I. A Message about Babylon 50:1-51:64

A. **Themes:** This collection of oracles contains two main themes

1. The fall of Babylon and the return of the exiles.

2. The attitude toward Babylon is somewhat harsher (50:14, 24) than is found elsewhere in the book (27:6; 43:10)

B. **50:1:** This introduction the word that the Lord spoke . . . by Jeremiah — a label common in Jeremiah and other prophetic books, where it normally refers to a group of independent “sayings” collectively as “the word of the LORD” to a prophet (1:1-2; 7:1; 14:1; 46:1).

1. The rationale for Jeremiah’s judgment on Babylon is that nation’s arrogance.

2. The Babylonians are being used by God to punish Judah and other peoples, yet they believe they are acting of their own accord.

3. These oracles merely put the relationship between God and Babylon in its proper perspective.

C. **50:2-32:** God is interacting with three groups of characters in this complex oracle.

1. These are:

   a. **1st:** consists of several nations “from the north,” whom God is calling to attack and defeat Babylon, vv. 2-3, 8-10, 14-16, 21-22, 25-27, 29-30

   b. **2nd:** consists of the people of Israel, portrayed as wandering sheep who are being avenged by those invading nations, vv. 4-7, 17-20, 28

   c. **3rd:** consists of the people of Babylon, Israel’s “foe from the north,” who is about to be overrun by her own northern enemies, vv. 11-13, 23-24, 31-32.
2. The interaction of these produces a contrast between the mood in Babylon (ashamed, humiliated) and the mood in Jerusalem (avenged).

3. The ultimate effect of relegating Babylon to the same status as all other "nations" is that God reaffirms the status of Israel as his chosen people.

D. **50:33-46:** This oracle describes first God's orders to destroy Babylon (33-40), then describes the execution of those orders (41-46).

E. **51:1-32** is broken into three sections:

1. **1-13:** emphasizes the coming destruction of Babylon
   
   a. The Lord is bringing a **destroyer** who will come against her **on every side**, 1-2
   
   b. God orders the destruction of the orders the total destruction of the Babylonian forces, 3-4
   
   c. These events show that God has not abandoned his people, v. 5
   
   d. God next addresses non-Babylonians living in Babylon, who were forced to drink the wine of God's wrath from the cup of Babylon — the cup will break and cannot be mended, 6-10
   
   e. God again addresses the invading armies, instructing them to make certain their victory, and explaining again this is the Lord's doing, an act of vengeance on behalf of his people, 11-13

2. **14-24:** consists of a dual oath in verses 14 and 24, enveloping a strong self-affirmation by the Lord of his divine sovereignty.

   a. God issues the oath as the divine warrior pledging a victory over Babylon, 14

   b. The Lord declares his unique divinity, 15-19

      (1) He is the true creator of the world, who commands the forces of nature, as evidenced by the thunder and clouds and lightning and wind, 15-16
(2) The idols and their makers have no sense or real knowledge at all; there is no life, no breath in them, vv. 17-18

(3) Israel’s God — the Portion of Jacob, Maker of all things — gives and sustains life; as Creator, he can assume the role of divine warrior — the Lord Almighty is his name, v. 19

c. Babylon has been his war club with which he smashed everything, v. 20-24

3. 25-32 resumes the theme of destruction.

a. Though Babylon has been known as the "destroyer," it will now be destroyed, 25

b. Nothing will be left that could be used for future rebuilding, v. 26

c. The soldiers will surrender, and there is nothing but bad news to be reported to the Babylonian king, vv. 30-32

d. These are the Lord's purposes, v. 29.

F. 51:33-35: Although the speaker here is God as divine warrior, he speaks as the collective body of Jerusalem (v. 35). The images he uses are not common, but the point is clear.

1. The first image (v. 33) simply indicates that Babylon’s “time” is near, as the time when she will be “harvested” for her sins.

2. The second image (v. 34) portrays the ugliness of what Babylon has done to Israel, comparing Babylon to a snake that has eaten and regurgitated Israel.

3. The concluding imprecation summarizes the central message of all these oracles: Babylon is to suffer just as she has caused Jerusalem to suffer.

G. 51:36-57: The primary function of this substantial oracle is for the divine warrior (the Lord of Hosts, v. 57) to assert once more the inevitability of Babylon’s collapse and God's desire to avenge the destruction of Jerusalem.
1. Jeremiah does this by a dual use of the metaphor of drunkenness and Babylon will become drunk, then sleep forever and not awake (vv. 39, 57).

2. Babylon, who other nations had been forced to drink, will not be forced to drink herself.

3. She will become drunk with herself as she celebrates the humiliation of her enemies.

4. Eventually that celebration will result in her own drunkenness and death.

5. Even Babylon’s patron deity, Bel (a.k.a. Marduk, see 50:2; Isa 46:1), will vomit from the excess wine (v. 44).

6. Babylon will suffer the same fate as those over whom she is now celebrating.

7. She will be consumed by what she has been feeding others — military conquest.

H. 51:58: Babylonian's citizens engaged in a futile work in their attempts to save their city.

I. 51:59-64: implies that all that precedes in Jeremiah 50-51 was sent at one time (c. 594 B.C.) by Jeremiah to the exiles in Babylon.

1. The courier is identified as Seraiah son of Neriah son of Mahseiah.

2. Apparently, he is the brother of Baruch, Jeremiah’s friend and scribe (32:12).

3. He is said to be accompanying King Zedekiah on an otherwise unmentioned trip to Babylon.

4. It is logical to assume he embarked on this trip as a result of the gathering of kings in Jerusalem that is the occasion for Jeremiah’s yoke-oracle (27:1 Seraiah is to read the scroll (to the Babylonian leaders?), call on the Lord to fulfill his words of destruction, then throw the scroll into the Euphrates River as a final symbolic act, demonstrating the ultimate fate of the great city.
5. Obviously, a second copy of the scroll is retained.

6. The timing of this reading and symbolic act seems curious at first.
   a. Jeremiah is strongly advising King Zedekiah and his cohort nations to submit to Babylonian rule (27:4-11) because the LORD has decreed that Babylon shall punish these nations. It seems curious that he would simultaneously announce to Babylon that it would fall.
   b. This pairing makes sense, however, as part of Jeremiah’s broader message to Zedekiah.
   c. The reason for Zedekiah’s resistance to Jeremiah’s call for submission is his ill-advised conviction that submission to Babylon indicates a lack of faith in the Lord.
   d. In reality, the opposite is true — Jeremiah’s oracles against Babylon show that the destruction of Jerusalem is not the end of the story.
   e. Submission is only a means to an end, that end being the restoration and glorification of a purified and redeemed Israel.
   f. Therefore, the message of Babylon’s destruction emerges primarily as an encouragement to King Zedekiah of Jerusalem, assuring him that Judah’s submission to Babylon will be a temporary situation.
   g. The final scene of this play as will be the restoration and glorification of Judah in her homeland)