

# EXPOSITORY NOTES ON THE PROPHET ISAIAH

by

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## ISAIAH CHAPTERS THIRTEEN AND FOURTEEN

### THE BURDEN OF BABYLON

WE NOW COME to a distinct section of Isaiah's prophecy, dealing particularly with the nations with whom Israel had to do in the past centuries and some of whom it will have to meet in the coming Day of the Lord. In chapters thirteen through twenty-three we have "**burdens**," that is, prophetic messages, relating particularly to Babylon (13,14), Moab (15,16), Damascus, the capital of Syria (17), some unnamed maritime power west of Ethiopia (18), Egypt (19), Egypt and Ethiopia (20), Edom and Arabia, (21) and of Tyre (23). Two messages also refer definitely to Palestine itself in connection with the attacks of their enemies, namely, part of chapter twenty-one and chapter twenty-two.

The nations mentioned in these chapters were those from whom Israel suffered in the past and some of them will appear on the scene in the last days, still manifesting their old enmity toward the chosen race.

In chapters thirteen and fourteen Isaiah looks on into the future, predicting the destruction that he foresaw would come upon Babylon as a result of the Medo-Persian invasion of Chaldea. It may seem strange that Babylon should occupy the place it does in these prophetic visions inasmuch as it was but an insignificant power in Isaiah's day, completely overshadowed by Assyria, but the spirit of prophecy enabled Isaiah to look on to the time when these two would be combined in one great dominion of which the city of Babylon would be the capital.

This was the power destined to carry out the judgments of God against Judah because of its rebellion and idolatry. As we read these chapters it is easy to see that back of the literal rulers of Babylon there was a sinister spirit-personality denominated as Lucifer, the son of the morning. That this evil angel is identical with Satan himself seems to be perfectly clear.

We note, then, the first part of the prophecy, which will have a double fulfillment: first, Babylon's destruction by the armies of Cyrus and Cyaxares (who is probably the same as the Darius of Daniel 5), and then the final destruction of the Assyrian in the last days.

In eloquent and dramatic language Isaiah pictures the downfall of the future oppressor of the people of God.

**“The burden of Babylon, which Isaiah the son of Amoz did see. Lift ye up a banner upon the high mountain, exalt the voice unto them, shake the hand, that they may go into the gates of the nobles. I have commanded my sanctified ones, I have also called my mighty ones for mine anger, even them that rejoice in my highness. The noise of a multitude in the mountains, like as of a great people; a tumultuous noise of the kingdoms of nations gathered together: the Lord of hosts mustereth the host of the battle. They come from a far country, from the end of heaven, even the Lord, and the weapons of his indignation, to destroy the whole land. Howl ye; for the day of the Lord is at hand; it shall come as a destruction from the Almighty. Therefore shall all hands be faint, and every man’s heart shall melt: and they shall be afraid: pangs and sorrows shall take hold of them; they shall be in pain as a woman that travaileth: they shall be amazed one at another; their faces shall be as flames. Behold, the day of the Lord cometh, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate: and he shall destroy the sinners thereof out of it. For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light: the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine. And I will punish the world for their evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; and I will cause the arrogance of the proud to cease, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible”** (verses 1-11).

The picture presented goes far beyond that of the literal destruction of Babylon on the Euphrates in the days of the Medo-Persian conquest. It vividly presents the conditions that will prevail not only among the nations of central and western Asia, but of all Gentile powers in the day of the Lord’s indignation. In other words, the doom that fell upon Babylon of old was an illustration of the terrible fate that awaits the godless Gentile powers who will be taken in red-handed rebellion against the Lord and His Anointed in the last days. It will be noted that many of the expressions used in these verses are practically identical with those of other prophecies concerning the Day of the Lord and with the events to follow the breaking of the sixth seal in the book of Revelation.

**“I will make a man more precious than fine gold; even a man than the golden wedge of Ophir. Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth shall remove out of her place, in the wrath of the Lord of hosts, and in the day of his fierce anger. And it shall be as the chased roe, and as a sheep that no man taketh up: they shall every man turn to his own people, and flee every one into his own land. Everyone that is found shall be thrust through; and every one that is joined unto them shall fall by the sword. Their children also shall be dashed to pieces’ before their eyes; their houses shall be spoiled, and their wives ravished”** (verses 12-16).

As we compare this passage with Haggai 2:6, 7; Hebrews 12:25-29; Zechariah 14:4, 5, and other passages relating to the Day of the Lord, we learn that not only will the kingdoms of the world be broken to pieces but there will be tremendous natural convulsions that will shake the earth and cause disorder even among the heavenly bodies, so that the people of the world will be in abject terror because of the judgments of the Lord. So large a portion of the human race will be destroyed in the conflicts and natural catastrophes of those days that a man will be more precious than gold, and fear and terror will take hold upon all of the inhabitants of the earth who do not know and wait for the Lord in that day of His power.

**“Behold, I will stir up the Medes against them, which shall not regard silver; and as for gold, they shall not delight in it. Their bows also shall dash the young men to pieces; and they shall have no pity on the fruit of the womb; their eye shall not spare children. And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees’ excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation: neither shall the Arabian pitch tents there; neither shall the shepherds make their fold there. But wild beasts of the desert shall lie there; and their houses shall be full of doleful creatures; and owls shall dwell there, and satyrs shall dance there. And the wild beasts of the islands shall cry in their desolate houses, and dragons in their pleasant palaces: and her time is near to come, and her days shall not be prolonged”** (verses 17-22).

Here the prophet reverts to the literal destruction of Babylon which began with its siege and overthrow by the Medes and Persians, but was not consummated fully until some centuries later when at last that one-time proud city was leveled to the dust, its palaces destroyed, its hanging gardens ruined, and its destruction made so complete that in all the centuries since it has never been able to rise again.

It is true that from time to time small villages have been built near the site of the ancient city, but the ruins of Babylon recently uncovered by archeologists show how completely the prophet’s words have been fulfilled.

Even to this day the Arabian refuses to pitch his tent there, thinking that demons prowl by night among the ruins of the city, where owls and lizards (dragons) and other creatures of the night abound. God has decreed that Babylon shall never rise again. The Babylon of the Revelation is a symbolic picture of the great religious-commercial organization of the last days which will become fully developed after the true Church has been caught up to be with the Lord. Its doom, like that of the ancient city, will soon be consummated and it too will fall, never to lift itself up again against God and His people.

In chapter fourteen, we see that God links Israel’s future restoration with Babylon’s doom. Though centuries were to elapse between the two events yet, inasmuch as through the decree of Cyrus a remnant was permitted to return to Jerusalem, thus fulfilling a part of the divine predictions concerning the recovery of Judah, so their final restoration is linked with the complete overthrow of Gentile power.

**“For the Lord will have mercy on Jacob, and will yet choose Israel, and set them in their own land: and the strangers shall be joined with them, and they shall cleave to the house of Jacob. And the people shall take them, and bring them to their place: and the house of Israel shall possess them in the land of the Lord for servants and handmaids: and they shall take them captives, whose captives they were; and they shall rule over their oppressors”** (verses 1,2).

Note the expression, **“They shall take them captives, whose captives they were.”** This seems to give the true explanation of that much-controverted passage in Ephesians 4:8, **“He led captivity captive.”** These words are quoted from Psalm 68:18.

The same Hebraism is found in Judges 5:12 where the meaning is perfectly clear: Barak was to lead captive those who had held Israel captive. So Christ, by His triumphant resurrection, has overthrown the powers of hell and led captive Satan and his hosts who held humanity captive for so long. Satan was utterly defeated at that time (Hebrews 2:14) and those who had once been his victims are now delivered from his power. In Colossians 2:15 we are told that Christ, in rising from the dead, spoiled, or made a prey of, principalities and powers, that is, the hosts of evil; therefore Satan is now a defeated foe. His judgment has not yet been carried out but is as certain as that God's Word is true. It is for the believer to resist the devil, steadfast in the faith, knowing that he can have no power against those who cleave to the Word of God.

In the section that follows, Israel is seen exulting over the destruction of her great enemy.

**“And it shall come to pass in the day that the Lord shall give thee rest from thy sorrow, and from thy fear, and from the hard bondage wherein thou wast made to serve, that thou shalt take up two proverbs against the king of Babylon, and say, How hath the oppressor ceased! the golden city ceased! The Lord hath broken the staff of the wicked, and the sceptre of the rulers. He who smote the people in wrath with a continual stroke, he that ruled the nations in anger, is persecuted, and none hindereth. The whole earth is at rest, and is quiet: they break forth into singing. Yea, the fir trees rejoice at thee, and the cedars of Lebanon, saying, Since thou art laid down, no feller is come up against us”** (verses 3-8).

The “**king of Babylon**” seems to be used here as a synonym for all Gentile powers that throughout the centuries have taken part in the persecution of God's ancient people. When the last great enemy shall be destroyed they will be able to rejoice in the manifestation of the Lord's power, and just as Israel sang on the shores of the Red Sea as they viewed the destruction of Pharaoh and his host, so in that coming day will they be able to raise the Song of Moses and the Lamb as they see all their enemies brought to naught.

We come to something now that enables us to understand how sin began in the heavens, and also to comprehend something of the unseen powers that throughout the centuries have dominated the minds of evil-disposed men, seeking to thwart the purpose of God. The fall of Lucifer portrays the fall of Satan. The passage links very closely with Ezekiel 28, which should be carefully considered in the effort to understand this fully.

**“Hell from beneath is moved for thee to meet thee at thy coming: it stirreth up the dead for thee, even all the chief ones of the earth; it hath raised up from their thrones all the kings of the nations. All they shall speak and say unto thee, Art thou also become weak as we? art thou become like unto us? Thy pomp is brought down to the grave, and the noise of thy viols: the worm is spread under thee, and the worms cover thee. How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit”** (verses 9-15).

These words cannot apply to any mere mortal man. Lucifer (the light-bearer) is a created angel of the very highest order, identical with the covering cherub of Ezekiel 28. He was, apparently, the greatest of all the angel host and was perfect before God until he fell through pride.

It was his ambition to take the throne of Deity for himself and become the supreme ruler of the universe.

Note his five **“I wills.”** It was the assertion of the creature’s will in opposition to the will of the Creator that brought about his downfall, and so an archangel became the devil! Cast down from the place of power and favor which he had enjoyed, he became the untiring enemy of God and man, and down through the millennia since has exerted every conceivable device to ruin mankind and rob God of the glory due to His name.

It is of him our Lord speaks in John 8:44. The Lord there shows that Satan is an apostate, having fallen from a position once enjoyed, and we know from other Scriptures how he ever goes about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.

The Cross was the precursor of Satan’s doom, but he is determined to wreak his vengeance upon mankind so far as he can before his own final judgment takes place, because his heart is filled with hatred against God and against those whom God loves. We know from other passages that Lucifer was not alone in his rebellion (II Peter 2:4), and our Lord speaks of **“the devil and his angels”** (Matthew 25:41), and this is confirmed in Revelation 12:7, where we read of the coming war in heaven between Michael and his angels, and the dragon and his.

These evil angels are the world-rulers of this darkness (Ephesians 6:12). They seek to dominate the hearts and minds of the rulers of the nations, stirring them up to act in opposition to the will of God. Therefore we need not be surprised to find in the next verses of our chapter that the king of Babylon seems to be, as it were, confounded with Lucifer. The actual meaning, of course, is that he was controlled or dominated by him.

His downfall is described:

**“They that see thee shall narrowly look upon thee, and consider thee, saying, Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms; that made the world as a wilderness, and destroyed the cities thereof; that opened not the house of his prisoners? All the kings of the nations, even all of them, lie in glory, every one in his own house. But thou art cast out of thy grave like an abominable branch, and as the raiment of those that are slain, thrust through with a sword, that go down to the stones of the pit; as a carcase trodden under feet. Thou shalt not be joined with them in burial, because thou hast destroyed thy land, and slain thy people: the seed of evildoers shall never be renowned. Prepare slaughter for his children for the iniquity of their fathers; that they do not rise, nor possess the land, nor fill the face of the world with cities. For I will rise up against them, saith the Lord of hosts, and cut off from Babylon the name, and remnant, and son, and nephew, saith the Lord. I will also make it a possession for the bittern, and pools of water: and I will sweep it with the besom of destruction, saith the Lord of hosts”** (verses 16-23).

This passage is highly poetical, but describes in no uncertain terms the utter destruction of the last great enemy of Israel in the Day of the Lord. See also Ezekiel 31:16-18. All the glory of the warrior and the pride of world conquest end in utter destruction. None who has dared to rise up in pride and arrogance to defy the living God has ever been able to escape the inevitable result of his folly. In the Assyrian of the last days, we see as it were the incarnation of all the persecuting powers who have distressed Israel since their dispersion among the Gentiles.

**“The Lord of hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand: that I will break the Assyrian in my land, and upon my mountains tread him under foot: then shall his yoke depart from off them, and his burden depart from off their shoulders. This is the purpose that is purposed upon the whole earth: and this is the hand that is matched out upon all the nations. For the Lord of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it? and his hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?”** (verses 24-27).

When the nations are gathered together for the Armageddon conflict, the Lord Himself will destroy the Assyrian with every other enemy of Christ and His truth. Israel will be completely delivered and God glorified in the kingdom to be set up in righteousness. In the last five verses of the chapter we have a separate prophecy, given in the last year of King Ahaz, relating to Palestine and its people.

**“In the year that king Ahaz died was this burden. Rejoice not thou, whole Palestina, because the rod of him that smote thee is broken: for out of the serpent’s root shall come forth a cockatrice, And his fruit shall be a fiery flying serpent. And the firstborn of the poor shall feed, and the needy shall lie down in safety: and I will kill thy root with famine, and he shall slay thy remnant. Howl, O gate; cry, O city; thou, whole Palestina, art dissolved: for there shall come from the north a smoke, and none shall be alone in his appointed times. What shall one then answer the messengers of the nation? That the Lord hath founded Zion, and the poor of his people shall trust in it”** (verses 28-32).

For the time being God had turned back the armies of Syria and of Assyria, but greater conflicts were in the future. These we know came to pass in the days of Hezekiah, and finally, at the close of the short reign of Zedekiah. First, the land was overrun by the Assyrians who, however, were turned back without accomplishing their purpose, but because of Judah’s lack of repentance and self-judgment, eventually the armies of Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem, slew thousands of the people, and carried many more into captivity. Nor was this to be the last distress that would come upon that doomed land. Throughout the long years since their dispersion, Palestine has been a veritable battleground and Israel’s sufferings have beggered all description, but the day of their deliverance is yet to come through the very One whom the nation rejected when He came in lowly grace as the promised Saviour and Messiah.

~ end of chapter 13, 14 ~

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