

# ISAIAH

## ISAIAH 47:11-15, BABYLON'S DOWNFALL, PART 4

Babylon thought she was above the morals and the mores that have served mankind as the basis for some sort of social order, however inadequate that functions in this fallen world, that have maintained the continuity and safety for the citizens of the various nations of the world. There have always been evil dictators and cruel rulers that violate these morals and mores, but, for the most part, they have provided the basis for some sort of stability, however limited, in human and governmental relations throughout history. Due to the fallen nature of the world and the satanic system that rules over it, this has never been perfect, but instead it has been chaotic and dangerous. Babylon as a nation in time and Babylon as a worldview have both been obstacles to the orderly governance of the planet. That will continue until Babylon is totally vanquished and the Messiah King is on His throne.

In verse 10, it was noted that Babylon claimed that "no one sees me," which was really a prideful statement indicating that no one could do anything about Babylon's evil behavior even if they wanted to do so. No one could judge the nation and hold it accountable. Babylon reveled in it; they flaunted it; they boasted about it; they used their might to subjugate and destroy the people and the nations around them. And they thought no one could stop them from continuing on forever. In a sense they were correct—up to a point. They failed to consider the fact that there is an omnipotent Creator God who can and will judge Babylon for their evil behavior. The nation itself ceased to exist as an independent nation when King Cyrus and his Medo-Persian army conquered Babylon, and as a city it has existed instead under the rule of various dictatorial regimes since that time. The Babylonian worldview continued on and still exists today. It will reach its pinnacle under the reign of antichrist and will finally be destroyed by the Messiah King when He returns to earth to save all Israel and establish His Messianic Kingdom.

"Babylon wrongly asserts its sovereignty. Babylon's folly is rooted in its inability to recognize that its wisdom and knowledge are actually foolishness. The nation believed itself to be unique, incomparable, and eternal, but such thoughts are deceptive. They cultivated arrogance and blinded Babylon to the coming destruction" [Michael Rydelnik and James Spence, "Isaiah" in *The Moody Bible Commentary*, 1077].

Just like Babylon, there have always been powerful, dictatorial regimes that have attempted to conquer the world. Rome, Greece under Alexander the Great, the Huns, the Mongols and Genghis Khan, Napoleon Bonaparte, and, more recently, the communist Soviet Union, Nazi Germany and Japan, Islam, and communist China all represent people and nations that have used force to conquer parts of the world. The point is that the Babylonian lust for power and domination, imposed by force, is still operative and has not gone away. It changes its ethnicity, its leadership, and its location from time to time, but it is still operative as a dominant worldview. At the end, this satanic, Babylonian worldview under the leadership of antichrist will engulf the world in violence and destruction.

Oswalt compared Babylon to Nazi Germany. "The parallel to Nazi Germany comes readily to mind, and it offers some illumination. Having declared that it was above such mundane matters as ethical accountability, that it was only accountable to itself for its destiny, Germany fell into the most horrifying kinds of wickedness. It appears that to deny the relevancy of ethical standards for oneself is not to leave oneself in a position of ethical neutrality, but to deliver oneself over to ethical evil. So it may have been for Babylon" [John N. Oswalt, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66*, 250]. Just as Babylon thought it would go on forever, so Hitler thought that his Third Reich would last for 1,000 years. Of course, they all think that, and they all eventually fall.

Babylon's downfall is revealed next.

Isaiah 47:11 <sup>11</sup>"But evil [רָעָה] will come on you Which you will not know how to charm [שָׁחַר] away; And disaster [הָרָה] will fall on you For which you cannot atone [כָּפַר]; And destruction [פְּתָאֵם] [ (m) שׂוֹאָה (f)] about which you do not know Will come on you suddenly [פְּתָאֵם].

Evil, רָעָה, means evil, bad, wickedness, wrongdoing, and depravity referring to that which is not morally good (as an opposite or perversion of goodness), so with an implication that the event or action is harmful in various ways. This word is translated "disaster" in the CSB and the NET Bible. This is the same word translated "wickedness" in v. 10. Babylon is going to reap what Babylon has sown; wickedness and evil they have sown and wickedness and evil they will reap.

There is an issue with accurately interpreting what the word translated "charm away" in the NASB actually means. All of the lexicons I use, except two, define charm, שָׁחַר, to mean dawn or morning which implies a better new day. The concept of a better day implied in the morning dawn does not fit the context. Some interpret it to mean the opposite of a better day having the sense of "'from which thou wilt experience no morning dawn' (i.e., after the night of calamity)" [C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: Isaiah*, vol. 7, 7:459].

One exception is the *Lexham Hebrew Analytical Lexicon* which defines the word as to cause to disappear by magic, cover up evil, or avert disaster with the sense being to cause something to stay away or depart by a kind of incantation [s.v. "שָׁחַר," *Lexham Hebrew Analytical Lexicon*, Logos Electronic Ed.]. The other exception is the NET Bible note on this verse which refers to the *Hebrew Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* which "references a verbal root with these three letters (שָׁחַר) that refers to magical activity" [*The NET Bible*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1298 n. h] leading to the translation "charm it away" in the NET Bible. There is another word that has different vowel pointing (שָׁחַר) that means to diligently seek, to search for [Baker and Carpenter, s.v. "שָׁחַר," *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament*, 1124]. It also means black [William L. Holladay, s.v. "שָׁחַר וּ," *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 366]. Baker and Carpenter, s.v. "שָׁחַר," in *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament* give a second meaning for this word as meaning to conjure away or to charm away. I think the context, given the previous verses that condemn the sorceries of Babylon, fits very well with "charm away." Some commentators believe this is questionable and the meaning should be "dawn."

Most of the lexicons define the word to mean dawn, which does also make sense in the verse, so here is how that idea looks in a literal translation:

Isaiah 47:11 <sup>11</sup>And evil has come in on you, you do not know its rising ... (LSV).

Isaiah 47:11 <sup>11</sup>Therefore shall evil come upon thee; thou shalt not know the dawning thereof ... (ASV).

Isaiah 47:11 <sup>11</sup>Therefore shall evil come upon thee; thou shalt not know from whence it riseth ... (KJV).

Disaster will also fall on Babylon once the Lord executes judgment on the nation. That happened when the Lord, using King Cyrus and his Medo-Persian Army, conquered the nation, and it will happen again, completely and finally, when the Lord personally destroys the Babylonian world system in total as a worldwide government, economic, and religious system figuratively described in terms of Babylon.

Disaster, הִנָּה, means ruin, calamity, misfortune, or disaster referring to what is a ruin. It has the sense of an event (or the result of an event) that completely destroys something. Babylon was not completely destroyed by Cyrus. In fact, Babylon was not physically destroyed at that time, and it became an important part of the Medo-Persian empire in the area. On the other hand, Babylon will be completely destroyed in the Tribulation, physically and as a world governmental system, and remain uninhabited during the Messianic Kingdom.

Isaiah 13:19–22 <sup>19</sup>And Babylon, the beauty of kingdoms, the glory of the Chaldeans' pride, Will be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. <sup>20</sup>It will never be inhabited or lived in from generation to generation; Nor will the Arab pitch *his* tent there, Nor will shepherds make *their* flocks lie down there. <sup>21</sup>But desert creatures will lie down there, And their houses will be full of owls; Ostriches also will live there, and shaggy goats will frolic there. <sup>22</sup>Hyenas will howl in their fortified towers And jackals in their luxurious palaces. Her *fateful* time also will soon come And her days will not be prolonged.

Jeremiah 51:61–64 <sup>61</sup>Then Jeremiah said to Seraiah, "As soon as you come to Babylon, then see that you read all these words aloud, <sup>62</sup>and say, 'You, O LORD, have promised concerning this place to cut it off, so that there will be nothing dwelling in it, whether man or beast, but it will be a perpetual desolation.' <sup>63</sup>"And as soon as you finish reading this scroll, you will tie a stone to it and throw it into the middle of the Euphrates, <sup>64</sup>and say, 'Just so shall Babylon sink down and not rise again because of the calamity that I am going to bring upon her; and they will become exhausted.'"

While it will be good for the world when Babylon is finally and completely destroyed, it will, in terms of the world's thought processes in accordance with a satanic world system mindset, be a real disaster for Babylon and for those who are part of her.

Revelation 18:9–10 <sup>9</sup>"And the kings of the earth, who committed *acts of* immorality and lived sensuously with her, will weep and lament over her when they see the smoke of her

burning, <sup>10</sup>standing at a distance because of the fear of her torment, saying, 'Woe, woe, the great city, Babylon, the strong city! For in one hour your judgment has come.'

Babylon's rejection of God is so complete that there will be nothing that can be done to save her from this destruction.

Atone, כָּפַר, means to cover over, to pacify, to make propitiation, to appease, or to make amends or atonement. In this context, it refers to cleanse from sin or the defilement of sin, most often by sacrifice. The problem Babylon has is that they have rebelled against God to such an extent that they do not even know how to atone for their sins and reconcile with God—which they do not want to do anyway. All of the world's wisdom and knowledge is informed by the father of lies, Satan, (John 8:44), and they cannot connect with God at all. Pagan rituals, sorceries, magic, sacrifices and so on cannot bring about reconciliation with God. These things do not result in atonement; they are rebellion!

Because Babylon trusts in pagan deities that cannot protect them and because they are in total rebellion against God, they are oblivious to the danger they are facing. Their fate, which is destruction, will befall them suddenly, and they will not know what hit them.

Destruction, שׂוּאָה (f) שׂוּאָ (m), means ravage (m) and devastation, ruin, desolation, or waste (f). The primary meaning of the word is devastation. It has the sense of ruin which is an irrecoverable state of devastation and destruction. The word relates to a desert or wilderness strongly implying a place of desolation where habitation is impossible, which is exactly what the Scriptures relate will be Babylon's fate in what is still the future. Babylon was not ruined, destroyed, or made desolate when King Cyrus conquered the city. They simply exchanged the Babylonian leadership and government for Medo-Persian leadership and government. The prophet Zephaniah described, in part, the Day of the Lord as a day of destruction and desolation.

Zephaniah 1:15 <sup>15</sup>A day of wrath is that day, A day of trouble and distress, A day of destruction [שׂוּאָ] and desolation [שׂוּאָה], A day of darkness and gloom, A day of clouds and thick darkness,

Babylon, at least in the form it existed at the time of Daniel, was an invincible nation that had not experienced defeat; therefore, they had no knowledge of the destruction that was about to come upon or fall upon the nation. "The threefold occurrence of *against thee* characterizes the verse and stresses the sureness of Babylon's doom. Taken with the preceding verb in each case [evil, disaster, destruction], this threefold occurrence shows that the calamities come from without, thus belying Babylon's claim that she was unique. There is One far greater than Babylon whom she has not known, and she has now become the object against which He sends the calamities" [Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah: A Commentary*, vol. 3, 3:241].

Suddenly, פְּתָאִם, means suddenness, suddenly, in a moment, surprisingly, and quickly and without warning which is the sense of the word as used here. It refers to suddenly and unexpectedly, all at once, in an instant, pertaining to an extremely short period of time for a state or event. Destruction is going to come upon Babylon when they are unaware their fate is about to befall them. "Suddenly" describes what happened to Babylon when

King Cyrus conquered it. The Babylonians knew that the enemy was just outside the walls, but they were taken suddenly and by surprise when the enemy breached the city without any warning. Babylon was not destroyed that time, but when the Lord suddenly appears at the end, Babylon will be consigned to the trash heap of history.

The prophet encourages Babylon to do what Babylon is inclined to do anyway, and that is rely on pagan gods, pagan priests, and the pagan spells and sorceries that are associated with pagan thought. This command has a mocking, sarcastic tone to it, but apparently some theologians think this is a serious command to the Babylonians to put their faith in action and test it, which is not unheard of in the biblical record. That was the situation on Mount Carmel between Elijah and Jezebel's priests of Baal which was a genuine test of power between Yahweh and Baal (1 Kings 18:20-40). Arguing against that interpretation, is the fact that in this section of Isaiah, pagan gods, pagan wisdom and knowledge, and pagan idols have already been condemned as worthless (Is. 41:29) and defeated (Is. 46:1-2). It is also not unheard of in the biblical record to use the imperative verb to mock or taunt someone [Wilhelm Gesenius, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, sec.110 a (a), 324] (cf. 1 Kings 18:27; Amos 4:4), which is, I think very clearly, the context here. The asterisk (\*) used in the two verses below indicate imperative verbs used to mock or taunt.

1 Kings 18:27 <sup>27</sup>It came about at noon, that Elijah mocked them and said, "Call out\* with a loud voice, for he is a god; either he is occupied or gone aside, or is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and needs to be awakened."

Amos 4:4 <sup>4</sup>"Enter\* Bethel and transgress; In Gilgal multiply\* transgression! Bring\* your sacrifices every morning, Your tithes every three days.

"... [I]t seems most likely that he [Isaiah] intends sarcasm here. It is as though the prophet is saying, 'If you don't believe me, go ahead and put your trust in this foolishness. Who knows, maybe it will help you?'" [John N. Oswalt, *The New American Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66*, 253].

Isaiah 47:12-13 <sup>12</sup>"Stand [עמד] *fast* now in your spells [תְּכָרִי] And in your many sorceries [כְּשָׁפִי] With which you have labored [יָגַעַת] from your youth; Perhaps [אולי] you will be able to profit [יַעֲלֶיךָ], Perhaps you may cause trembling [עָרִיץ]. <sup>13</sup>"You are wearied [לָאָהָה] with your many [רַב] counsels [עֲצָה]; Let now the astrologers, Those who prophesy by the stars, Those who predict by the new moons, Stand up and save [יִשָּׁעַת] you from what will come upon you.

Knowing that the Babylonian pagans cannot stand against the one and only omnipotent, holy God, the Creator of the universe, Isaiah commands them to keep doing what they have always done in the event that it may actually produce results for them, but, of course, false pagan deities cannot produce results. The astrologers and pagan priests not only fail to save the nation, they cannot even save themselves. Spells and sorceries are ineffective in terms of resisting and overcoming Yahweh. Babylon is going to learn that fact the hard way. Remember, Babylon was proclaiming to be deified with the "I am" statements she made, but the nation is going to discover that all the pagan wisdom and knowledge they think they possess is useless in terms of overcoming the Creator God.

Stand, עָמַד, means to take one's stand, to stand firm, or to remain. This is a command. It has the sense of rising up for the purpose of taking action. In this context, the word connotes persistence or perseverance. It is a reference to continuing on with doing what has always been done, to keep engaging in spells and sorceries just as the Babylonian pagans have done all their lives. They know nothing else, and they have nothing else. They will not turn to God, so they must rely on what they have always done and what is really the only acceptable thing to do according to the Babylonian religious worldview which is paganism.

Spell, קְסָד, means a spell, a magic spell, an incantation, an enchantment, or a charm referring to an illicit religious charm to invoke power either verbally or by actions. Whether spoken or physically performed, the spell is believed to have magical force.

Sorcery, כְּשָׁף, means sorcery, witchcraft, or black magic. These are acts of obtaining powers from spirits often with the associative meanings of rebellion and seductive false religion.

These things are products of the darkness; they are not of the light. Do the spells and sorceries as they have been developed by pagan practitioners of the dark arts or black magic have any power? I think they do, but what they do not have is any power to overcome what is of God. Dr. Zuck conducted a Scripture review concerning the use of black magic, and he concluded that occult power is real although inferior to the power of God.

"First, witchcraft is *demonic*, opposing all that is godly.... Second, witchcraft is *deceitful*. At first glance the performances of the Egyptian magicians appeared identical with those of Aaron, but in actuality were less powerful. Simon, the Samaritan sorcerer, deceived many for a long time by means of his magical powers.... Third, witchcraft is *deteriorating* and *destructive*.... Fourth, witchcraft is *doomed*. Though sorcerers may have tremendous supernatural powers because of their subjugation to and alignment with demonic forces, God's power is superior...." [Roy B. Zuck, "The Practice of Witchcraft in the Scriptures," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 128, no. 512 (October-December, 1971): 359–360].

Others, however, believe that the practitioners of the dark arts have no power at all except as that which is wielded in the ways that people can generally exert power over others by means of persuasion or intimidation or trickery.

They may be under the influence of Satan or his demons, but the power they exert may only be through their *words and natural behavior* – not through miraculous or supra-human phenomena.... In fact, the Scriptures are clear in pointing out that all occult practices are performed by deceitful fabricators of lies and that their claimed miraculous "powers" are far from genuine or effective. [Toby A. Travis, "Whom Shall We Fear?" *Global Journal of Classical Theology* 4, no. 3 (2004)].

We do know for certain that the antichrist will be able to perform real miracles in the power of Satan. This tells us that Satan possesses supernatural power. What it does not tell us is when, where, and how God allows him to use those powers.

2 Thessalonians 2:8–10 <sup>8</sup>Then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; <sup>9</sup>that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, <sup>10</sup>and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved.

These wonders will be “false wonders,” but that does not mean they are not real supernatural activities. The purpose of signs, wonders, and miracles is to authenticate the message and the messenger. What makes these wonders false is that the personalities they are authenticating, that is, antichrist and his master, Satan, are false in nature. These wonders are false because they are not authenticating God, the light, but are instead authenticating Satan, who is darkness.

To some extent, the satanic, demonic forces of darkness do have the power to perform in the supernatural realm. Pharaoh's court sorcerers, Jannes and Jambres (2 Tim. 3:8-9), performed supernatural acts when they turned their staffs into snakes just as Aaron did with Moses' staff (Ex. 7:10-12). The Egyptian magicians turned water into blood (Ex. 7:22) and called frogs up to cover Egypt (Ex. 8:7). What they can do, however, is limited by God. Once the plague of flies began, the Egyptian magicians attempted to duplicate that miracle, but they were unable to do so and subsequently admitted the plague was from God and that they were powerless to duplicate it (Ex. 8:18-19). We have to understand that pagan magicians and sorcerers are granted supernatural power and God allows them to exercise that power, but only within the limits He has set. My conclusion is that those who practice the spells and sorceries Isaiah referenced do carry some degree of supernatural power to affect reality, but they are nowhere near as powerful as the power that God wields. They cannot overcome or thwart God's plans for Babylon.

Labor, *לָבַד*, means to work, to become weary with work, labor, struggle, or striving referring to putting forth great effort and exertion to accomplish something. It has the sense of working hard until one is tired and exhausted. There is an emphasis on the toil of work, and the weariness that results from labor. Hard work that results in nothing more than futility was revealed to be the pagan's lot in the confrontation between Elijah and the priests of Baal on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:25-29). The fruit of laboring in sorcery is judgment.

Perhaps, *אִי־יָדָע*, means peradventure (uncertainty or doubt), perhaps, whether, or maybe as an expression of hope, request, or fear referring to a marker showing uncertainty, but usually an expectancy that a positive result will happen. However, whether a positive outcome occurs or not is an altogether different issue. Conversely, this word asserts a note of contingency into a sentence that may express fear, hope, entreaty, or wish. The word represents uncertainty in this context. Will the pagan spells and sorceries work to the benefit of the Babylonians or will they fail despite all the effort put into them? If they fail to positively work in terms of benefits for Babylon, will they negatively work by means of creating fear in their enemies?

Isaiah continues to mock the pagans for their worthless labor that they hope will result in something that benefits them either by providing direct assistance to them or by terrorizing their enemies.

Profit, *יָעַל*, means to profit, to benefit, to derive a benefit from, which is the context here, referring to having value or benefiting resulting in a use or gain in some way. The sense of the word represents the derivation of a benefit from something.

Trembling, *עָרַץ*, means to terrify, to cause terror, to be in dread, or trembling referring to being in fear or terrorized which pertains to being in state or condition of fear, as an extension of the shaking of an earthquake as correlated to the shaking of the body in terror.

Isaiah knows these things are worthless; he has already recorded God's messages revealing Babylon's destruction (Is. 21:9; 43:14). In God's sight, sorceries and spells are only foolishness and they will not prevent the divinely ordained judgment from taking place that is going to be imposed on Babylon. The Word of God definitively connects idol worship with foolishness.

Jeremiah 10:8 <sup>8</sup>But they are altogether stupid and foolish *In their* discipline of delusion—their idol is wood!

Romans 1:22–23 <sup>22</sup>Professing to be wise, they became fools, <sup>23</sup>and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.

Not only is fruitless paganism a laborious burden that accomplishes nothing good, it is an emotionally damaging and exhausting pursuit.

Weary, *לָאָה*, means to be weary, exhausted, impatient, emotionally tired with the result that one does not have the capacity to carry out a function or task as an extension of being weary or tired and therefore unable to respond with potency. This verb form is passive meaning the astrologers wear the Babylonians out with all the faulty advice they dole out.

The astrologers had plenty of advice to give, in fact, the text suggests they were overloaded with it. Their advice may even appear to be accurate—for a time, but eventually it will fail.

Counsel, *עֲצָה*, means counsel, advice, wisdom referring to the action of telling someone what they should do based on a plan or scheme. It has the sense of something that provides direction or advice as to a decision or course of action.

Many, *רַב*, means multitude, abundance, many or much referring to a large amount, a great number of countable items, often with a focus on being an impressive number. The sense is one of a more than adequate number or supply.

There were numerous methods the pagans used to try and divine the future. You can imagine how confusing and wearying it could be to run here and there trying to figure out which astrologer, sorcerer, or magician was right and which method they used was the correct one.

This continues the sarcasm the prophet has employed to mock the Babylonians. First, he told them to stand fast in their spells and their sorceries, and now he encourages the



astrologers to save Babylon from what was going to come upon the nation, but, of course, they are powerless to do so.

Save, *ישע*, means to deliver, rescue, save, or help which places a person in a situation safe and free from danger. It has the sense of saving from ruin, destruction, or harm. I prefer to translate this word as "rescue" (NET Bible) or "help" (TANAKH) or "deliverance" in this context only because Christians tend to relate the word "save" with justification salvation which is not the context here. This verse is talking about a physical deliverance or rescue from physical danger.

Astrologer, *הַבְּרֹי שְׂמֵרָם*, actually reads "they divide heavens" which was used as a means to predict the future. "The practice consists in consulting the heavenly bodies, particularly the signs of the zodiac in relation to observed human events, and making deductions and predictions on this basis" [Merrill F. Unger, s.v. "Astrology," *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, 120]. We should not overlook the fact that the Creator God of the universe is challenging these pagan astrologers to prove their worth, which they cannot do. They cannot divine the future and see to it that it comes to pass, but the Creator can.

Lest anyone think this is only an ancient practice, think again. It is still widely practiced today including in Western Civilization. Why do you think that for decades newspapers have carried daily horoscopes in them for people to consult? That is the ancient art of pagan astrology!

The Babylonians clearly thought these measures might save them, but they will not. Astrologers, sorcerers, and magicians are no match for the Creator God.

Babylon's destruction is once again revealed by Isaiah. Not even the astrologers will be able to deliver themselves much less deliver the nation.

Isaiah 47:14–15 <sup>14</sup>"Behold [*הִנֵּה*], they have become like stubble, Fire burns them; They cannot deliver themselves from the power of the flame; There will be no coal [*בְּחֹלֶת*] to warm by Nor a fire to sit before! <sup>15</sup>"So have those become to you with whom you have labored, Who have trafficked [*סָחַר*] with you from your youth; Each has wandered in his own way; There is none to save you.

Behold, *הִנֵּה*, is a textual marker meaning lo! behold! Look! It is an exclamation of attention. The Babylonians need to pay attention to what is coming. The things predicted are coming into view, and the astrologers are going to be destroyed. Their destruction is compared to burning stubble, which is quickly destroyed. Furthermore, they cannot deliver themselves from the flames. The destruction will be complete; the creature comforts to which they are accustomed will be destroyed as well. They will not even have a fire for warmth, and even if they did, they would have no charcoal to fuel it.

Coal, *בְּחֹלֶת*, is a reference to burning charcoal or to live coals, that is, a hot fragment of coal that is left from a fire and that is glowing or smoldering. It signifies an ignited or live coal. Charcoal is charred wood that is used for fuel. "Charcoal was made by charring wood which was stacked in a dome-shaped pile from which air was excluded" J. B. Scott, s.v. "charcoal," *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, Volume 1, A-C*, 1:779].

Kilns were also used to produce charcoal. This is not a reference to the mineral type of coal that is mined from the earth, rather, it is "a dark carbon substance usually prepared from wood by charring in a kiln" [s.v. "charcoal," *Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, new and enhanced ed., 228].

The concept of a literal fire, sustained by charcoal, before which people may warm themselves, is a figurative reference to the complete destruction that is coming upon Babylon. Such a fire will no longer be found in the nation. "No fire: false religion may seem to offer the warmth of 'helpfulness', but it is not a fire to sit by, rather a fire which will burn up, a furnace of destruction" [J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary*, 299].

The Babylonians labored at doing pagan religion. All the labor expended to counsel and guide the Babylonians in the power and the methods of pagan religion were going to come to naught. The nation was going to be destroyed and the astrologers were going to be destroyed right along with it. They cannot save themselves, and they cannot save the nation.

The commercial character of the Babylonian system will also prove to be of no help to the nation when it is facing destruction. "Trafficked" is not a particularly good word to use to identify those whom the nation has dealt with from the beginning.

Trafficked, טָהַר, means to go round, to travel about countries for the sake of traffic, hence to trade. It refers to a merchant or a trader, i.e., one who buys, sells, and barter goods. The basic sense is a reference to those who travel as merchants, to trade. Merchants or traders are those who purchase and maintain an inventory of goods to be sold.

Only the NASB and the ASV use the word "trafficked" in this verse. *The Oxford American College Dictionary* lists this use of the word as archaic meaning to deal or communicate between people. It also refers to the activity associated with dealing or trading in something illegal, which is probably the meaning most of us would associate with this word today, for example, drug trafficking. "Merchant" (KJV, NKJV, YLT, LSV), "traders" or "traded" (CSB, LEB, TANAKH), or "doing business" (ESV, ISV) are all better suited as English translations of this Hebrew word in terms of making clear the meaning of the word.

The way the world does business is condemned in the Bible (cf. Is. 23:1-8; Ezek. 27:12-26; Nahum 3:16) whether it is Babylon, Tyre, or Nineveh. Even Israel was criticized for the business of some Israelites in taking advantage of others at times during the nation's history (cf. Neh. 5:1-13; Prov. 22:16). Even an amillennialist such as Young recognizes the unmistakable typology here between the Babylon of old, which is simply a visible manifestation of Satan's world system, and the Babylonian one world system of the end times. "[O]f particular significance is Revelation 17 [and 18], which clearly reflects the present passage. Babylon's merchants have had no genuine concern for her but have dealt with her merely for their own advantage. In the time of crisis they flee for safety, unconcerned about the fate of the city. At the time of judgment, when the hand of the God of Israel falls upon the kingdom of man, that kingdom goes down to destruction. All upon which she had relied and with which she had toiled now forsakes her, leaving her desolate. Each of the merchants wanders to his own side or place, in order, were it possible, to find a refuge. There is no concern for Babylon; none at all are saving her" [Edward J. Young,

*The Book of Isaiah: A Commentary*, vol. 3, 3:244]. Dispensational theologians have less of a problem with making this connection. "But the similarities between this chapter and Revelation 17 and 18 remind us that a future eschatological destruction of Babylon is coming" [Thomas L. Constable, "Isaiah" in *Thomas Constable's Notes on the Bible, Volume IV, Isaiah-Daniel*, 4:135].

Many theologians believe the concept of merchants here is a textual problem and the word is really a word that refers to sorcerers which aligns better with the context. These Babylonian, pagan religious officials cannot save the nation and all will be lost for relying on them. Once judgment falls, these charlatans will abandon the nation and seek to find safety for themselves.

Babylon's religion is nothing and it cannot protect her; in fact, it will fail her. Her gods are nothing but lifeless pieces of created material. Babylon can only rely on herself which will end in failure. Israel and Jerusalem, on the other hand, who look to be defeated, have the one true God as their Shepherd. He is the One who will guide them to restoration then, now, and in the future. "When the crisis comes to Jerusalem, she has Someone outside herself, Someone who is not simply herself projected against the backdrop of eternity. He is the Creator, the Holy One of Israel, the Savior. These few words at the end of v. 15 capture the whole argument of chs. 40-47: everybody needs a savior; the gods and the magical worldview on which they rest cannot save; the Lord who stands outside the cosmos and directs it according to his good purposes can save ..." [John N. Oswalt, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66*, 256].

The text seems to be correct, and when we consider that Babylon is a visible representation of the world system, which encompasses religion, economy, society and culture, and government, the reference to business is probably not out of place in the verse. Satan's world system is a façade built on a faulty foundation that cannot survive in God's world. I kind of want to agree that this is out of place given the pagan, idol context, but I don't think there is any critical evidence to suggest that there is a gloss, or an error, in the Masoretic Text.

The argument may be made that the nation has been acting in concert with sorcerers, magicians, and astrologers since its beginning, which we can trace at least back to the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1-9); therefore, the nation has continually traded with the merchants of magic, sorceries, charms, and idols and made them the business of the nation in many ways. That is not unusual. Making a living off of idolatry was going on in Ephesus when Paul was there (Acts 19:23-41). Since the rest of the Bible condemns the world's business practices in general, that must also include the economic realities of paganism as well.