

Lesson 36

Chapter 16

Last week we ended with some introductory comments about Chapter 16. In that chapter we will see the seven bowls of God's wrath poured out on the Roman empire. As we discussed last week, that judgment of Rome was a **spiritual** judgment, just as the victory of the church over Rome was a **spiritual** victory.

Each event is occurring at death. For the Christian, death marks the point of spiritual victory — the point at which the Christian receives a crown of life (Revelation 2:10) and the point at which the Christian is blessed (Revelation 14:13). For the Roman, death marks the point of spiritual defeat — the point at which judgment occurs, which in Chapter 16 is figuratively described as plagues.

Do these plagues **literally** occur? No. These plagues are figurative of what occurs to the Roman after death. This judgment of Rome is total — it is denoted by **seven** bowls of God's wrath. There is no coming back from this judgment. I think that fact alone is enough for us to see that this judgment is happening at death, just as the Christian's victory is happening at death.

But some might ask, "Is that all?" After all the evil that Rome had done and after all that the church had suffered, is there no punishment for Rome in this life? Does Rome really get to live on happily and unconcerned in this life? Where is the fire and the brimstone that consumed Sodom and Gomorra? Where is the destruction of their great city as happened with the judgment of Jerusalem? It may seem to some that Rome got off pretty light!

If we are tempted to see things that way, then I think we need to adjust our spiritual eyeglasses! As we have seen over and over in this book, God wants us to see things as He sees them — and that includes how we see our life on this earth.

There is a constant temptation for us to see this life as all that there is. After all, we can **see** these things around us — we can't see spiritual things. And

these things that we can see around us seem so permanent. But how does God view them? What does the Bible say?

2 Corinthians 4:18 — *While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.*

How can we look at the things which are not seen? We do that by looking at things as God looks at them, and the only way to do that is to look at things through God's word. Only then can we see that what we are tempted to think is permanent is really just temporal, and that which we can't even see is what is permanent and eternal.

So how is that relevant to the judgment of Rome? Simple. **Eternity is all that really matters.** This life matters only because it determines where we will spend eternity. Absent eternity, this life doesn't matter at all. Isn't that what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15?

1 Corinthians 15:19 — *If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.*

1 Corinthians 15:32 — *If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantage it me, if the dead rise not? let us eat and drink; for to morrow we die.*

It is hardly a coincidence that the rise of hedonism and nihilism in our own society is occurring simultaneously with the collapse of organized religion.

Most men today think that this life is all that really matters, and they think that this life is all there is. They say that "all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation" (2 Peter 3:4). They agree with Carl Sagan: "The Cosmos is all that is or was or ever will be." Is that how God sees this universe? Is that how God sees our life? No. (And I suspect Carl Sagan has a different view of things now that he has been dead for 22 years.) God is telling us in his word that there is something else, something beyond this life. And that something else is all that really matters.

James 4:14 — *For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.*

A vapor? That doesn't seem very permanent. That doesn't seem like something that lasts very long. Is that really what our life on this earth is like? Yes — because that is how God sees it, and if we want to know what something is really like, then we must see that thing as God sees it. God sees our life on this earth like a vapor.

What happens when we see our life on this earth as God sees it? What happens is that suddenly everything makes sense. Suddenly we understand why Christians went to their deaths confessing Christ. Suddenly we can understand the solution to the so-called problem of pain that plagues the philosophers. Suddenly we can understand verses like this one:

Matthew 10:28 — And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

Does that verse make any sense if this life is all there is? And how about this verse:

Matthew 16:26 — For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

Does that verse make any sense if this life is all there is? But isn't that the bargain that Rome made? Didn't Rome gain the whole world (Luke 2:1)? But what did it profit them? **Nothing, because the price was their soul. They are paying that price here in Chapter 16.** That is what this chapter is all about.

Revelation 16:1-2

1 And I heard a great voice out of the temple saying to the seven angels, Go your ways, and pour out the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth.
2 And the first went, and poured out his vial upon the earth; and there fell a noisome and grievous sore upon the men which had the mark of the beast, and upon them which worshipped his image.

The previous verse at the end of Chapter 15 told us that no one could enter the temple until the judgments were fulfilled, so perhaps the great voice here in verse 1 is the voice of God commanding the bowls to be poured out.

The first bowl in verse 2 contains foul and evil sores that afflict those who worship the image of the beast — those who worship the image of Caesar.

This first bowl parallels the sixth plague against Egypt in Exodus 9.

Exodus 9:8-9 — And the Lord said unto Moses and unto Aaron, Take to you handfuls of ashes of the furnace, and let Moses sprinkle it toward the heaven in the sight of Pharaoh. And it shall become small dust in all the land of Egypt, and shall be a boil breaking forth with blains upon man, and upon beast, throughout all the land of Egypt.

The word used for “sore” in verse 2 (and later in verse 11) occurs elsewhere only in Luke 16:21, where it denotes the sores on Lazarus the beggar. Perhaps the message is that what the faithful suffer in this life is what the unfaithful suffer in the next.

We have been seeing frequent allusions back to Egypt and the exodus — why? Because those comparisons remind us of how God dealt with past enemies of his people.

Everyone knows how the conflict with Egypt ended — the conflict with Rome will end the same way: as a total victory for God’s people. With this first bowl, God uses a symbol that reminds us of an Old Testament judgment against a great enemy of his people.

But there is a **difference** between these bowls in Chapter 16 and the plagues of Egypt or even the seven trumpets that we saw earlier in this book. It was not until the sixth Egyptian plague and the fifth trumpet that men were affected **directly**, but here in Chapter 16 men are affected directly starting with the very first bowl of wrath. From the very beginning we see that these bowls are more serious than anything we have seen before.

So were the Romans **literally** afflicted with these terrible sores? No. (I know I keep asking that question and I keep giving the same answer, but many misguided commentators try to literalize the symbols in this book, and by doing so they miss the whole point of the book.)

These bowls and the punishments they bring are symbolic. Yes, the sores in Egypt were literal as was the fire and brimstone in Sodom. But those **literal** sores and that **literal** fire and brimstone afterward became **symbols** for those earlier judgments. We have seen the same language used that way by the Old Testament prophets, and that is how the same language is being used here. If the sores in verse 2 are literal, then what about the beast in verse 2? Is it a literal beast?

The sores in verse 2 are not literal sores, but you know what? The Romans would no doubt have greatly preferred them to be literal sores! The spiritual punishment they received was infinitely worse than physical sores!

Revelation 16:3

3 And the second angel poured out his vial upon the sea; and it became as the blood of a dead man: and every living soul died in the sea.

The second bowl turns the sea into blood. Again we are reminded of a past display of God's wrath against Egypt.

Exodus 7:19 — And the LORD spake unto Moses, Say unto Aaron, Take thy rod, and stretch out thine hand upon the waters of Egypt, upon their streams, upon their rivers, and upon their ponds, and upon all their pools of water, that they may become blood; and that there may be blood throughout all the land of Egypt, both in vessels of wood, and in vessels of stone.

We know the plague against Egypt was literal, but again this second bowl is not literal. Its purpose is to remind us of how God dealt with Egypt.

We have seen the sea several times already in this book. The first beast arose from the sea, which represented the unsettled and wicked nations of the world that gave rise to Rome. This blood may depict, as one commentary described it, "the utter putrefaction of a dead society." Another called it "a revealing illustration of the true nature of the spiritually dead."

Hailey: "A society abandoned to idolatry and its consequent morals, as was the Roman empire of John's day, is spiritually dead."

In such a society, morals decline to the lowest level; the family collapses, schools breed anarchy and rebellion, business ethics are forgotten, entertainment becomes base and sordid, and printing presses exude smut and filth, until the whole is strangled in its own death blood and suffocated by its own stench.”

Similar figurative language is used in Zephaniah to describe a judgment against Judah.

Zephaniah 1:2-3 — I will utterly consume all things from off the land, saith the Lord. I will consume man and beast; I will consume the fowls of the heaven, and the fishes of the sea.

The language in Zephaniah was figurative, as is the language here in Revelation 16.

Revelation 16:4-7

4 And the third angel poured out his vial upon the rivers and fountains of waters; and they became blood. 5 And I heard the angel of the waters say, Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus. 6 For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink; for they are worthy. 7 And I heard another out of the altar say, Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments.

The second bowl in verse 3 turned the **sea** into blood, and this third bowl here in verse 4 turns the **fresh water** into blood. So, between them, **all of the water** has become blood.

Again, we are reminded of God’s wrath against Egypt and the first plague, which turned the Nile into blood. But this plague is worse than what happened

to Egypt. Exodus 7:24 tells us that the Egyptians could obtain water by digging, but that does not seem to be the case with these two bowls of wrath.

As with the first two, we should not take this third plague literally. These seven plagues are intended to paint a vivid picture of terrible judgment and utter devastation. And I think we would agree that having every drop of water turned into blood very vividly paints such a picture.

Does *anyone* teach that these passages should be taken literally? Yes. Hal Lindsey, who has sold millions of books on the subject, has the following to say about these verses:

As if the bloodied sea wasn't enough, the third angel poured out his bowl of judgment into the rivers and springs of waters, and they became blood also. It gets pretty grim when there is no fresh water to drink anywhere on earth. There's going to be a big run on Coca-Cola, but even this will give out after a while!

How ridiculous! How trivial! It is a crime when this beautiful book of Revelation is butchered by the likes of Hal Lindsey! And why does Lindsey resort to such sensationalism? Because it sells! **It should be a big warning sign when your commentary on Revelation comes with a movie deal!** I am reminded of 2 Corinthians 2:17 (ESV) — “For we are not, like so many, **peddlers** of God’s word.” There were many such peddlers then, and there are still many such peddlers today.

The “angel of the waters” in verse 5 is most likely the third angel from verse 4. In verses 5-6, this angel reminds us why these bowls are being poured out onto Rome: “Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink; for they are worthy.”

Verse 5 is a general statement that we are seeing these bowls because of the righteousness of God and because of God’s eternal power. Verse 6 then gives us a more specific reason — Rome wanted blood, and so God gave them blood. Rome was blood thirsty. In fact, in the very next chapter Rome will be depicted as a blood thirsty harlot drunk on the blood of the saints! Perhaps having every drop of water turned to blood will satisfy Rome’s lust for blood!

The “prophets” in verse 6 are the New Testament prophets, including John the Baptist who was murdered by a Roman puppet, as well as Peter and Paul, who were also prophets and who were murdered by Nero.

The end of verse 7 is **chilling** — “for they are worthy.” Rome deserved everything that it received from God. These judgments are many things, but one thing they are **not** is too harsh. God is the perfect judge, and God makes perfect judgments. No one can ever say that God is unjust or too harsh. Rome was getting exactly what Rome deserved. We are reminded of what God said to Edom in Obadiah.

Obadiah 15 — *For the day of the LORD is near upon all the heathen: as thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee: thy reward shall return upon thine own head.*

What happens next? In verse 7, a voice cries out from the altar to declare the justice of God — “Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments.” We have seen this altar before.

Revelation 6:9-10 — *And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?*

The end of verse 7 here in Chapter 16 ties what we are seeing here with that earlier statement from Chapter 6, which is one of the key statements in the entire book. That cry for justice from Chapter 6 was what prompted this display of God’s wrath, and that cry from Chapter 6 came from the martyrs gathered under the same altar that is shown here in verse 7.

It is likely that the voice of approval in verse 7 is the voice of those martyrs in Chapter 6. Why? Because their prayers have now been answered. In Chapter 6 they prayed for what is now happening in Chapter 16. The altar in verse 7 is wonderful link between Chapter 6 and Chapter 16.

Rome should have repented. Had they done so, they would not be drinking blood here in Chapter 16. Instead, they would be drinking something very different.

Isaiah 12:3 — *Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation.*

John 4:14 — *But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water*

that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

The faithful children of God have a life-sustaining drink that was utterly unknown to the pagans that surrounded them and that were drowning in a sea of blood and filth. The same is true today. Our mission is to bring people to Christ so that they can “draw water out of the wells of salvation.” Sadly, for Rome it was now too late — but it is not too late for those we can still teach today.

*John 7:37-38 — In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, **If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.** He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.*

Revelation 16:8-9

8 And the fourth angel poured out his vial upon the sun; and power was given unto him to scorch men with fire. 9 And men were scorched with great heat, and blasphemed the name of God, which hath power over these plagues: and they repented not to give him glory.

The fourth bowl is poured out onto the sun, and it scorches men with fire, apparently by causing the heat of the sun to intensify. Thus, to a waterless world filled with blood we now add the blazing sun. (This is all starting to sound like west Texas!)

The source of light that was created by God to guide and to warm has instead been turned into an instrument of pain. We are reminded of several passages.

Psalm 104:4 — Who maketh his angels spirits; his ministers a flaming fire.

Isaiah 47:13-14 — Thou art wearied in the multitude of thy counsels. Let now the astrologers, the stargazers, the monthly prognosticators, stand up, and

save thee from these things that shall come upon thee. Behold, they shall be as stubble; the fire shall burn them; they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame: there shall not be a coal to warm at, nor fire to sit before it.

And once again the Romans are getting back just what they gave. Remember how Tacitus described Nero's persecution of the church: "[The Christians] were covered with wild beasts' skins and torn to death by dogs; or they were fastened on crosses, and, **when daylight failed were burned to serve as lamps by night.**"

The Romans wanted blood, and so God gave them oceans of blood and rivers of blood. The Romans wanted light, and so God turns up the heat of the sun until they are scorched by its light.

And what about the church? Remember the beautiful description of God's people given that we studied in Revelation 7.

Revelation 7:16-17 — *They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water; and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.*

Rome is swimming in blood, but the church is drinking from springs of living water. Rome is burning from the heat of the sun, but the sun shall not strike the church.

In these verses, the condition of the faithful is the precise opposite of the condition of the unfaithful. But that was true before as well — in life, Rome seemingly had everything while the church seemingly had nothing. **But things are not what they seem! And now the tables have turned!**

And note the response of the ungodly in verse 9 — they blasphemed the name of God, and they repented not to give him glory. They seem to have taken the advice of Job's wife to just curse God and die (Job 2:9). We are reminded of Paul's description of evil men in Romans 1.

Romans 1:21 — *Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.*

Verse 9 says that they repented not. Does that mean that repentance was still an option? Not necessarily.

The rich man in Luke 16 seems to have developed a repentant attitude, or at least a regretful attitude, but it was too late for either. In fact, that rich man in Luke 16 seems to have undergone a tremendous change after it was too late. Suddenly that rich man had a real interest in religious matters! Suddenly that rich man had a proper view of his own material wealth! Suddenly that rich man was willing to admit his own mistakes! Suddenly that rich man had a genuine concern for the lost! But it was all too late.

I think that there will be a great deal of repentance after the final door swings shut — **but it is telling that these Romans are so far gone that they fail to repent even in the face of the these terrible plagues.**

We are once again reminded of the exodus and of Pharaoh's hardened heart. I don't think that verse 9 is telling us that the door remained open for these Romans. Instead, I think verse 9 is just telling us how far gone these Romans were. Even in the face of their own death and their own well-deserved judgment they still refused to acknowledge God.

And I fear those hardened first century Romans have many modern counterparts. We live in a society that has cast sin and shame away, along with the word of God. Jeremiah described such people long ago.

***Jeremiah 8:12** — Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush.*

As did Paul.

***Romans 1:31-32** — Without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.*

Hebrews 3:13 warns us not to “be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” **Hardened people are unreachable people, and there is no sadder condition than that.** Jesus knocks on their door, but they have turned that door into a wall. Such it seems was the case with Rome.

Revelation 16:10-11

10 And the fifth angel poured out his vial upon the seat of the beast; and his kingdom was full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues for pain, 11 And blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds.

The fifth bowl pours darkness on the seat or the throne of the beast and on the kingdom of the beast. The seat or throne of the beast is Rome, and the kingdom of the beast is the Roman empire.

This bowl parallels the ninth plague against Egypt.

Exodus 10:21 — And the Lord said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, even darkness which may be felt.

It seems that the darkness here can also be felt — verse 10 tells us that it causes men to gnaw their tongues in pain, and verse 11 tells us that it causes pain and sores, although perhaps some of that may have been caused by the previous plague.

We also saw darkness back in Chapter 9 where, as you recall, smoke from the bottomless pit darkened the sun and sky. There we suggested that the darkness may represent the moral darkness of the Roman society, and that may be the case here as well. Moral decline is itself a punishment.

The Bible has much to say about darkness. In fact, the first recorded words from God were “Let there be light!”

Spiritual darkness is often described in the Bible as a judgment from God, and darkness is pictured as the domain of Satan.

Psalms 69:23 — Let their eyes be darkened, that they see not.

Isaiah 9:19 — Through the wrath of the LORD of hosts is the land darkened.

John 3:19 — *And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.*

Romans 1:21 — *Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.*

1 John 2:11 — *But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes.*

Ephesians 6:12 — *For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.*

Colossians 1:13 — *Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.*

2 Corinthians 4:6 — *For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*

Romans 13:12 — *The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light.*

It was through the work of Satan that this world was plunged into darkness, and it is through Christ that the light shone once again in that darkness. **In fact, both the Old Testament and the New Testament begin with a light from God shining in darkness.**

John 1:5 — *And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.*

John 8:12 — *Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.*

As with the previous plague, Rome does not repent, but instead continues to blaspheme God. You know that people are really hardened in their sin when not even the fires of hell are enough to convince them of the errors of their ways! Such seems to have been the case with Rome.

Revelation 16:12

12 And the sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared.

The sixth bowl causes the water in the great river Euphrates to dry up to prepare the way for kings from the east. (By the way, if these bowls are describing **literal** plagues, then where did all of this water come from? Wasn't it all turned to blood just a few plagues ago?)

The first five bowls would be terrifying to anyone, but perhaps this sixth bowl is the most terrifying so far to the average Roman.

The “kings of the east” in verse 12 are the same kings we discussed for the sixth trumpet in Revelation 9. They are the Parthian kings, whom Rome feared would attack from the east. In fact, Rome had an irrational fear of Parthia. One false rumor that was spread after the death of Nero was that Nero had not really died at all, but had instead gone to Parthia to raise an army to attack Rome. William Barclay writes:

The greatest enemies of Rome, the one nation she could not subjugate, were the Parthians who lived beyond the Euphrates. Their cavalry was the most dreaded force of fighting men in the world. For the cavalry of the Parthians to come sweeping across the Euphrates was a thought to strike terror in the bravest heart.

Did Parthia literally conquer Rome? No. Was an attack from Parthia something that Rome feared and that could be used to figuratively depict a great judgment against them? Absolutely, and that is how it is used here.

None of the previous bowls literally occurred and this bowl is no different. The purpose of the bowls is to paint a picture of complete and total destruction and judgment, and that is exactly what this bowl conveys.

With the sixth trumpet in Revelation 9:13-19, we saw 200 million troops crossing the Euphrates river to march against Rome. But the war of the sixth trumpet was only a partial judgment — only a third were killed. The war of that sixth trumpet was horrifying, but how much worse must be this war of the sixth bowl!

As we saw in Chapter 9, crossing the Euphrates was a vivid portrayal of the threat of military power. In the Old Testament, the Assyrians and the Babylonians crossed the Euphrates river to attack the Jews. Rome feared an invasion from the Parthians across the Euphrates. The Euphrates symbolized a barrier or a deterrent to an external invasion, and that barrier had now been removed by the sixth angel.

The drying up of the waters is a common sign of God's power.

- In *Exodus 14:21*, God showed his power by drying up the Red Sea.
- In *Joshua 3:17*, God showed his power by drying up the Jordan river.
- In *Jeremiah 51:36*, God threatened to destroy Babylon by drying up her sea.
- In *Zechariah 10:11*, God threatened to destroy Egypt by drying up the Nile.

It is also possible that this image depicting the threat of invasion is recalling an actual historical event. As we know, in Revelation, Babylon — a **past** enemy of God's people — is used to depict Rome — the **current** enemy of God's people. And here we see a dried up river being used to defeat figurative Babylon. Ancient Babylon was once conquered by a dried up river.

History tells us that Babylon fell to the Persians without a shot being fired, and we certainly don't see any shots being fired in Daniel 5:30-31 where the fall of the city is described. Instead, there is evidence that certain priests of the false god Marduk thought the current rulers in Babylon were impious and preferred instead the Persians under Cyrus. The people, led by the priests, opened the gates to Cyrus, who was then greeted by them as a great liberator.

But according to Herodotus, there is even more to those strange events. He tells us that when the Persians captured Babylon they did so by drying up the Euphrates river, which flowed right through the center of Babylon. They diverted the river into a lake and entered the city through the dry channel of the river. There were huge brass gates in the walls that flanked the river Euphrates in its passage through the city, and these gates provided access to

water for the citizens and could be closed as a defense if needed. But it was these gates that were deliberately opened, which allowed access to the Persian troops after Cyrus had reduced the water level of the river. Just as the **actual** city of Babylon had fallen by a **literal** drying up of the Euphrates, the **figurative** Babylon would fall by a **figurative** drying up of the Euphrates.

As we study these judgment against the first century “Babylon” (which is exactly what Peter called Rome in 1 Peter 5:13), it is helpful to study the judgment against ancient Babylon, from which Rome got that inspired nickname.

Those who argue that the judgments in Revelation must literally occur need to explain why the same judgments pronounced against ancient Babylon did not literally occur. For example:

Jeremiah 50:3 — *For out of the north there cometh up a nation against her, which shall make her land desolate, and none shall dwell therein: they shall remove, they shall depart, both man and beast.*

Jeremiah 50:39-40 — *Therefore the wild beasts of the desert with the wild beasts of the islands shall dwell there, and the owls shall dwell therein: and it shall be no more inhabited for ever; neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation. As God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah and the neighbour cities thereof, saith the Lord; so shall no man abide there, neither shall any son of man dwell therein.*

Jeremiah 51:1-2 — *Thus saith the Lord; Behold, I will raise up against Babylon, and against them that dwell in the midst of them that rise up against me, a destroying wind; And will send unto Babylon fanners, that shall fan her, and shall empty her land: for in the day of trouble they shall be against her round about.*

Jeremiah 51:25-26 — *Behold, I am against thee, O destroying mountain, saith the Lord, which destroyest all the earth: and I will stretch out mine hand upon thee, and roll thee down from the rocks, and will make thee a burnt mountain. And they shall not take of thee a stone for a corner, nor a stone for foundations; but thou shalt be desolate for ever, saith the Lord.*

Jeremiah 51:36-37 — Therefore thus saith the Lord; Behold, I will plead thy cause, and take vengeance for thee; and I will dry up her sea, and make her springs dry. And Babylon shall become heaps, a dwellingplace for dragons, an astonishment, and an hissing, without an inhabitant.

Jeremiah 51:42-43 — The sea is come up upon Babylon: she is covered with the multitude of the waves thereof. Her cities are a desolation, a dry land, and a wilderness, a land wherein no man dwelleth, neither doth any son of man pass thereby.

None of that literally occurred — but it did all occur. The language in Jeremiah is a vivid, apocalyptic description of God’s judgment of an ancient enemy of God’s people. The same language is used for the same purpose in the book of Revelation — all that has changed between the two books is the great enemy. In Jeremiah it is Babylon; in Revelation it is Rome.

But if none of these prophecies in Jeremiah literally occurred, then is there then a historical contradiction in the Bible? Not at all! In fact, Isaiah prophesied exactly how Babylon would literally fall in Isaiah 45:1, and he even gave the name of the conqueror, Cyrus, long before Cyrus was even born!

Isaiah 45:1 — Thus saith the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut.

That is one of the most remarkable prophecies in the entire Bible, and of course that is exactly how it literally occurred, down to the name of the person who did it! And it is that same event that Jeremiah describes with vivid figurative language. The Bible describes the same event from different perspectives, one literal and the other figurative.

The key verse in understanding Jeremiah 50-51 is Jeremiah 51:64 — **“Thus shall Babylon sink, and shall not rise from the evil that I will bring upon her.”** From an earthly perspective, the end of Babylon may not have looked like much, but that was not at all how it looked from God’s perspective. **“Thus shall Babylon sink!”** And what did we see Revelation 14:8? **“Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city!”** God’s people will be victorious over their enemies! We see that

with Babylon in Jeremiah, and we see that with Rome in Revelation. And the message for us is that we will see that with every enemy of God's people.

***Daniel 2:44** — And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.*