



Highlights From the Book of Isaiah

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The Oracles Against the Nations (Isaiah 13-23)

- Up till now the passages that we have examined in the book of Isaiah have all been in the *first* major section of the book (chapters 1-12) in which Isaiah prophesies both *judgment* and *hope* for Jerusalem.
- The text we will be looking at today is found in the *second* major section of Isaiah (chapters 13-23) which prophesies the fall of *Babylon* and several of Israel's *other* neighbors.
- This section of Isaiah consists of a series of *messages*, each beginning with the phrase, "*an oracle concerning...*"
- The Hebrew word for "*oracle*" here (*maśśā'*) can *also* be translated "*burden*" (as in a burden on the prophet's heart or a load weighing down its recipients) or just "*message*".

The Oracles Against the Nations (Isaiah 13-23)

- These oracles, in addition to being pronouncements of *doom* upon Israel's *enemies*, are designed to demonstrate to the nation of Israel the *folly* of trusting in nations whose doom is certain.
- God is the master of the nations.
- It is at *his* command that the armies of nations move out to destroy one another.
- Therefore, it is *foolish* for Israel to trust in these other nations to save her.
- Only God, who has *promised* to save her, can actually do so.

The Oracles Against the Nations (Isaiah 13-23)

Babylon (13:1–14:27)	“The Wilderness by the Sea” (Babylon) (21:1–10)
Philistia (14:28–32)	“Dumah” (Edom) (21:11–12)
Moab (15:1–16:14)	Arabia (21:13–17)
Damascus/ Israel (17:1–18:7)	“The Valley of Vision” (Jerusalem) (22:1–25)
Egypt (19:1–20:6)	Tyre (23:1–18)

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
 - 14:1-4a – A *contrasting* announcement of salvation and restoration to “*Jacob*” (i.e. the nation of Israel as a whole)
 - 14:4b-23 – A “*taunt*” against the *King* of Babylon

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

- The nation of Babylon, to whom this oracle is directed, was already active in the affairs of Judah in Isaiah's day (Isaiah 39:1-8).
- Furthermore, Isaiah is aware that Babylon is the nation that will *ultimately* carry Judah into exile.
- We see this in his warning to King Hezekiah:
 - *Look, a time is coming when everything in your palace and the things your ancestors have accumulated to this day will be carried away to **Babylon**; nothing will be left... Some of your very own descendants whom you father will be taken away and will be made eunuchs in the palace of the king of **Babylon**.* (Isaiah 39:6-7)
- The destruction of Babylon that is prophesied in this oracle will not take place until *after* the Jews return from that Babylonian exile in 539 BC – almost a 150 years after Isaiah had passed from the scene.

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

- Babylon has a history reaching all the way back to the tower of Babel (Gen 11:9)
- Babylon often serves in scripture as a symbol of the arrogance and power that is so characteristic of nations in rebellion against God.
- This symbolic significance of Babylon is *ultimately* seen in the Book of Revelation where we read:
 - *Fallen, fallen, is Babylon the great! She has become a lair for demons, a haunt for every unclean spirit... For all the nations have fallen from the wine of her immoral passion, and the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have gotten rich from the power of her sensual behavior.*

Summoning Warriors for an Assault

Isaiah 13:1-5

13:1 This is an oracle about Babylon that Isaiah son of Amoz saw: ² On a bare hill raise a signal flag; shout to them, wave your hand so they might enter the gates of the princes! ³ I have given orders to my chosen soldiers; I have summoned the warriors through whom I will vent my anger – my boasting, arrogant ones. ⁴ There is a loud noise on the mountains – it sounds like a large army! There is great commotion among the kingdoms – nations are being assembled! The LORD of Heaven’s Armies is mustering forces for battle. ⁵ They come from a distant land, from the horizon. It is the LORD with his instruments of judgment coming to destroy the whole earth.

Summoning Warriors for an Assault

Isaiah 13:1-5

- In this section, Isaiah begins describing a scene without indicating specifically who is involved or where they are.
- **Commands** are issued to this unidentified group.
- The “*LORD of Heaven’s Armies*” instructs them to:
 - Summon troops for battle by raising a “*signal flag*” on a “*bare hill*” so that it can be easily seen.
 - “*Shout*” and gesture with the hand, urgently directing the troops as they assemble.
- As the scene unfolds, the LORD makes it clear that the gathering army is assembling by *his* sovereign direction. The LORD tells us that he has:
 - “*Given orders to [his] chosen soldiers*”
 - “*Summoned the warriors through whom [he] will vent [his] anger*”

Summoning Warriors for an Assault

Isaiah 13:1-5

- These warriors are divinely called, though they may not be aware of it.
- They are tools in the hand of the sovereign Lord just as the *Assyrians* were when *they* were used by God to discipline the nation of Israel (cf. Isaiah 10:5-7)
- The fact that the LORD calls these chosen soldiers “*my boasting, arrogant ones*” does *not* imply that he *approves* of their arrogance.
- Nevertheless they are *controlled* by him and *used* by him to accomplish his purposes.

Summoning Warriors for an Assault

Isaiah 13:1-5

- As Isaiah views the gathering troops, he sees them coming from “*a distant land*” on the far “*horizon*”.
- The intended *extent* of this judgment is unclear.
- It says in verse 5 that the pending judgment is coming to destroy, *not* just Babylon, but “*the whole earth.*”
- Though the prophecy as introduced in verse **1** is directed against “*Babylon*”, in verse **5** the focus is on the *greater* scope of judgment that will take place in the “*the LORD’s day of judgment*” – a term that will be introduced in the next verse.

The Terrors of the Day of the LORD

Isaiah 13:6-8

13:6 Wail, for the LORD's day of judgment is near; it comes with all the destructive power of the Sovereign One. ⁷ For this reason all hands hang limp, every human heart loses its courage. ⁸ They panic – cramps and pain seize hold of them like those of a woman who is straining to give birth. They look at one another in astonishment; their faces are flushed red.

The Terrors of the Day of the LORD

Isaiah 13:6-8

- In verses 6-8 the inhabitants of this threatened country are called upon to “*wail*” as they see the coming judgment.
- Those who experience this judgment will be *overwhelmed* by what they see coming and will be *helpless* to resist.
- Their “*hands hang limp*” unable to even reach for their weapons to defend themselves as their hearts have lost all “*courage*”.
- In their “*panic*” they are compared to “*a woman who is straining to give birth*” – facing sudden, unavoidable *agony*, and having great *anxiety* as to the outcome of what they are about to go through.
- Their faces are “*flushed red*” with *shame* at their lack of ability to deal with what they are now facing.

Destruction Caused by the LORD's Judgment

Isaiah 13:9-16

⁹ Look, the LORD's day of judgment is coming; it is a day of cruelty and savage, raging anger, destroying the earth and annihilating its sinners. ¹⁰ Indeed the stars in the sky and their constellations no longer give out their light; the sun is darkened as soon as it rises, and the moon does not shine. ¹¹ I will punish the world for its evil and wicked people for their sin. I will put an end to the pride of the insolent, I will bring down the arrogance of tyrants. ¹² I will make human beings more scarce than pure gold and people more scarce than gold from Ophir. ¹³ So I will shake the heavens, and the earth will shake loose from its foundation, because of the fury of the LORD of Heaven's Armies, in the day he vents his raging anger.

Destruction Caused by the LORD's Judgment

Isaiah 13:9-16

14 Like a frightened gazelle or a sheep with no shepherd, each will turn toward home, each will run to his homeland. 15 Everyone who is caught will be stabbed; everyone who is seized will die by the sword. 16 Their children will be smashed to pieces before their very eyes; their houses will be looted and their wives raped.

Destruction Caused by the LORD's Judgment

Isaiah 13:9-16

- In verse 9 Isaiah describes what is about to occur on "*the LORD's day of judgment*" (literally, "*the Day of the Lord*" in the Hebrew) – a term that **first** appeared in back in verse 6.
- "*The Day of the Lord*" is an eschatological (i.e. end times) term used **throughout** scripture.
- In scripture, "*the Day of the Lord*" is an occasion when Yahweh actively intervenes to punish sin that has come to a climax at some point in history.
- This punishment may come through an invasion or through some natural disaster.
- All these **lesser** interventions in history will reach an **ultimate** conclusion at the **actual** coming of the Lord **himself** in the last days when there will be a **final** "*Day of the Lord*".

Destruction Caused by the LORD's Judgment

Isaiah 13:9-16

- Quite often when scripture describes one of these earlier “*Day of the Lord*” events, it will go back and forth between describing the earlier event and describing what will happen in the *final* “*Day of the Lord*”, since the *earlier* event *prefigures* the *final* event.
- And I believe this is what we see happening in this text:
- The judgment of Babylon is described as “*the Day of the Lord*” in that it *prefigures* the larger, more terrifying judgment that will take place on the *final* “*Day of the Lord*” .

Destruction Caused by the LORD's Judgment

Isaiah 13:9-16

- Throughout verses 9-16 we see the judgment of a *much wider group* taking place than just the Babylonians:
 - **verse 9** talks about “*destroying the earth [not just Babylonians] and annihilating its sinners*”
 - **verse 11** says “*I will punish the world [not just Babylonia] for its evil*”
 - **verse 13** shows judgment taking place on a *universal* scale as the Lord says he will “*shake the heavens, and the earth will shake loose from its foundation...*”
- This *last* statement is reminiscent of **Heb 12:26-27** where the author (citing Haggai) talks about how in the last judgment the Lord promised that he will “*once more shake not only the earth but heaven too...so that what is unshaken may remain.*”

Destruction Caused by the LORD's Judgment

Isaiah 13:9-16

- In verse 10 Isaiah again describes a scene of **doom** that goes **far beyond** the destruction that took place when the Lord destroyed the nation of Babylon:
 - *the **stars** in the sky and their constellations no longer give out their light; the **sun** is darkened as soon as it rises, and the **moon** does not shine.*
- This is reminiscent of **Matthew 24** where **Jesus** tells us what will take place in the **final judgment**:
 - *Immediately after the suffering of those days, **the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of heaven will be shaken.** Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and all the tribes of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man arriving on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. (Mat 24:29-30)*

Destruction Caused by the LORD's Judgment

Isaiah 13:9-16

- But then at the *end* of this passage (verses 14-16), Isaiah gives a description of a series of judgments that *could* be understood as a description of events that will take place in the destruction of Babylon:
 - *Like a frightened gazelle or a sheep with no shepherd, each will turn toward home, each will run to his homeland. Everyone who is caught will be stabbed; everyone who is seized will die by the sword. Their children will be smashed to pieces before their very eyes; their houses will be looted and their wives raped.*
- **Or** this may *instead* be a *metaphorical* description of the horrors of the final judgment.

The Overthrow of Babylon by the Medes

Isaiah 13:17-22

13:17 Look, I am stirring up the Medes to attack them; they are not concerned about silver, nor are they interested in gold. ¹⁸ Their arrows will cut young men to ribbons; they have no compassion on a person's offspring; they will not look with pity on children. ¹⁹ Babylon, the most admired of kingdoms, the Chaldeans' source of honor and pride, will be destroyed by God just as Sodom and Gomorrah were. ²⁰ No one will live there again; no one will ever reside there again. No bedouin will camp there, no shepherds will rest their flocks there. ²¹ Wild animals will rest there, the ruined houses will be full of hyenas. Ostriches will live there, wild goats will skip among the ruins. ²² Wild dogs will yip in her ruined fortresses, jackals will yelp in the once-splendid palaces. Her time is almost up, her days will not be prolonged.

The Overthrow of Babylon by the Medes

Isaiah 13:17-22

- Here we are told the name of the specific group that will be involved in the destruction of Babylon – it is the Medes, a group known even in Isaiah’s day as a fierce warlike group.
- Two aspects of the Medes attack are stressed:
 - It occurs by divine intervention: “*Look, I [the LORD] am stirring up*”
 - The Medes will be opponents who cannot be bought off, because their primary aim is not plunder but slaughter and destruction.
- The **Medes**, used as instruments in Babylon’s overthrow, are **also** mentioned in Jer 51:11, where the events of 539 BC are anticipated.
- By then the **Persians** had taken control of **Media**, but even so, they are always described as “*the Medes and the Persians*” (Dan 6:8,12,15; cf. Esth 10:2)

The Overthrow of Babylon by the Medes

Isaiah 13:17-22

- It is predicted that the site of Babylon will be left unoccupied.
- This did not happen all at once.
- When the Persians captured Babylon in 539 BC, the city collapsed so quickly that ***no destruction*** was involved, and the city and its inhabitants were treated with ***great respect***.
- Subsequently, however, a long process of economic decline set in, until by AD 200 it was utterly deserted as we see described in verses 20-22.

Next Time

I plan to cover the remainder of the Oracle Against Babylon in **Isaiah 14:1-23**, which we didn't get to today.

As we saw earlier this chapter consists of two sections:

- **14:1-4a** – A *contrasting* announcement of salvation and restoration to “*Jacob*” (i.e. the nation of Israel as a whole)
- **14:4b-23** – A “*taunt*” against the King of Babylon

Class Discussion Time



Class Discussion Time

- Many people in our day have a hard time envisioning God directly orchestrating the actions of evil individuals – including their sinful behavior. And yet, in this passage (and many others like it), it clearly declares that God does so.
- Some people think that that for God to sovereignly orchestrate sinful or evil behavior would make God himself sinful or evil, which scripture clearly teaches he is not.
- How do we explain this to those who are struggling with this idea?