

The second purpose of Biblical prophecy is to give an idea of certain vital facts in God's plan for the future that will affect our present attitudes. It is with regard to these two important purposes that God determines which future events He will reveal.

This morning I would like to emphasize particularly the first of these two purposes of Biblical prophecy--that of strengthening our confidence in God's existence and power and increasing our certainty that the Bible is His dependable revelation. Therefore I shall now direct your attention to Jeremiah 51:41-43. I shall begin to read in the middle of verse 41, where Jeremiah is speaking about the great empire that controlled the world in his day. He says: "How is Babylon become an astonishment among the nations! 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."

The first part of this quotation is a figurative description of the overthrow of Babylon. The coalition of nations that would attack her is described as "the sea" and as "the multitude of the waves thereof." These forces will put an end to the military and political greatness of Babylon.

There is nothing extremely unusual in this prediction that Babylon is to be overthrown. In the course of time most of the ancient cities were conquered by their enemies. Soldiers from Babylon had already destroyed Jerusalem, the Jew own capital city. Its people had been led off into captivity. The declaration that Babylon would also be destroyed might encourage them, as they kept their faith in God and knew that He would eventually deliver them from Babylon and bring them back to their homeland. But if this had been all that was said, it would not be particularly important as evidence of God's power to predict the future.

However, in the description of the eventual situation of the Babylonian cities we find a very unusual and specific statement: "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."

When Jeremiah wrote there were great cities along the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, which had been centers of commerce and civilization for centuries. Day after day, year after year, thousands of people would go in and out of these great cities. Governments and situations might change, but these cities continued. If one should be destroyed it was sure to be rebuilt before long, since the rivers made the area both fertile and accessible. Yet Jeremiah said that her cities would become "a desolation, a dry land, and a wilderness, a land wherein no man dwelleth, neither doth any son of man pass thereby."

Jeremiah did not make this prediction about Palestine but about Babylonia. If he had made it about Palestine we would have to say that it has not yet been fulfilled. In 1929, long before the recent developments in the state of Israel, I went a few miles north of Jerusalem to a little hill called Tell el-Ful, which means "hill of beans," since Professor William F. Albright of Johns Hopkins University, who was then Director of the American Schools of Oriental Research in Jerusalem, had told me that he believed that it contained the remains of Saul's headquarters. Looking out from the top of Tell el-Ful, one could see the edge of what was then the little town of Jerusalem, far to the south, but in all other directions the land seemed barren and desolate. It appeared empty. One might have thought that this prophecy about Babylonia would apply to the situation of Palestine as it then appeared, but such a conclusion would have been entirely wrong.