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At the gates of Berlin, 1945.

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AT THE GATES OF BERLIN

WRHS

By
Dr. Abba Hillel Silver



At
The Temple

On
Sunday morning, February 11, 1945

As the armies of the Soviet Union have been approaching the gates of Berlin I have reading and re-reading Isaiah's parable, that remarkable parable which I read to you this morning, from the 14th Chapter of the Book of Isaiah. As the armies of the United States, Great Britain, France have been crashing through the fortifications of the Western wall and have resumed their relentless march on Berlin, I have been pondering more and more this ancient parable.

It is strange, how often events in our own day seem to swing into the focus of these ancient prophecies of long ago; and how their inextinguishable light illumines contemporary happenings.

The amazing thing about these prophets was in their power of foretelling the future. The prophet was a great moral teacher. But they have looked so long and so profoundly into the heart of the moral law, they have studied so long the ways of men and of nations, that they could foretell action on the part of certain nations. Knowing the causes, they could announced the effects like the astrologers, having devoted a lifetime of study to constellations, the position of the starrs, could foretell the position of stars...

Take this 14th Chapter of the Book of Isaiah, this prophecy about ancient Babylon. Ancient Babylon was the Berlin of Biblican days. It was the proud and bloody capital of an insatiable empire. Babylon set out to conquer the world. The people were war-like and rapacious. Their military prowess astonished and terrified the world. Babylon was feared and hated. The peoples whom they conquered they treated with utmost brutality.

"They smote the peoples in wrath
"With an incessant smiting.
"They trampled the nations in anger
"With an unchecked trampling.

These ~~in~~ ancient Babylonians filled the earth with exiles and refugees, with the slain and the tortured. The ambitions of these ancient Nazis knew no bounds. Their pride, their arrogance and their conceit were limitless.

Again I refer to these prophecies of Israel:

"Thou saidst in thy heart
"I will ascend into heaven
"Above the stars of God

"Will I exalt my throne;...
"I will ascend above the heights of the clouds;
"I will match the Most High."

For they are gods, these Babylonians, more powerful than God. Behind their walls of massive thickness, so thick that Nebuchadnezzar could plant his famous "hanging gardens" upon them, which became one of the seven wonders of the earth, behind that massive wall Babylon sat secure on both banks of the River Euphrates and from there ruled the world. All the wealth of the nations were ~~but~~ paid to her, and the sweated labor of myriads of enslaved peoples in distant lands filled her treasure-troves and coffers.

Babylon felt secure. She had made the earth to tremble and shook Kingdoms. She destroyed their cities and made the world a wilderness." Babylon would endure forever! So Babylon thought. Behold her invincible armies, her impregnable fortresses, her magnificent palaces and temples!

Babylon, like Berlin, waged war also on Israel. She laid waste Judea in the beginning of the 7th Century. She destroyed the Temple in 586 and laid it in ruins and ashes. The greater part of the Jewish people were ~~infected~~ deported from Palestine and sent as exiles and prisoners into the Eastern territories of Babylon. So vast was the destruction that the surviving remnants of Israel looked upon themselves as ghosts in a vast graveyard. Ezekiel the prophet, makes the people say: "Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost, we are clean cut off." Babylon had destroyed Israel! Babylon had conquered the world! But, had it?

From the East, just like the Russians, came Cyrus of Persia and with every step came victory. Swiftly and terribly his armies swept over the Babylonians and into the Mesopotamian Valley, and over night all their proud and beautiful edifices, all their might, strength, wealth and glory crumbled.

"And Babylon, the beauty of Kingdoms (and I quote again)
"The proud glory of the Chaldeans
"Became like Sodom and Gomorrah, when God overthrew them."

"Her pomp was brought down to the nether-world
"And the noise of her harps.
"Beneath her maggots are spread
"And worms became her covering.

"How are you fallen from heaven, cries out the prophet
"O Lucifer, son of the dawn!
"How are you hewn to the earth,
"Who laid waste all the nations.!

And the parable, you will recall, concludes: "I will cut off from Babylon race and remnant, offspring and offshoot. I will make it the possession of the Bittern -- marshes of water, and I will sweep it with the besom of destruction."

Amazing prophecy, that! Ancient Babylon, a modern Babylon. Destruction is sweeping across Germany today, from the East and also from the West -- fire and death and destruction. The day of judgment, and recompense is at hand, and the day of deliverance for mankind.

They who had launched total war upon their neighbors with premeditated cruelty and cunning, devastating whole cities and provinces, ravaging whole countries, decimating their populations, and butchering with utter abandon and bestiality millions of innocent and unarmed men, women and children, are now themselves tasting the gall and wormwood of total war. It is now their turn to drink and drink to its bitter dregs the cup of fury, the beaker of staggering which they themselves had concocted. The fire and death which they rained down on Rotterdam and Warsaw and London is now sweeping down like a burning avalanche upon Berlin, Munich, Cologne, and Frankfurt and Breslau and Königsberg.

They thought they were safe. They felt secure and safe. They thought that Berlin would forever be immune from air attack. The Nazis boasted that they were immune from attack while they were pouring death from the air upon London. No enemy plane could ever penetrate the outer and inner rings of the capital's anti-aircraft defence. Berlin was forever safe. That was Goering's proud boast. Well, Berlin has turned out to be the most bombed city in Europe. In the last year alone the British Royal Air Force dropped 10,000 tons of bombs, and the U. S. Air Forces dropped an additional 15,000 tons. Thousands upon thousands of bombers have penetrated that city's defense and have reduced it to rubble and debris.

There is an amazing similarity between now and then. There is an amazing continuity in the operation of moral law. For five years now the roads of Europe have witnessed

long lines of distraught and bewildered refugees fleeing from their homes and cities which the Germans had put to the torch, cold, hungry, knowing not whither to turn, families separated, children lost, a flooding population of human misery. And it is now the turn of the Germans to taste that hell which they had let loose. One now reads in the papers such items as this one - out of Berlin: "The death toll is so great.... it is like the end of the world," said one refugee.

One reads these things, good friends, not with any secret satisfaction of vindictiveness. We have been told by our teachers: "The enemy has fallen. Do not rejoice." The suffering of these Germans will not vindicate an iota the suffering which they inflicted upon other peoples, and the death of these Germans will not restore a single human life. But it is important to observe now what is taking place, terribly important, and to draw the moral implication of what is taking place. But men would come to question the operation of God's Moral Law if such shameless and murderous conduct of a nation could long go on with impunity, without bringing down retributive justice upon their heads.

The German people would be lost forever, beyond hope of penance, forgiveness and moral rehabilitation if the consequences of their actions were not to be brought to their own doorsteps, if they were not made to suffer and atone for their unspeakable crimes.

In the swift and sure punishment which is being visited upon that sinful nation one can discern again as the prophets did 2600 years ago, the sure and certain operation of the Moral Law, the sure and certain operation of a law which no one dare defy with impunity, a law as sure as the operation of any physical law. When you put your hand into the fire you are burned. When you break the law of mercy, justice, compassion, you will be scorched, burned.

This regime of wickedness, this race of evil-doers boasted they would last a thousand years, remember? They are not likely to last a thousand weeks. They boasted that they would extend their boundaries to the furthestmost ends of the earth, that a measure of wealth and glory would come to them. Well, they have ruined their land and slain their

people and prepared their youth for the shambles."

This is the law of men and nations, dear friends. No reign of wickedness can long endure. No government can survive whose foundations are laid in tyranny, terror and lust of power domination and in the hatred of other men. And it is on such foundations that the Nazis sought to build their government. This is what Hitler said: "We are faced with the iron necessity of creating a new social order. (Quote) (three classes and a slave class)

This is the hierarchy which the Nazis sought to build in the world, themselves on the top, in the middle a large group and at the bottom a disfranchised, dispossessed group with no voice in government, taught to obey the leader at the top...Surely never was God's moral law so swiftly vindicated as in our day. Surely God's hand has not been slow to punish the evil-doers.

If the German's could only produce in this hour of their great agony, a prophet like the ancient Israelites produced in their hours of agony, someone who would stand at the gates of Berlin as the armies of the leaders and have the courage to raise his voice as the prophets of ancient Israel in similar circumstances, "to declare to Jacob his sins and Israel its transgressions," This is what Jeremiah would have said had he stood at the gates of Berlin. He would say unto the people: "We have sinned." You have filled the world with horror and cruelty. You have been arrogant and ruthless and this evil which has come upon you is just and righteous and what you deserved. And now it is your turn to do penance, to repent, to acknowledge your guilt. Then there would be hope for the salvation of the soul of the German people. Until that hour comes, until that great man arrives, or rather until there is this inner spiritual resolution in the soul of that people, it will have to suffer. Perhaps suffering will bring it.

On the other hand, lest we become self-righteous, as the advancing armies of the Allies are approaching the gates of Berlin, that we do not come to feel that we are utterly without guilt, that we need not atone for any of our sins of the past, it is important that in this great hour on the eve of victory, we members of the United Nations, in utmost humility of spirit, take stock of our sins, of our mistakes and make our resolutions for tomorrow. We, too, have atoned for many of our mistakes -- Our sons who are dying upon the battlefields and the ruined cities of the nations around Germany, the misery and suffering of multitudes of human beings, are in a way atonement for sins which we ourselves have committed. And our atonement will not be complete until we build a just world after this war.

Destiny is bring us to the gates of Berlin, and the hour of destiny will wait for us. But destiny is also waiting for us at the gates of some nameless city somewhere in the Black Sea today where the leaders of the three great nations are meeting, and where the future of the world is being determined. Unless those leaders representing their people, unless they can rise to the challenge of the great hour, the hour of destiny, unless they can transcend that which is mean and small and petty and selfish, unless they can check the play of power politics, unless they can restrain the desire for extended boundaries and unless they will have the vision before them of the inescapable operations of the moral law, the military gains at the gates of Berlin will result in nothing and the world will follow in the shadow of another world war.

The fall of the Nazis will not be enough and will not compensate the world for the liquidation and ruin of these years. It will not bring a sense of rest and peace and security for people of the earth. Only a new world order laid upon the foundations of justice, of international law, a social order grounded in obedience to God's eternal moral law -- only such a world order will give men that which they are seeking ~~for~~ that for which they have sent their sons into battle.....

There is no escaping the moral law whether in ancient Babylon/or in 1945.

2600 years ago

1) As the R. have been approaching the gates of Berlin, I have been reading and re-reading Isaiah's parable against Babylon - Ch. 14. As the armies of the U.S., G.B. & France have been ~~entering~~ ^{entering} the fortifications, the West & have resumed their rebuttal march on B. - I have pondered over once ^{again} that ancient parable. Strange, how often events of an day, swing into the focus of these prophecies of long ago, and how their unextinguishable light illumines contemporary happenings.

2) Bab was the Bastion of Biblical times. It was the proud and bloody capital of an insatiable empire. It set out to conquer the whole earth. Its people were war-like and rapacious. Their military prowess astonished and terrified the world. Babylon was feared and hated. The peoples whom they conquered they treated with utmost ^{inhumanity} brutality.

"They smote the peoples in wrath

"with an incessant smiting.

"They trampled the nations in anger

"with an unchecked trampling.

They filled the earth with exiles and refugees, with the slain and the forlorn.

Their ambitions knew no bounds. Their pride, their arrogance and conceit were limiters.

"There is a god in the heart

"I will ascend into heaven,

"above the stars of God

"Will I exalt my throne;...

"I will ascend above the heights of the clouds;

"I will ~~will~~ ^{will} match the Most High.

Behind his walls of unwieldy thickness so thick that Nebuchad-
negzer could ~~plant~~ ^{plant} his famous "hanging gardens" upon them. Bab. sat secure on both banks, the R. Euphrates

and from this rule the world. And the wealth of nations was but to her, and the sweated labor of myriads of enslaved people in distant lands filled her treasure-chests. & so Persia

Bab. felt secure! She "had made the earth to tremble and shook kingdoms. She destroyed their cities and made the world a wilderness". Bab. would endure forever! Behold her invincible armies, her invincible fortresses, her magnificent palace and temples!

3. Bab. like Babel, waged war also on Israel. She laid waste Judah in the beg. of the 7th c. She destroyed the Temple in 586 and laid it in ruins and ashes. The greater part of the Jewish people were deported from Pal. & sent as exiles and prisoners into the Eastern territories of Babylonia. So vast was the destruction that the surviving remnants of Israel looked upon themselves as "strangers in a ^{lost & now-gone} valley of dried bones. 'Our bones are dried up and our hope is lost, we are clean cut off.'

Yes, Bab. had destroyed Israel! Bab. had conquered the world!

But, had it?

From the East came Cyrus of Persia, "at whom ~~the~~ Victory meets at every step". Swiftly and surely his armies swept over Babylonia, into the Howlat. Valley.

"And Babylon, the beauty of kingdoms,

"The proud place, the Chaldeans

"Became as Sodom & Gomorrah, when God overthrew them.

"Her pomp was brought down to the nether-world

"And the noise of her harps.

"Beneath her maggots are spread

"And worms to be her covering

'How are you fallen from heaven, - cries out the prophet
"O Lucifer, son, the dawn!"
'How are you hewn to the earth,
"Who laid waste all the nations!"

And the rock concludes: "I will cut off from Babylon race
and remnant, offspring and offshoot. I will make it the
possession of the bitter - weathers, water, and I will
sweep it with the besom of destruction"

y. Well, the besom of destruction is sweeping ~~across~~ ^{from the east} across the
fir. ~~from the east~~ ^{from the east} and from the west, fire, death and destruction.
The day of judgment and retribution is at hand, and the day of
destruction for mankind -

They who had launched Total War upon their neighbors - with
primitiv~~ist~~ cruelty and cunning - devoting white
cities and provinces, razing whole countries, decimating
their populations, and butchering with utter abandon and
heraldic ruthlessness innocent, unarmed men, women
children, are now themselves taking the gall and worm-
wood of total war.

It is now their turn to drink ^{to drain to its last bitter dregs} the cup of fury, the
baker of stag fury which they themselves had concocted.
The fire and death which they rained down on Rotterdam,
and Warsaw and London is now sweeping down like
a burning ^{and dark} ~~dark~~ upon Berlin, Munich, Cologne,
and Frankfurt and Breslau and Koenigsberg.

Berlin would never be immune from air-attack, boasted
the Nazis while they were pouring death from the air
upon London. No enemy plane could ever penetrate

the outer and inner rings of the capital's outer aircraft
defence. Berlin, little Baby. was safe and secure!

Well, Berlin has ~~been~~ turned out to be the most bombed city in Europe. In the last year alone - the British Royal Air Force dropped 10,000 tons of bombs. And the U.S. Air Force dropped an additional 15,000 tons. Thousands upon thousands of bombs have pulverized that city's defenses and have ~~reduced~~ ^{reduced} it to rubble and debris.

5) Fed 5 yrs. now the roads of Europe ~~are~~ have ~~been~~ witnessed
long lines of distraught and bewildered refugees fleeing from
their homes & cities where the Germans had put to the torch.
Cold, hungry, knowing not whether to turn, farther separated,
children lost - a flooding population of human misery.

Well, it is now the turn, the firmans - to fork the hell
which they have let loose. one needs (Janti).

water the zero base

6). One reads thus not with the secret satisfaction of underhandedness. The mystery, these firmans will not investigate the sufferings & the wrongs which they inflicted upon millions, other people. They ^{direct} will not venture to lift the veil, to inquire where they slew.

2lew.
But men would come to question the ^{very} ~~operation~~ / ~~first~~ /
moral law if such shameful & murderous conduct of
a nation could long go on with impunity, without
~~and the~~ ~~being~~ down revolutionary justice upon their
heads.

The firmness people would be lost forever - beyond
hope, renounce, and improvement & moral rehabilitation
if the consequences of their action ~~had~~ were not to be lost

to their own doorstep - if they ever are made to suffer
and atone for their unspeakable crimes.

7. In the swift & inevitable punishment which has been
visited upon that sinful nation - we can discern the
merit & certain punishment of the Moral Law.

The reprobate chief advisers - ^{who could do} 1000 yrs - 1000 weeks -
They who had boasted - boundless ends, the earth - wealth

and glory -

"They have ruined their land

"And stain their people"

"And prepared their youth for the shambles."

No reign of wickedness can long endure! No city of blood
can prosper!

No gov't can survive ^{when founded in sin} which is built upon tyranny, oppression,
murder, and hatred of the meek. (Isaiah)

Never was the God's moral law so swiftly vindicated as
in our day.
Surely God's hand has not been slow to punish the
evil doers.

8. And, if the Jews could in their hour of agony
produce a prophet like Israel - "who would have
the courage" to declare to Jacob his sin, Israel his
iniquities, ^(Isaiah) this is what he would say to
them, standing at the gates of Babel - or the great
enemy of Babel - "We have sinned" (Oswald) p. 135
we have desecrated - Rehoboth!
This would save their souls!

9/ lest we become self-righteous - not without guilt - (6)

we have atoned -

we may complete our atonement by building a just world
order after the war

Our destiny has led us to the gates of Berlin -

It is also knocking at the gates of that city on the
shores, the Black Sea - where -

If they fail - the Ruins, the Fall of Nazis - will
not compensate for their suffering & their people - would

Power. Politics

