

Wings

*“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles.”
Isaiah 40:31*



December 15, 2013

The Measure of Our Covetousness

The greed of ancient Babylon blinded her to a mortal threat that eventually brought her down. Could our nation be making the same mistake?

“. . . For the Lord has both devised and done what He spoke against the inhabitants of Babylon. O you who dwell by many waters, abundant in treasures, your end has come, the measure of your covetousness” (Jer. 51:12-13).

--◇--

In Jeremiah’s day, Babylon was the master of her world. Her armies had swept through the Middle East, defeating every army and crushing every city that dared oppose her. Even Judah had fallen, seemingly nullifying all of God’s grand promises.

Yet, as a prophet of God, Jeremiah knew that Babylon’s dominance was ephemeral. Her armies might be invincible, but her gods were not, and someday Babylon would meet the same fate as every other world power. In fact, God had already set in motion a chain of events that would lead to her destruction at the hands of the Medes and Persians (50:41-41; 51:11, 18).

The Babylonians, of course, could not see that future. Her coffers bulged with gold and silver looted from the temples of her victims. What she could

not take by force, she could buy with her extraordinary wealth. Babylon was “abundant in treasures”—insanely rich and oblivious to any threat.

But Babylon’s wealth could not save her. In fact, her wealth had blinded her to the danger that lay ahead. Daniel and Herodotus record that Babylon fell to a Medo-Persian army even as her leaders were enjoying a drunken orgy celebrating their luxury. In Jeremiah’s words, Babylon’s end proved to be “the measure of your covetousness”; that is, the wealth in which she placed her trust was matched by the breathtaking extent of her downfall.

In studying this ancient story, I can’t help but see a parallel in modern America. Like Babylon, we are a fabulously wealthy nation. But also like Babylon, our wealth has blinded us to threats that lies before us. Our economic and military power have served us so well for so long, that we have forgotten the role of God in our destiny. Abundant in treasures, we have become haughty and smug, confident that our power will preserve us well into the foreseeable

future. It’s a dangerous mindset that sets up our nation for a terrible fall.

America’s problem with covetousness is not the fault of corrupt politicians or bureaucrats (of which we have plenty). In a democratic society such as ours, the leadership at the top is merely a reflection of the collective thinking of millions of people who put them there. We are a covetous nation because we are a covetous people. Driven by greed in our personal lives, we reward with our votes those who promise us even more. But mark it well—the day is coming when the measure of our covetousness will be repaid in bitter scrip.

These comments do not denigrate hard work, thrift, or profit. Wealth accumulated in the course of providing a valuable service or product to others is perfectly reasonable, especially if God is given credit for the bounty. The warning is aimed instead at hearts that have exalted wealth as the ultimate measure of success, and have forgotten the great debt that we owe our Creator for His blessings. If we do not change that attitude, we will someday regret it.

– David King