

Isaiah Chapter 13

This section of Isaiah's prophecy concerns the message of God's judgment against Israel's neighbors. The prophet's message of judgment begins with the word burden (masa), which may also be rendered "oracle." The fact that Isaiah did see these events indicates that he saw them in a vision as though they were actually happening.

The prophet's first message was delivered against Babylon, the very nation that would eventually carry Judah into captivity. Sanctified ones and mighty ones are the armies of Medo-Persia, which God will raise up against Babylon to fulfill His purpose.

Verses 13:1 – 23:18: These 11 chapters group together prophecies against foreign nations, much the same as those (in Jer. 46-51 and Ezekiel 25-32).

Verses 13:1 – 14:27: The section (13:1-14:24), deals specifically with Babylon (and the verses 25-27), with Assyria, though Babylon was not yet a world power at the time of this prophecy. Isaiah foresaw a time when Babylon would overthrow the current dominant nation Assyria and be an international force.

Isaiah 13:1 "The burden of Babylon, which Isaiah the son of Amoz did see."

"Burden or oracle": In the sense of his having heavy responsibility to deliver the message. It is used 15 other times in the Old Testament in superscriptions like this.

This is a very strange statement. "Burden" here, was translated from the word masa, which means tribute, utterance, or spoken doom. It can also mean oracle or prophecy.

We do know that Babylon carried the inhabitants of Jerusalem captive in the 8th year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar made his uncle Mattaniah king, and changed his name to Zedekiah about this same time. All of this occurred about 14 generations before the birth of Jesus.

Matthew 1:17 "So all the generations from Abraham to David [are] fourteen generations; and from David until the carrying away into Babylon [are] fourteen generations; and from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ [are] fourteen generations."

We know that Isaiah received this prophecy in some sort of vision, because the verse above uses the word "see". Notice again, the mention of Amoz as the father of Isaiah. The main thrust of this, however, is judgment against Babylon.

Babylon ... Isaiah ... did see": This chapter foretold the city's destruction. Even during the Assyrian Empire, the city of Babylon was formidable and stood at the head in the list of Israel's enemies to be conquered.

Isaiah 13:2 "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."

The lifting of the ensign would be similar to our raising of our flag. The high mountain is mentioned, because it would be easier to see it. They are calling out with their voices to call the army to fight against Babylon.

(As in 5:26), the Lord summoned foreign armies to conquer Babylon in all her greatness.

Isaiah 13:3 "I have commanded my sanctified ones, I have also called my mighty ones for mine anger, [even] them that rejoice in my highness."

I, in the verse above, is speaking of God. "Sanctified", possibly, means those set aside for God's purpose. We know in this that God is in control of all nations in the end. He is calling those to battle on the side of the Lord to bring judgment against Babylon.

"I have commanded ... called". The Lord told of His gathering of armies to overcome Babylon. "My anger": God's anger had turned away from Israel (12:1), and toward this oppressive foreign power.

Isaiah 13:4 "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."

"The noise of a multitude" is from the large army that comes to fight against Babylon. The army coming is a strong army of men who are strengthened by the Lord. The great people, just means a large number of people.

The Lord of hosts is mustering the army. Literally "the Lord of armies musters the army." This anticipated the end time coming of the Lord to crush the final Babylon and to dash His enemies in pieces and establish a kingdom over all nations (Rev. 19:11-16).

Nations lets us know there will be more than one nation. The Lord of hosts has called this battle in judgment against Babylon.

Isaiah 13:5 "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."

The "indignation", spoken of here, is God's fury. My own opinion of this is that the Lord is taking vengeance on Babylon for the terrible things they had done to God's people. He has given them ample time to repent and come to Him, and they have not. I believe this to be speaking of the time of the end, spoken of in the 24th chapter of Matthew.

The fall of Babylon to the Medes was merely a short term glimpse of the ultimate fall of Babylon at the hands of the universal forces of God (Rev. 18:2).

The countries of the world will come against Israel and God's people at that time. God will punish Babylon and all their evil neighbors, when they are defeated. There are many Babylons in the sense of what they believe. See why God comes against them in the following Scripture.

Romans 1:18 "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;"

Babylon, and those with ideas similar to Babylon, will come to destroy and will be destroyed themselves. The wrath of God comes because of disobedience to His Word.

Ephesians 5:6 "Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience."

"From the end of heaven" means many of the countries come from the other side of the world.

Isaiah's reference to the day of the Lord is both immediate and eschatological. The destruction that he has immediately in view is the fall of Babylon (in 539 B.C.). But he also saw the ultimate fall of "Babylon" in the last days (Rev. 14:18). The Medes are named in advance (in verse 17; as is Cyrus in chapters 44 and 45), since they rose to power before the Persians.

Isaiah 13:6 "Howl ye; for the day of the LORD [is] at hand; it shall come as a destruction from the Almighty."

"The day of the Lord is at hand": The prophecy looked beyond the more immediate conquest of the city by the Medes to a greater day of the Lord and anticipated the final destruction of Babylon by the personal intervention of the Messiah.

You see, this destruction does not come from the devil. This destruction comes, because the judgment of God has come.

Joel 1:15: "Alas for the day! for the day of the LORD [is] at hand, and as a destruction from the Almighty shall it come."

The word "Almighty" in the verse above is showing the power of the Lord to do whatever He wishes. In this case, it is punishment after He has passed judgment. "Howl" is a strong expression of sorrow.

Acts 2:20 "The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come:"

Isaiah 13:7 "Therefore shall all hands be faint, and every man's heart shall melt:"

"Heart shall melt": Courage was to vanish (19:1; Ezekiel 21:7; Nahum 2:10).

Luke 21:26 "Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken."

These two Scriptures seem to be speaking of the same thing. Man can fight against another man, but there is no way to win against the wrath of God.

Isaiah 13:8 "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."

The pain comes suddenly and unexpected (similar to a woman at childbirth). Whether the face being as a flame means that their blood pressure has risen from the suddenness of their troubles, or whether this is speaking of a time when they will be burned by the sun, is hard to say. Either way, it has to do with the judgment of God on these wicked people.

“As a woman that travaileth”: The comparison of labor pains is often a figure to describe human sufferings in the period just before the final deliverance of Israel. Usually it was the suffering of Israel, but here it pictured the misery of Babylon.

Isaiah 13:9 "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."

The reason we know this is not just speaking of the evil Babylon, is the fact that just the sinners are destroyed. It appears there are others here, who are not sinners. This is a much wider scope than just physical Babylon.

This occurs when Messiah returns in judgment of all living on earth. In this case the prophet moves forward to the Babylon which is the final evil world city to be destroyed with all its inhabitants (see Rev. chapters 17 and 18).

Romans 13:4: "For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to [execute] wrath upon him that doeth evil."

Isaiah 13:10 "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."

The following Scriptures are speaking of a time when the sun and moon and stars will not give light to the earth.

Scripture frequently associates cosmic upheavals with the period of tribulation just before Christ's return.

Matthew 24:29 "Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken:"

Mark 13:24 "But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light,"

The Scriptures we just gave are speaking of something that happens at the time of the great tribulation upon the earth at the second coming of Christ. This could be caused by a natural happening, or this could occur when oil well smoke covers the atmosphere.

Isaiah 13:11 "And I will punish the world for [their] evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; and I will cause the arrogancy of the proud to cease, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible."

The word "world" here, means the globe. It can also mean, the inhabitants of the globe. We can easily see, this is speaking of more than just physical Babylon. This is a global judgment of God on all people who have chosen to disobey Him.

The same sin of pride that led to Israel's judgment will cause Babylon's downfall (47:5, 7-8; Rev. 18:7).

It includes those who have not accepted Jesus as their Savior. This is a warning to all evil people in every country in the world.

Isaiah 13:12 "I will make a man more precious than fine gold; even a man than the golden wedge of Ophir."

Because of this visitation human mortality will be extremely high, but not complete. God will spare a faithful remnant.

Fine gold has been tried in the fire. It has undergone purification by fire. Gold of Ophir was pure gold.

Isaiah 13:13 "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."

These upheavals are associated with the ones (in verse 10).

We read in an earlier verse from (Matthew 24:29), how the heavens and the earth will be shaken just after the days of tribulation. If we follow that to (verse 30), we will see when this happens.

Matthew 24:30 "And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory."

This is just before the second coming of Christ.

Isaiah 13:14 "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."

Humans are frightening to the shy gazelle, but indispensable to the helpless sheep. The Babylonians will find the Lord as their enemy and lose Him as their shepherd. All they can do is flee the land.

When the Christians are removed from the earth, great fear will overtake those remaining here, and they will run for safety.

Matthew 24:31 "And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."

The true sheep will be caught up in this catching away of the church. Notice, it says, as a sheep. The ones left are not the Lord's sheep. Some of them may be professing to be sheep, but that is just in outward appearance.

Verses 15-16: The prophet for the moment returned to the immediate future, when the Medes committed all those cruel atrocities in captured Babylon.

Isaiah 13:15 "Every one that is found shall be thrust through; and every one that is joined [unto them] shall fall by the sword."

This very thing did happen when they were overthrown, but the message is two-fold. It will happen again at the end of the age.

Isaiah 13:16 "Their children also shall be dashed to pieces before their eyes; their houses shall be spoiled, and their wives ravished."

This has been true in wars of the past. Children are seldom spared in a vicious war. The captor does not want to be bothered with them. The wives were sexually assaulted and then killed.

Isaiah 13:17 "Behold, I will stir up the Medes against them, which shall not regard silver; and [as for] gold, they shall not delight in it."

These people from an area southwest of the Caspian Sea, North of Persia, East of Assyria, and Northeast of Babylon later allied themselves with the Babylonians to conquer Assyria and later with the Persians to cause the fall of Babylon (in 539 B.C.).

God established gold and silver as worth in the book of Genesis. Mankind has done away with the money God established and put out worthless paper notes. Anyone, or any nation, who disregards standards the Lord established is in for a great deal of trouble.

In recent years that the United States went off the gold and silver standard. The fact that gold means the purity of God and silver means redemption should tell us something. God will not bless those who tear down His standards and make their own standards.

Isaiah 13:18 "[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."

This is speaking of evil people who do not regard children's lives as anything. The Medes and the Persians were skilled in warfare using bows and arrows, and they were known for their disregard for human life.

Verses 19-22: From the near future, Isaiah returned to the distant future. The ultimate fulfillment of these prophecies of Babylon's desolation will come in conjunction with Babylon's rebuilding and utter destruction when Christ returns (Rev. 14:8; 18:2).

Obviously, Isaiah was unable to see the many centuries that separated Babylon's fall to the Medes from the destruction of the final Babylon by God (see Rev. chapters 17 and 18).

Isaiah closes this chapter by predicting the Babylon will be destroyed and will never be rebuilt. Instead it will remain desolate and shall never be inhabited. The reference to wild beasts should be taken literally and not interpreted as demons. Owls, satyrs and dragons are better rendered ostriches, wild goats, and jackals.

Isaiah 13:19 "And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees' excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah."

In the physical sense, Babylon took a punishment in the recent war with the world against them. Much life was lost from the bombing on Iraq. Sodom and Gomorrah were totally destroyed by God for their evil habits of homosexuality. Babylon had been a great city and had great kings as the world views things.

God will overthrow rebuilt Babylon in the same supernatural way He did these two ancient cities, (Gen. 19:24; Rev. 18:8).

God has a different view. God sees the evil of the heart. This is speaking of the literal city, but is, also, speaking of all evil cities as well. God will not always overlook sin. There is a day of reckoning.

Isaiah 13:20 "It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation: neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there; neither shall the shepherds make their fold there."

Where Sodom and Gomorrah stood, there is nothing but desolation. Physical Babylon did not keep its greatness either. It is a wasteland, as well. Spiritual Babylon will be the same. God will

destroy, where perversion and unnatural life styles prevail. The Arabians believe harm will come to them at this sight, and they will not inhabit Babylon anymore.

Though nothing like its glorious past, the site of Babylon has never been void of inhabitants. A city or town of one type or another has always existed there, so this prophecy must point toward a yet future desolation.

Verses 21-22 “doleful creatures, owls and satyrs” This is the utter devastation referred to (in 21:9 and further described in Rev. 18:2).

Isaiah 13:21 "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."

This just speaks of the total desolation that comes upon this place from the judgment of God. These are animals and fowls repulsive to man.

Isaiah 13:22 "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."

Animals sometimes have a sense of impending danger. The fall of physical Babylon was nearly 200 years after this was prophesied. The fall of spiritual Babylon is coming soon.

As already noted (in verse 6), once Babylon becomes great, her days are numbered.

Isaiah Chapter 13 Questions

1. In verse 1, what does "burden" mean?
2. When did Babylon take Jerusalem captive?
3. Who did Nebuchadnezzar make king?
4. What was the new name he gave him?
5. How many generations are there from the carrying away into Babylon to Christ?
6. What can we relate the lifting of the ensign to?
7. Who is "I" speaking of, in verse 3?
8. What does "sanctified" mean?

9. What are they being called to battle for?
10. Who are those who "rejoice in His highness"?
11. What is "the noise of the multitude" in verse 4?
12. The "indignation" in verse 5, is what?
13. Why is God taking vengeance on Babylon?
14. Who does this destruction come from?
15. What does "Almighty" in verse 6 show us?
16. Howl is a strong expression of _____.
17. What New Testament Scripture is saying the same thing as Isaiah 13:7?
18. What makes their pain similar to a woman's pain in childbirth?
19. After what special time, does there come a time when the sun will not give light?
20. "World" in verse 11, means what?
21. I will make a man more precious than _____.
22. I will shake the heavens, and the _____ shall move out of her place.
23. Matthew 24:30 says the sign of the Son of man is in the _____.
24. What will be the calling of the Christians?
25. What is the spiritual meaning of silver?
26. When did physical Babylon take punishment recently?
27. Why were Sodom and Gomorrah destroyed by God?
28. Why have the Arabians not resettled Babylon?