



Highlights From the Book of Isaiah

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An Oracle Concerning Babylon (Isaiah 13:1-14:23)

- The Oracle to Babylon breaks up into *three* major sections:
 - 13:1-22 – An “*oracle*” announcing that *judgment* is coming to Babylon
 - 14:1-2 – A *contrasting* announcement of the future salvation and restoration of Israel
 - 14:3-23 – A “*taunt*” against the *King* of Babylon

Rejoicing Over Babylonian Defeat

Isaiah 14:3-8

14:3 When the LORD gives you relief from your suffering and anxiety and from the hard labor that you were made to perform, ⁴ you will taunt the king of Babylon with these words: “Look how the oppressor has met his end! Hostility has ceased! ⁵ The LORD has broken the club of the wicked, the scepter of rulers. ⁶ It furiously struck down nations with unceasing blows. It angrily ruled over nations, oppressing them without restraint. ⁷ The whole earth rests and is quiet; they break into song. ⁸ The evergreens also rejoice over your demise, as do the cedars of Lebanon, singing, “Since you fell asleep, no woodsman comes up to chop us down!”

Rejoicing Over Babylonian Defeat

Isaiah 14:3-8

- Isaiah tells the Israelites that when God gives them relief from their captivity they will recite this “*taunt*”.
- A “*taunt*”, in this context, is **not** just a satirical oration with cheap insults.
- The Hebrew word translated “*taunt*” here is *mashal*.
- It refers to a pithy comparison that brings out the underlying realities of a situation, thereby providing guidance for one’s conduct.
- This Hebrew word is **often** translated “*proverb*”, as in Proverbs 1:6 where it says: “*To discern the meaning of a proverb...*”.
- So, this “*taunt*” is a set of instructional literature that vividly and ironically treats the King of Babylon as an object lesson of how **not** to behave.

Rejoicing Over Babylonian Defeat

Isaiah 14:3-8

- So in that future day, after being released from their Babylonian captivity, the Israelites were to *reflect* on this extended “proverb” describing how their oppressor has been overthrown.
- His behavior was *not* be imitated, and his downfall was a *solemn warning* regarding the destiny of all who set themselves against the LORD.
- This poem could be compared to the song of triumph in Exodus 15 that the Israelites sang after the crossing of the Red Sea.

Rejoicing Over Babylonian Defeat

Isaiah 14:3-8

- But who is this “*king of Babylon*” and why does Isaiah mention him here?
- Most likely Isaiah does not have in mind a *particular* Babylonian king.
- Instead, what he seems to be describing here is the Babylonian dynasty as a whole, personified as the ultimate evil ruler.
- Babylon was a great foe – far greater even than Assyria.
- But Babylon was an *arrogant* foe who the LORD will utterly destroy.
- Babylon’s destruction symbolized a *victory* for God’s people, and for that reason it was to be *celebrated* in strong terms.

Rejoicing Over Babylonian Defeat

Isaiah 14:3-8

- The proverb *begins* as a lamentation:
“*Look how the oppressor has met his end!*”
- A typical lament might begin by saying how earth’s inhabitants are struck over the news of the departed’s death.
- But here the poet tells with great anticipation how *grateful* the people on earth are to have rest (v. 7) from the repeated blows of this oppressor’s “*club*” (vv. 5-6) – because now the **LORD** “*has broken the club*”.

Rejoicing Over Babylonian Defeat

Isaiah 14:3-8

- What good news to know that the hammer blows are finally over!
- And it's not just *human beings* who are glad to know that this reign of terror is over.
- The *whole creation*, including the trees, are glad.
- Many of the ancient kings regularly boasted how they cut down the mighty forests of Lebanon both for lumber for their engines of war and also for the building of their palaces and temples.
- These proud marauding kings consumed both human beings and natural resources to carry on their exploits.
- So much so that *even nature* now seems to breathe a sigh of relief when the news of that their death is announced.

King of Babylon Is Sent to Sheol

Isaiah 14:9-11

14:9 Sheol below is stirred up about you, ready to meet you when you arrive. It rouses the spirits of the dead for you, all the former leaders of the earth; it makes all the former kings of the nations rise from their thrones. ¹⁰ All of them respond to you, saying: 'You too have become weak like us! You have become just like us! ¹¹ Your splendor has been brought down to Sheol, as well as the sound of your stringed instruments. You lie on a bed of maggots, with a blanket of worms over you.'

King of Babylon Is Sent to Sheol

Isaiah 14:9-11

- The scene changes from the earth to the underworld (“*Sheol*”).
- In place of the *peace and quiet* that the tyrant’s death has brought to the *earth*, the *underworld* is in an *uproar*.
- All the kings have been sitting on their thrones.
- Now they rise, stretching their necks to get a glimpse of this newcomer.
- He is the one who sneeringly sent them on their way to this grim place, and now he has come to join them!
- In the end he is no stronger than they were.
- He could no more prevent his death than they could theirs.

King of Babylon Is Sent to Sheol

Isaiah 14:9-11

- Verse 11 is a masterpiece of sarcasm and irony.
- We see a funeral celebration where a gorgeously decked out casket is carried past with “*splendor*” and with lovely music played on “*stringed instruments*”.
- Then the picture suddenly changes:
- All is deathly still, and we see that the king, who once seemed invincible, is now food for “*maggots*” and “*worms*”, reminding us that **everyone**, no matter how powerful, eventually meets death, the great equalizer.

King's Lofty Ambitions Are Destroyed

Isaiah 14:12-15

14:12 "Look how you have fallen from the sky, O shining one, son of the dawn! You have been cut down to the ground, O conqueror of the nations!"¹³ You said to yourself, 'I will climb up to the sky. Above the stars of El I will set up my throne. I will rule on the mountain of assembly on the remote slopes of Zaphon.'¹⁴ I will climb up to the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High!'¹⁵ But you were brought down to Sheol, to the remote slopes of the Pit.

King's Lofty Ambitions Are Destroyed

Isaiah 14:12-15

- Verse 12 begins with *two* metaphors.
- In the *first* metaphor:
 - It calls him a “*shining one*”, likening him to a *heavenly body*.
 - This term is translated as “Lucifer” in the Latin Vulgate, which was then picked up by the King James translators.
 - But it is probably a reference to *Venus*, the “morning star”, a bright star that marks the beginning of the day – which fits with the second term used of this king: “*son of the dawn*.”
 - But Venus is eventually obscured from view by the brightness of the rising sun.
 - So too, the king who had once determined the life cycle of nations, has “*fallen from the sky*” – meaning that he has been toppled from his position of political dominance.

King's Lofty Ambitions Are Destroyed

Isaiah 14:12-15

- Verse 12 begins with *two* metaphors.
- In the *second* metaphor:
 - He uses the figure of a *tree* that has been “*cut down*”.
 - The king had formerly been a “*conqueror of the nations.*”
 - Now the one who dominated the nations and seemed invincible has been “*cut down*”. He too is powerless.

King's Lofty Ambitions Are Destroyed

Isaiah 14:12-15

- Some early church Fathers (e.g. Tertullian and Gregory the Great) linked this passage with Luke 10:8 and therefore thought this was referring to the fall of Satan: ¹
 - *[Jesus] said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven."* (Luke 10:8)
- This has led to the perversion of the beautiful name "Lucifer" to signify the Devil. ²
- The proud being described here, however, is **human** and not angelic. ¹

¹ Mackay, John L. – *A Study Commentary on Isaiah Volume I: Chapters 1-39* (pp. 334-335)

² Alexander, Joseph A.. *Commentary on Isaiah* (p. 171). Ravenio Books.

King's Lofty Ambitions Are Destroyed

Isaiah 14:12-15

- In verses 13-14 the proud ambitions of the Babylonian king's heart are laid bare for all to see:
- *"I will climb up to the sky"* – which the Babylonians thought to be the abode of the gods.
- *"Above the stars of El I will set up my throne"* – *"El"* is a shortened form of "Elohim" and a common name for divinity throughout the Ancient Near East.
- Note that he does not say "above God" but *"above the stars"* – a reference to other leaders or lesser deities.

King's Lofty Ambitions Are Destroyed

Isaiah 14:12-15

- *“I will rule on the mountain of assembly on the remote slopes of [Mount] Zaphon”*).
- This is a reference to mountain in the area of Babylonia where the gods were thought to dwell.
- In other words, what the king is saying here is that he intends to sit in an assembly with other deities.
- *“I will climb up to the tops of the clouds”* – the gods were thought to dwell above the clouds in heaven.
- The Babylonian king's desire is similar to that of those who attempted to build the tower of Babel *“Come, let's build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens”* (Gen. 11:4).

King's Lofty Ambitions Are Destroyed

Isaiah 14:12-15

- *“I will make myself like the Most High!”* – In the Babylonian pantheon of gods, there was one god who ruled over all the others – “El Elyon” – the *“Most High”* god
- The king is claiming here that in time he could rival this *“Most High”* god.
- The name “El Elyon” is also frequently used for Yahweh in the Old Testament to emphasize his sovereignty (see Gen 14:19-20).

Does Isaiah 14:12-14 Describe the Fall of Satan?

- Some scholars have suggested that verses 12–14 refer to the fall of Satan, arguing that the actions described go beyond that of a mere human being.
- But this understanding demands lifting these verses out of their context, which clearly refers to a *human* king.
- For example, when this king is addressed in verse 16, it says: *“Those who see you stare at you, they look at you carefully, thinking: ‘Is this the **man** who shook the earth, the one who made kingdoms tremble?’”*
- In Ancient Near Eastern thought, a god was only *somewhat* more powerful than humans.
- It is therefore reasonable that a Babylonian king might hope to rival the gods, perhaps even taking the place of the *highest* god.

King of Babylon's Final Humiliation

Isaiah 14:16-21

14:16 Those who see you stare at you, they look at you carefully, thinking: 'Is this the man who shook the earth, the one who made kingdoms tremble?'¹⁷ Is this the one who made the world like a wilderness, who ruined its cities and refused to free his prisoners so they could return home?'¹⁸ As for all the kings of the nations, all of them lie down in splendor, each in his own tomb.¹⁹ But you have been thrown out of your grave like a shoot that is thrown away. You lie among the slain, among those who have been slashed by the sword, among those headed for the stones of the Pit, as if you were a mangled corpse.²⁰ You will not be buried with them, because you destroyed your land and killed your people. "The offspring of the wicked will never be mentioned again."²¹ Prepare to execute his sons for the sins their ancestors have committed. They must not rise up and take possession of the earth or fill the surface of the world with cities.

King of Babylon's Final Humiliation

Isaiah 14:16-21

- These verses show people staring at the mangled corpse of the tyrant lying in a heap of other corpses in a pit (see v. 19).
- Instead of a dignified death and an honorable burial, his corpse is abandoned in a field, perhaps in a hasty retreat.
- The point is one of final and complete humiliation for this arrogant king.
- Far from being equal to God, this king is not even equal to the other kings he has killed.
- They at least have their own tombs; he has none.

King of Babylon's Final Humiliation

Isaiah 14:16-21

- But not only does the proud king not have a decent burial, he doesn't have a continuing dynasty.
- His very memory is blotted out.
- This is entirely fitting, for his pride has not only destroyed the lands of others (v. 17), it has destroyed his own land as well (v. 20).
- This is the end of the proud king that says he will sit on the throne of God: absolute and complete destruction.

Final Destruction of Babylon Itself

Isaiah 14:22-23

14:22 “I will rise up against them,” says the LORD of Heaven’s Armies. “I will blot out all remembrance of Babylon and destroy all her people, including the offspring she produces,” says the LORD. ²³ “I will turn her into a place that is overrun with wild animals and covered with pools of stagnant water. I will get rid of her, just as one sweeps away dirt with a broom,” says the LORD of Heaven’s Armies. .

Final Destruction of Babylon Itself

Isaiah 14:22-23

- The destruction of Babylon will be thorough: Babylon's name will be wiped out, along with any survivors, offspring or descendants.
- It will become a place for owls and a swampland, being thoroughly swept away with the broom of destruction, just as one would sweep away dust.
- This destruction and humiliation began with Nabonidus, the last king of Babylonia, who suffered the humiliation of hearing the cheering of Babylonian citizens in the streets when he was removed from office by Cyrus.
- But the nation was not entirely terminated until after the death of Alexander the Great.

Next Time

I plan to cover the remainder of the Oracle Against Babylon in **Isaiah 22:1-25**, where we will see the “*oracle*” against Jerusalem.

Class Discussion Time



Class Discussion Time

- Have you ever heard Isaiah 14:12-14 used to show how Satan fell?
- Were you surprised to see J.A. Alexander's comment that a mistranslation of "shining one" in Isaiah 14:12 has "*led to the perversion of the beautiful name 'Lucifer' to signify the Devil.*"?
- Do you see how this passage is **not** talking about Satan? Or are you still not convinced?
- The larger message of this passage is to show what happens to evil rulers who oppose God.
- And there is a **celebratory** tone to this passage – it is a **good** thing when the Lord finally brings down an evil ruler!
- Can you think of an application of this idea in **our** day? Should **we** celebrate the demise of an evil ruler?