “giving honor to a fool is not only inappropriate (snow in summer) but destructive (rain in harvest), as the similes imply (26:1), since he may think of himself as competent and actually try to take charge” (NAC; compare verse 8).

? “26:3-5 These verses tell how one should speak to a fool” (NAC). Verse 3 implies that fools don’t respond well to reason. They are better guided, like work animals, through strict discipline.

Verses 4-5, as explained in our introduction to the book of Proverbs, are not hard and fast rules that contradict one another. Rather, they go together to illustrate the fact that proverbs are generalizations and that the specific circumstances must be evaluated to know which proverb applies. Consideration was given in our introduction to some modern English proverbs that seem contradictory but are nevertheless true depending on the circumstances. For example, “Many hands make light work” as opposed to “Too many cooks spoil the broth.” Both principles are valid, but the situation may call for one or the other. Even so, circumstances will dictate whether to apply “Do not answer a fool according to his folly” or “Answer a fool according to his folly.”

As The New American Commentary notes on these verses: "To 'answer a fool according to his folly' is to engage in the same emotional invective [or loud show or drawn-out debate] that the fool uses. On the one hand, one should not deal with a fool on his own terms lest the imitation of folly become habitual [or lest we appear foolish ourselves]. On the other hand, one must sometimes answer fools in the words they understand in order to reprimand them effectively" or possibly to show others that the fool's argument has not stumped us. Much will depend on the intention of statements made to us. Are these sincere inquiries or meant to trap us? Is the person willing to learn or is he belligerent and unyielding? Sometimes a sarcastic answer is appropriate. Jesus was masterful at knowing how to answer hostile questions.

The rabbinic solution to the apparent contradiction between these approaches, as given in the Talmud (Shabbath 30b) was to apply "verse 4 to foolish opinions on secular subjects which can be ignored, and verse 5 to erroneous ideas in connection with 'learning,' i.e. religious matters, which should be refuted" (Soncino, note on verse 5). Yet there is nothing in the verses in question to support this delineation, whereas the general circumstantial application, supported even by the Jewish Soncino commentary, explains the matter rather sensibly. Of course, the delineation mentioned in the Talmud is worth taking into account in a general circumstantial view.

? "26:6-10 The similes in vv. 6-10 all concern how one should deal with a fool. They are arranged in a chiasmic fashion as follows:

In the context of understanding verses 4-5, we may note that the wise consider not only what proverbs say, but how to properly apply them?unlike fools, who, as we see here, don't know how to use proverbs appropriately and may even wield them dangerously (compare verses 7, 9).

The Hebrew of verse 10 is notoriously difficult. While the New King James Version reads, "The great (God) who formed everything/gives the fool (his) hire and the transgressor (his) wages," the NIV reads, "Like an archer who wounds at random/is he who hires a fool or any passerby." The Expositor's Bible Commentary explains that the first line " is difficult because it can be translated in different ways: rab can mean 'archer,' 'master,' or 'much'; and meholel could mean 'wound' or 'bring forth.' The possibilities include the following: 'A master performs all'; 'A master injures all'; 'An archer wounds all'; or simply 'Much produces (wounds) all.'" The Jewish Soncino commentary, viewing the two lines of the proverb as contrasting, says that "the nearest to the Hebrew text is R[evised] V[ersion] margin, 'A master-worker formeth all things; but he that hireth the fool is as one that hireth them that pass by' (Rashi, quoting R[abbi] Moshe). The thought would then be: if you want a task accomplished, select an expert for the work; to choose a fool is like calling upon a casual passer-by without regard to his competence" (note on verse 10). Expositor's, seeing the colons not as contrasting (with a 'but') but as synonymous ('As...so'), argues: "The [first] line must [with the second] express something that is negative?an archer/master who injures/wounds everything. Anyone who hires a fool or a stranger gives them ample opportunity to do great damage. The undisciplined hiring will have the same effect as an archer's shooting at random" (note on verse 10). The point of both these translations, unlike the NKJV rendering, is that important tasks should not be committed to fools, parallel with verse 6?which fits the concentric arrangement outlined above.

? 26:11-12 Verse 11, which illustrates that fools don't learn from their mistakes, is quoted by the apostle Peter in 2 Peter 2:22 in reference to people who are led out of the sinful ways of this world and yet then return to their former evil ways. Wise people make mistakes, but one is a fool to keep making the same mistake. And Proverbs 26:12 "is an apt closure to this section. The quintessential fool is the one who is so sure he has all the facts of life straight that he refuses to submit to wisdom for instruction and is far worse off than the run-of-the-mill fool" (NAC). Recall from verse 5 that answering a fool according to his folly is sometimes necessary to prevent him from becoming wise in his own eyes.

### Portrait of a Sluggard (26:13-16)

“TYPE: THEMATIC” (NAC). “These proverbs about the lazy man have a ‘can you top this’ quality that provides comic relief....Each one belittles laziness and the many outrageous excuses people often use to justify it” (Nelson Study Bible, note on verses 13-15). Two verses here are on the table of identical proverbs included with the comments on our previous reading. Proverbs 26:13 is identical in meaning to 22:13, and 26:15 is identical in meaning to 19:24. As the last proverb in the previous cluster concerned a fool being wise in his own eyes (26:12), so this cluster ends with a lazy person being wise in his own eyes (verse 16), deeming his sheer brilliance in avoiding work and productivity to be greater than the combined wisdom of a whole group of thinkers; when the fact that he believes this proves just the opposite.

### Portrait of a Busybody (26:17-22)

“TYPE: THEMATIC....These proverbs discuss anyone who involves himself or herself in the affairs of others, who spreads gossip, or is a general source of mischief. Metaphors of violence and destruction dominate this text since these qualities characterize the aftereffects of the busybody” (NAC).

A person who injects himself into a quarrel not his own is likely to get snipped at and possibly hurt, represented here by the imagery of grabbing a dog by the ears (verse 17). Some take verses 18-19 as condemning any kind of antics, such as modern practical jokes friends might play on one another, but that does not seem to be the point here. As The New American Commentary says: “While practical jokes can be destructive and hurtful [especially if done maliciously with a view to humiliating someone as opposed to good-natured humor that the subject of the prank can himself laugh at later], the larger context here implies that such may not be precisely the nature of the deceit implied here. Rather, this is a person who enjoys gossiping about or tampering with the affairs of other people. Such a person will purposefully confuse others and engage in a kind of social disinformation. When called to account, he or she will treat the whole thing as a game and be oblivious [like a reckless madman] to all the hurt such actions created” (note on verses 18-19). Another idea here might be slanderous jokes. Humor, such a political humor, is often a powerful weapon. And people know that they can better get away with derogatory comments if they are made in a humorous way.

Verse 22 is identical to Proverbs 18:8, warning the reader that while gossip tastes good like choice bites of food, it likewise makes its way to one’s innermost being. They have a corrupting effect on one’s heart and character.

### 11. Portrait of a Liar (26:23-28)

“TYPE: THEMATIC....This final ‘portrait’ rounds off the larger collection of 25:28?26:28. The fool, the meddler, and the liar are the three agents of social discord” (NAC).

Where the NKJV has “silver dross” in 26:23 (see also NASB and New JPS Tanakh), several modern Bible versions slightly emend the Hebrew to a meaning of “like glazes”; but this is not necessary, as silver dross was used for glaze. The New International Commentary on the Old Testament notes on this verse: “Silver dross ...refers to the scum or refuse that is thrown off, or falls, in smelting silver (see 25:4). In the process of melting and purifying the ore, the silver, oxygen, and lead are separated, leaving lead monoxide as the silver dross. Because of its silvery gloss, this slag was used as a glaze for ceramics.” The point of the proverb is that a wicked person’s appealing speech conceals what he really is; which is expanded on in verses 24-26.

Verse 27 shows that those who lay traps for others will be caught in their own snares, an idea found elsewhere in the Old Testament as well (Psalm 7:15; 9:15; Ecclesiastes 10:8).

## Acts 23

We pick up this week with the Apostle Sha'ul sitting in front of a council of chief priests and he begins his testimony and defense before them. The high priest was a man named Hananyah who, after hearing Sha'ul's opening statement ordered the men standing next to where Sha'ul was seated to strike him on the mouth. Sha'ul rebukes them. Here he is being judged

"supposedly" according to the Torah and the high priest is commanding him to be struck, which is contrary to the Torah. Then Sha'ul, noticing that some of the council were Sadducees and some were Pharisees, he decides to create a diversion by claiming he is on trial concerning the expectation and resurrection of the dead. For in that day, the two sects were split on this issue and had many many arguments because of it. The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection of the dead and the Pharisees did. This in fact does create a large commotion between the members of the council. And the crowd was divided.

When the Pharisees, who profess the resurrection of the dead and in the spirit and messengers of Elohim heard this they began exclaiming that they find no fault in Sha'ul! The commander of the soldiers ordered for Sha'ul to be taken back into custody to protect him from the crowd once again and he was taken back to the barracks. That night, our Master

Yeshua appeared to Sha'ul and said, "Take courage, for as you have witnessed for Me in Jerusalem, so you have to bear witness at Rome too."

Also that evening, a group of more than forty of the religious council bound themselves with an oath saying they would neither eat nor drink until they had killed Sha'ul. They were going to kill him the next day when he was brought down again before the council for further interrogation. Sha'ul's nephew overheard the plot – told Sha'ul – and the message was relayed to the commander of the guard. When he heard of this, he ordered that Sha'ul be carried away by night (the third hour of the night) by armed guard and on beasts to Caesarea to Felix the governor. The commander wrote a letter to Caudius Lysias recounting all that had happened and why this Sha'ul was being sent to him now.

We finish Chapter 23 with an agreement from the governor to hear from all sides the following day – with Sha'ul and then also his accusers.