

## **HUMBLE YOURSELF BEFORE THE LORD**

*47 Come down and sit in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon! Sit on the ground without a throne, O daughter of the Chaldeans, for you shall no longer be called tender and delicate. <sup>2</sup>Take the millstone and grind flour. Remove your veil; lift up your skirt, and wade through the stream with your legs uncovered. <sup>3</sup>Your nakedness will be exposed, and your shame will be uncovered. I will take vengeance; I will spare no one. <sup>4</sup>Our Redeemer—Jehovah of hosts is his name—is the Holy One of Israel. <sup>5</sup>Sit in silence, depart into darkness, O daughter of the Chaldeans; for you shall no longer be called, The Queen of Kingdoms. <sup>6</sup>I was angry with my people, [therefore] I desecrated my inheritance and delivered them into your hand; [but] you showed them no mercy. [Even] on the aged you laid a very heavy yoke.*

*<sup>7</sup>You said, I will be queen forever. So you did not consider these things, nor did you reflect on what would happen. <sup>8</sup>Now then, listen to this, you who give yourself over to your pleasures, you who lounge in your security, you who say in your heart, I am, and there is none besides me; I will never be a widow, nor will I suffer the loss of children. <sup>9</sup>Both of these things will overtake you in a moment—in a single day: loss of children and widowhood. They will come upon you in full measure, [despite] the multitude of your sorceries and the great number of your incantations. <sup>10</sup>You have trusted in your wickedness. You have said, No one sees me. Your wisdom and your knowledge have deluded you, [causing] you to say in your heart, I am, and there is none besides me. <sup>11</sup>Therefore, disaster will come upon you, and you will not know how to conjure it away. A calamity will fall upon you that you cannot ward off with a ransom. A catastrophe you could not foresee will suddenly come upon you. <sup>12</sup>Adhere to your incantations and the multitude of your sorceries in which you have labored from your youth; if you will be able to benefit [from them], if you will be able to prevail [by means of them]. <sup>13</sup>The great number of your consultations has worn you out! Now let your astrologers come forward—those stargazers who make predictions month by month—and save you from what is coming upon you. <sup>14</sup>Surely they will be like stubble; the fire will burn them up. They will not be able to deliver themselves from the power of the flame—this will not be a fire of coals to provide warmth nor a campfire around which they may sit. <sup>15</sup>This is what the things with which you have labored will be for you—they will be of no value! Furthermore, those with whom you have carried on trade from the time of your youth will each wander away to his own home; there will be no one to save you. (Isa. 47:1-15)*

A note on the Scripture text that accompanies each individual message: The *American Standard Version* and the *New International Version*, along with the original Greek and Hebrew, have been used in an effort to achieve the greatest degree of accuracy and clarity. Where words or phrases have been added to the original text in an effort to better express its meaning, those words or phrases have usually been indicated by means of [brackets].

### **Introduction**

A successful businessman writes:

Until a dozen years ago I thought I was completely in control of my life ... It was easy for me to chart my course and see how I was progressing in the company. I had my entire future carefully mapped out with insurance policies, investments and a house for security. My philosophy was that man is at the center of life and has all the answers.

Once ... when my wife ... said, "We really ought to thank God for all the blessings He has given us." I responded, "You don't thank God! You thank me! I'm the one who brings home the paycheck; I'm the one who pays the bills; I'm the one who plans how we're going to spend the money." (*POWER*, 4/2/89, pp.2-ff.)

That is the testimony and the attitude of a once proud man. He goes on to write, "Although it makes me cringe now, at the time I really believed what I was saying."

When we are "on top of the world," there is the temptation to entertain an attitude of self-confidence and arrogance. Such was the situation with ancient Babylon when she held sway as the greatest empire of the day.

But what we learn from this present passage of Scripture is that God resists the proud. Taking to heart the testimony of this passage, let us humble ourselves before the LORD our God, because He is the God who opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

### **I. Humble Yourself before the LORD, or He will Bring You Down (Isa. 47:1-3)**

The great empire of Babylon is portrayed as a beautiful queen who is brought to disgrace and humiliation (vs. 1-3.) The LORD issues the command, "*Come down* [from your lofty throne of power and prestige], *and sit in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon!*" "*Virgin daughter of Babylon*" indicates a nation that has known no defeat in battle. "*Sit on the ground without a throne*"—this great nation, at the command of the LORD, shall be abased and deprived of her glory. "*You shall no longer be called tender and delicate*"—this beautiful nation, known for its splendor, one that has been blessed with every luxury, shall be reduced to shame and disgrace. "*Take the millstone and grind flour*"—this once great "queen" is now reduced to the status of the most menial slave girl who is assigned the hard task of grinding grain for bread. "*Remove your veil; lift up your skirt, wade through the stream with your legs uncovered*"—this great queen must remove her royal apparel and conduct herself in a most unlady-like manner: splashing across a stream like a common peasant girl, instead of being conveyed across in a stylish coach carried by servants. The LORD declares that He shall reduce this great world power to nakedness and humiliation as an act of righteous vengeance and judgment (vs. 3.)

Earlier in Babylon's history, the great king, Nebuchadnezzar, had to learn the lesson that the LORD rules in the kingdom of men and that He is able to abase those who walk in pride:

*... [the king] was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon. <sup>30</sup>The king said, Is not this great Babylon that I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty? <sup>31</sup>While the word was [still] on the king's lips, there came a voice from heaven, saying, O King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is declared: The kingdom has been removed from you. <sup>32</sup>Furthermore, you shall be driven away from men and you shall live with the beasts of the field; you shall be forced to eat grass like the cattle. Seven years shall pass over you, until you acknowledge that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men and gives it to whomever he desires. <sup>33</sup>In that very hour what had been declared to Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled. He was driven away from men, and he ate grass like the cattle, and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven, until his hair grew like [the feathers] of an eagle and his nails like [the claws] of a bird. <sup>34</sup>At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted up my eyes to heaven, and my sanity was restored to me. Then I blessed the Most High, and I praised and honored him who lives forever ... <sup>37</sup>Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and honor the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just, and he is able to humble those who walk in pride. (Dan. 4:29b-34a, 37)*

But, tragically, his son, Belshazzar, refused to learn that lesson and, consequently, at the end he and his kingdom paid the terrible price for their unholy pride,

*O king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar, your father, the kingdom and the greatness and the glory and the majesty. <sup>19</sup>Because of the greatness he gave him, all the peoples, nations, and men of every language feared him and trembled before him. He killed whomever he desired, and he kept alive whomever he desired; he promoted whomever he desired, and he demoted whomever he desired. <sup>20</sup>But when his heart became arrogant and his spirit was hardened, so that he behaved in a proud manner, he was deposed from his royal throne and they took his glory from him. <sup>21</sup>He was driven away from people and his mind became like that of the beasts. He lived with the wild donkeys, he was given grass to eat like the cattle, and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven, until he acknowledged that the Most High God rules in the kingdom of men and that he sets over it whomever he desires. <sup>22</sup>Yet you, his son, O Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, even though you knew all this. <sup>23</sup>On the contrary, you have exalted yourself against the Lord of heaven. (Dan. 5:18-23a)*

Will we take to heart the lesson that Nebuchadnezzar learned the hard way, will that profound truth have a practical impact on the way we view and employ the abilities and opportunities the LORD God gives us, ... or will we follow the course of Belshazzar to a tragic end?

Let us humble ourselves before the LORD, or He will bring us down. Let us consider well the warning of Proverbs 16:18, "*Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.*" Let us acknowledge with humble gratitude that whatever abilities and opportunities we possess have been graciously given to us

by the LORD. Let us dedicate ourselves and those God-given abilities and opportunities to the LORD, asking Him to show us how and to help us to use them in ways that are pleasing to Him and for His honor and glory.

## **II. Humble Yourself before the LORD, by Renouncing the Attitudes that Offend Him (Isa. 47:5-15)**

The LORD consigns this mighty world empire of Babylon to silence and darkness—i.e.; judgment and complete obscurity (vs. 5.) When one has been granted a position of power and prestige, one must be on guard against the temptation that accompanies such a position; namely, the temptation to entertain and exhibit ungodly attitudes, attitudes that are highly offensive to God.

Such attitudes resided in the heart of Babylon and were displayed in her life. She was merciless (vs. 6.) She had no pity on the weak and helpless, no compassion for such; rather than employing her power for the benefit of the needy, it was used to crush them and to even do so with delight. How do we employ whatever power and position God has given us? Do we use it for the defense and relief of the needy, or for their suppression and exploitation? She displayed arrogant self-confidence (vs. 7.) She viewed herself as being unconquerable, secure, immune to disaster; and she entertained this confidence with an attitude of arrogance, she said, *“I will be queen forever”*. She was a nation that had a false sense of security (vs. 8b). Due to her strategic position, her strong fortifications, and her vast military power, she viewed herself as being secure and invulnerable. She was confident that she would perpetually continue in her lofty estate: she would not be a widow; she would not become childless (vs. 8d.) That is to say, she would never know a time when there would be no one to protect her and provide for her—but the LORD declares that her desolation shall come upon her *“in a moment”* and *“in full measure”* (vs. 9.) Babylon declared that forever she would be the mistress of kingdoms, but the LORD declared that no longer would she be called the mistress of kingdoms (vs. 5.) Do we view our positions as being secure; do we see ourselves as being in complete control? Or do we humbly and wisely recognize that all of life is under God’s sovereign control and at His disposal?

Babylon was devoted to her pleasures (vs. 8.) She assumed that all her power and prestige was to be employed for her own personal benefit, satisfaction, fulfillment, and pleasure. The Hebrew word for “pleasure” (תַּעֲנוּת) is related to the word “Eden;” Babylon sought to create her own form of Eden—in this case, a self-centered, self-indulging paradise. Do we assume that our abilities and opportunities are to be employed for the chief purpose, if not the exclusive purpose, of fulfilling our own personal ambitions and desires? Or do we recognize that all we are and all we have are to be dedicated to the Lord our

God? As the Apostle Paul instructs us, *“Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God”* (1 Cor. 10:31.) Furthermore, and worst of all, Babylon she deified herself (vs. 8c.) She viewed herself as being at the center of life and the fulfillment of her will as being the chief end of life; in her heart and thinking she assumed the identity of the LORD, declaring, *“I am, and there is none besides me.”* In our hearts and thoughts do we hold the philosophy that man is at the center of life? Or do we acknowledge the truth that the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever?

The LORD rebukes the incredible perverseness of Babylon: *“You have trusted in your wickedness. You have said, ‘No one sees me’”* (vs. 10a.) She viewed herself as being hidden from God; and thus entertained the false confidence that she could continue to practice wickedness, and rely upon wicked measures to advance her own purposes, without fear of punishment and just retribution. *“Your wisdom and your knowledge have deluded you, causing you to say in your heart, ‘I am, and there is none besides me’”* (vs. 10b.) Here is great confidence in human wisdom and human knowledge (the outlook that maintains that man possesses the knowledge to solve all problems and accomplish all things)—and this haughty self-confidence deluded the nation into deifying itself. *“Therefore,”* declares the LORD, *“disaster will come upon you.”* When that day comes, *“you will not know how to conjure it away”* all of Babylon’s superstition and magic shall not be able to drive away the calamity sent by the Lord of heaven. *“A calamity will fall upon you that you cannot ward off with a ransom”*—Babylon shall not have the strength or the resources to defend itself and to repel the calamity ordained against it by the Lord Almighty. *“A catastrophe you could not foresee will suddenly come upon you”*—it shall overtake the nation unexpectedly, catching her totally unaware. She shall neither be prepared for its coming nor have the wherewithal to withstand it—it shall be a calamity such as she has never known before. It proved to be a calamity that took the form of invasion and defeat by the Medes and the Persians under King Cyrus.

The LORD challenges Babylon to stand against Him, but at the same time informs her that such efforts will prove to be utterly futile. He challenges the nation to resort to its sorceries and by means of them to ward off the LORD’s judgment (vs. 12.) The LORD challenges the astrologers themselves to stand up and save the nation (vs. 13.) But far from being able to save their nation, the sorcerers themselves will be stubble before the fire of the LORD’s judgment (vs. 14.) The LORD warns the nation that all the unholy and ungodly things they have trusted in will desert them and there shall be none to save them (vs. 15.)

Let us humble ourselves before the LORD, by renouncing the attitudes that offend Him. Let us bear in mind and, by God’s grace, put into practice the counsel of the prophet Micah, *“He has shown you, O man, what is good. And what does Jehovah require of you? [He requires you] to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly before your God”* (Mic. 6:8.)

### III. Humble Yourself before the LORD, and He will Lift You Up (Isa. 47:4)

Upon hearing the pronouncement of God's righteous decrees against proud Babylon, the people of God cry out in praise and thanksgiving: *"Our Redeemer—Jehovah of hosts is his name—is the Holy One of Israel"* (vs. 4.)

As the LORD Himself indicates in verse 6, He had been angry with His people and had been compelled to send them away in discipline, because they had exhibited in the land of Israel the same pride and arrogance found in the people of Babylon. But, as the Scriptures reveal, Israel's exile had a humbling effect upon them; it caused them to turn their hearts to God, to call upon Him as their Redeemer, and acknowledge Him as their sovereign Lord, note Jeremiah 29:12-14a,

*... you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. <sup>13</sup>You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. <sup>14</sup>I will be found by you, declares Jehovah, and I will bring you back from captivity.* (Jer. 29:12-14a)

The LORD had warned long ago that He would chasten His people with severe discipline, that He would break their stubborn pride: *"I will break down your stubborn pride and make the sky above you like iron and the ground beneath you like bronze"* (Lev. 26:19.) Then, after having done so, He would restore them:

*But if they will confess their sins and the sins of their fathers—their treachery against me and their hostility toward me, <sup>41</sup>which made me hostile toward them so that I sent them into the land of their enemies—then when their uncircumcised hearts are humbled and they accept the punishment for their iniquity; <sup>42</sup>then I will remember my covenant.* (Lev. 26:40-42)

Contrast the LORD's pronouncement of judgment against arrogant Babylon (Isaiah 47:1) with His pronouncement of blessing upon repentant Israel (Isaiah 52:2a),

*Come down and sit in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon! Sit on the ground without a throne, O daughter of the Chaldeans, for you shall no longer be called tender and delicate.* (Isa. 47:1)

*Shake the dust off yourself. Rise up and sit on your throne, O Jerusalem.* (Isa. 52:2a)

Let us humble ourselves before the LORD, so that He may lift us up. As the Apostle Peter declares, *"God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. <sup>6</sup>Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time"* (1 Pet. 5:5b-6.) In practical terms, this means having the same mind and attitude as the Lord Jesus: He did not seek to exalt Himself; on the

contrary, He faithfully served His heavenly Father, being confident that He would receive true and lasting honor from Him:

*Have this mind in you that was also in Christ Jesus: <sup>6</sup>existing in the form of God, he did not regard his being on an equality with God as a thing to be exploited; <sup>7</sup>on the contrary, he emptied himself by taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men. Being found as a man in appearance, <sup>8</sup>he humbled himself by becoming obedient unto death, even the death on the cross. <sup>9</sup>Therefore, God exalted him to the highest position. (Phil. 2:5-9a)*