

The Road to Jesus: The Gospel According to Isaiah
Oracles Against the Nations - Isaiah 13 - 17
October 21, 2015

INTRODUCTION:

What we know so far... Isaiah is preaching to God's people during a time when they have recently experienced material prosperity but now they are engaged in war or potential war - northern tribes of Israel have allied themselves with Syria (Damascus) against Assyria (Syro-Ephraimite War, 734-32 B. C.). Assyria is going to destroy Israel (Samaria) and come against Jerusalem. It's not going to be pretty. This particular series of messages (chapters 13ff) probably date around 704-701 B. C.

The *reason* why is because of sin. Jerusalem has revolted against her Father, against her husband. She is sinful, weighed down with iniquity, evildoers, and corrupt (1:4). Forgiveness will be possible; it will be made available (1:18) but Judah was to "consent and obey" (1:19).

Idol worship is their fundamental problem. They do not know God (1:3; that is, they do not have a relationship with Him) because they are worshiping under the terebinth (oaks) false gods (1:28-31).

The new, spiritual temple is going to be established in Jerusalem to which Gentiles will join and from which the law of God will be proclaimed (2:1-3).

In this new, spiritual temple peace will abound (2:4).

Israel needs to repent of pride, abusing the poor, and trusting in man, in his gods, his business, or his military.

Israel's leaders were not guiding men back to God. Subsequently, God would provide His own leader (4:2). To *Him*, the "survivors" would listen!

Up to this point, Isaiah has preached against primarily Jerusalem (Judah) - the southern tribes of God's people. At this point, God will now direct His judgment *in eleven chapters* against the nations surrounding Judah. This is done for a few reasons:

1. These nations are guilty of sin and sin has to be punished.
2. God had warned Israel not to trust in *men* (2:22); therefore, they should not trust in *nations* for their security. God, alone, is to be trusted.
3. God has promised that He will establish a new *body of people* (pictured as a Kingdom, with the Son of David as the King - 7:14; 9:6-7). How will these foreign nations react to this new kingdom? Well, on one hand, they will *flow* to this new kingdom (2:1-4); on the other hand, God will *destroy* the kingdoms so they cannot inhibit the establishment of this new kingdom.
4. In a culture in which gods of conquering nations were viewed as more powerful than those of conquered nations, God would show that He, indeed, was God Almighty. Israel should not trust *other gods* as Ahaz had done.

Most of the punishment God will bring on these nations will be through Assyria, the "rod of His anger" (10:5). Smith comments these chapters: "teach the principle that believers should not be motivated by fear to compromise their beliefs about the sovereignty of God. They should confidently serve God regardless of their situation, knowing that his plans are being fulfilled" (292).

BABYLON:

Assyria was the dominant and most threatening power in Isaiah's day, but Isaiah will be with Babylon. Why? Although Assyria would fight against *Judah*, that nation would not be *victorious*. But, Babylon will. Babylon is the nation in which Hezekiah will place *ill-founded* trust - chapter 39. Babylon is the nation who will carry Judah into exile for 70 years.

BABYLON'S DESTRUCTION - 13:1-22:

God has called for some to execute His anger - vs 3. This is the army of the Lord, mustered for battle - vs 4. As we saw back in 2:12, here too, we have a "day of the Lord" that is coming - the day of His judgment. This time, it will be against the nation of Babylon - vs 9. "When God wipes out a nation for its sin, the Day of the Lord happens for that group of people" (Smith, 297). Please observe verse 10 - it is "apocalyptic" - it describes the destruction of *Babylon* in cosmic terms. (Vs 13 is also "apocalyptic" - I bring this up because *it is not to be taken literally and keep that in mind when you read Matthew 24 (destruction of Jerusalem) and Revelation (destruction of Rome)*). Protestant scholar E. J. Young agrees: "We are not to understand these upheavals in the realm of nature as necessarily a literal fulfillment. ...Isaiah is permitting us to perceive how great is the judgment which God will bring" (424-5).

Why is He going to punish Babylon? For the same reason He is punishing Jerusalem & Judah - sin - verse 11: evil, wicked, iniquity, arrogance, proud, haughtiness, ruthlessness.

Please notice verse 17 - this is a prophecy of the destruction of Babylon by the Medes (in conjunction with the Persians). Just as God compared the punishment of Judah to Sodom (1:9 & 3:9), so here, the destruction of Babylon will also be like Sodom and Gomorrah (verse 19).

The Medes lived below the Caspian Sea, north of the Zagros Mountains & Elam and east of Assyria. The Medes would be a major part of the Persian Empire under Cyrus in 550 B. C. (Cyrus is mentioned by name by Isaiah in 44:28 & 45:1; the Medo-Persian Empire is also pictured by Daniel in 5:31; 9:1). Since Isaiah lived around 750-700 B. C., this is a prophecy of events yet two centuries in the future! Babylon was destroyed (as a world city) by Cyrus in 539 B. C. It was turned into a provincial capital until it was finally destroyed in 200 A. D.

Young comments: "When we doubt the power of our God, let us look to the wilderness where Babylon once was. So will He judge the wicked" (427).

THE TAUNT SONG AGAINST BABYLON - 14:1-23:

Despite what God will do to Babylon, He will preserve and bless the nation of Israel (those who remain faithful to Him; i.e. the "remnant" or "survivors") - verses 1-3. Notice here that "strangers" (Gentiles) will join themselves to the house of Jacob (referring back to the prophecy in 2:1-4). Observe in verse 5 that God (not the Medes) is the ultimate source of Babylon's destruction. "...the God of tiny Judah is God of all the universe and before his bar all human pretension must bow" (Oswalt, 317).

These Jews will even "sing" a song taunting Babylon. The whole earth will sing with joy at the downfall of Babylon (vs 7). "Sheol" is the Hebrew word for the realm of the dead; so "Sheol" rejoices at Babylon's destruction because it can "consume" more of the dead (vss 9-11).

In verses 12-14, Isaiah pictures Babylon (*not "Satan"* - *there is no reason to apply these verses to Satan*) as a shooting/falling star that was once high in the heavens and visible / respected by all but now, fallen to earth, defeated.

The rest of the taunt song pictures Babylon defeated by God and the object of loathing by other peoples.

ASSYRIA - 14:24-27:

This is a brief message against the world empire of Assyria, which Isaiah delivered the year King Ahaz died. Isaiah had already spoken extensively about Assyria (chapter 10) and he will deal with Assyria more in the historical section (chapters 36-37). Here, we have just a short message that God will break and remove Assyria (verse 26).

“Here is the final issue of biblical faith. If there is one almighty Creator of the universe, who is intimately and purposefully involved with his creation, then there is no power on earth, least of all human pride, which can successfully rise up against him (43:13; Ps. 33:6-11; Prov. 19:12)” (Oswalt, 328).

We will see this particular prophecy fulfilled in 37:36-37. Motyer (138) writes: “Faith is not credulity, wishful thinking or a leap in the dark. Rather, it is a leap into the light, for faith is conviction and action based on evidence. When they see what happens to Assyria they can believe about Babylon, and, beyond Babylon, about the Day of the Lord.”

PHILISTIA - 14:28-32:

The Philistines were a perennial enemy of Judah. Philistia might rejoice because Assyria was broken, but they cannot boast about returning to power to dominate Judah - God will punish them as well. When a king dies (Ahaz) and another king takes the throne (Hezekiah), it might be a good time to invade such a country. But God warns Philistia that it would *not* be a good idea. The reference to smoke coming from the north (vs 31) is likely an allusion to the coming of Assyria, whom God will use to punish Philistia. Assyria King Tiglath-Pileser III conquered Gath in 734 B. C. while Sargon II conquered Ashkelon and Gath in 720 B. C. and again in 711. When Assyria came against Jerusalem in 701 B. C., they also defeated these Philistine cities again.

We also have a reference to God establishing Zion (vs 32) - likely a reference to the new spiritual temple Isaiah had predicted back in chapter 2:1-4. God’s people will find refuge in His new city, the kingdom of Christ.

MOAB - 15:1-16:14:

The Moabites were Israel’s cousins through Lot & one of his daughters (Genesis 19:37). They were also perennial enemies of Israel.

“In a night” suggests a sudden destruction (vs 1). Kir is Moab’s ancient capital (Dibon was also a capital at one time) and the other names in chapter 15 are likely towns and villages throughout the nation. They all mourn and weep because of the destruction God has brought through Assyria.

Moab will seek assistance from Jerusalem (16:1-4). The *lamb* was offered by Moab to Jerusalem to shelter her refugees in her battle with Assyria (likely figuratively referring to some alliance).

In this midst, Isaiah promises that David’s throne will be established in “lovingkindness” and “faithfulness” (vs 5). This would encourage the Moabites in that David was descended from Ruth, a Moabitess (Ruth 4:17). Surely there will be members of Moab who will be in the new, spiritual kingdom of the Messiah, the Son of David, the church of Jesus Christ. Young (464) writes: “The language obviously is based upon the great Messianic passage of 9:6...”

But Moab’s issue - as always - is sin (vs 6): pride, arrogance, fury, boasting.

When Assyria comes against Moab, there will be no rejoicing (vs 10). Moab’s agriculture, army, and leaders would all be devastated. But, still, Isaiah (the great preacher that

he was) lamented their destruction (vs 11). Commenting on verse 12, Young states: "In Moab everyone went to "the church of his own choice" (467).

Moab, Isaiah prophesied, would be defeated within three years; although God would preserve a "remnant" alive (vs 14).

DAMASCUS, SYRIA - 17:1-14:

Let us be reminded that we have the Syro-Ephraimite War (735-734 B. C.) in the background here; see 7:1-9. Both nations will answer to the God of heaven.

JUDGMENT AGAINST DAMASCUS - 17:1-3:

Destruction is coming; yet, God will preserve a remnant, even among the Arameans (vs 3).

Assyria, under Tiglath-Pileser III captured the capital of Damascus and killed Rezin, the king of Aram/Syria (2 Kings 16:7-9).

JUDGMENT AGAINST (NORTHERN) ISRAEL - 17:4-14:

Although Isaiah preaches primarily against the southern tribes of Judah, he also has a message for their northern brothers. In imagery of a harvest, there will be nothing left when Assyria overruns Israel.

In the coming day of God's judgment, a remnant of Israel will, once again, respect and honor the God of heaven through their worship (vss 7-8). But, because of sin, the nation will be made a desolation (vs 9). They too long persisted in trusting in their leaders instead of the God of heaven.

Why? Because they forgot the God of their salvation and had not remembered the rock of their refuge (vs 10). Cities deserted. Empty harvests. Disease. Pain.

CONCLUSION:

The key point: *Don't trust in men nor nations of men!* Where is our confidence? It ought not to be in Wall St. nor in Main St. Neither in Congress or the President. Not in Republicans or Democrats. Not in the military or our own weapons. *Salvation comes from the Lord!* We must consent and obey His will (1:19). If there is one message that pervades these chapters it is: Be humble & submit to God! (James 4:7)

One other key point, in the words of John from Revelation 11:15 (whose setting would be similar to Isaiah's): "The kingdom of the world has become *the kingdom* of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever." The Son of David *will* establish His kingdom and the nations of the world will *not* stop Him.