

Isaiah 13:1-14:27      “The Fall of Babylon”      January 17, 2021

Isaiah 13-27 forms the second major section of the book of Isaiah.

One commentator borrows from Isaiah 26:1 for the title of this section:  
“We have a strong city.”

This is especially helpful in orienting us to the first part of these chapters –  
because chapters 13-23 will consist of oracles against the nations –  
showing how the cities of man do not last – *cannot* last.

As we go through these oracles we will hear what God says about the powerful nations –  
Babylon and Assyria – who were the China or the United States of the ancient world –  
but also what God says about Philistia and Moab – the Moroccos or Nepals of that day.

Chapters 1-12 presented a vision of history with Zion at the center.

Now chapters 13-23 will move to the periphery.

Isaiah will take Judah on a world tour,  
in order to demonstrate that Yahweh is indeed the sovereign God of history,  
who governs all things according to the counsel of his holy will.

In chapters 7-12, we heard that God’s purpose is to use Assyria to chasten Judah and Jerusalem.

But now in chapters 13-27 God explains his purposes for the nations.

Zion is still at the center of history.

But here we learn that God’s purposes include the whole earth.

Our passage tonight – the oracle against Babylon –

has a chiasmic structure which I’ve given you in your bulletin:

1. The Coming Day of the LORD against Babylon (13:1-5)
2. The Humiliation of Babylon (13:6-22)
3. The LORD’s Decree Regarding the Restoration of Jacob (14:1-2)
- 2’. The Proverb against the King of Babylon (14:3-21)
- 1’. The Purpose of the LORD: Assyria – and All Nations – Will Fall (14:24-27)

That last line may seem out of place in an oracle against *Babylon*.

What is Assyria doing here?

The Assyrian Empire and the Babylonian Empire rarely existed side by side.

The heart of the Assyrian empire was in northern Iraq.

The heart of the Babylonian empire was in southern Iraq.

The land in between the Tigris and the Euphrates Rivers  
has no natural borders.

So it was rare for the two kingdoms to exist side by side.

Usually one was dominant and the other was subordinate –

until there was a revolution – and then it flipped!

But there is a reason why Isaiah starts with an oracle against *Babylon*.

The Hebrew word for “Babylon” is the word *babel*.

As in the *tower of Babel*.

In English we distinguish between Babylon and Babel.

In Hebrew you don’t.

So when Isaiah opens his oracles against the nations with an oracle against *Babel*,  
it would certainly make people wonder –

does this have anything to do with the Tower of Babel?

As we will see throughout these oracles in chapters 13-27,  
the nations are very much like Babel/Babylon.

They may be weaker – but in their hearts, they too are like their big sister.

(In Hebrew, nations are masculine – cities are feminine).

Chapter 13 starts with a description of the Day of the Lord.

The Day of the LORD is a common prophetic theme,

which appears to have originated with Amos a century before Isaiah’s time.

The Day of the LORD is a day of darkness, and not light.

### **1. The Coming Day of the LORD against Babylon (13:1-5)**

*The oracle concerning Babylon which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw.*

<sup>2</sup> *On a bare hill raise a signal;  
cry aloud to them;*

*wave the hand for them to enter  
the gates of the nobles.*

<sup>3</sup> *I myself have commanded my consecrated ones,  
and have summoned my mighty men to execute my anger,  
my proudly exulting ones.<sup>[a]</sup>*

<sup>4</sup> *The sound of a tumult is on the mountains  
as of a great multitude!*

*The sound of an uproar of kingdoms,  
of nations gathering together!*

*The LORD of hosts is mustering  
a host for battle.*

<sup>5</sup> *They come from a distant land,  
from the end of the heavens,  
the LORD and the weapons of his indignation,  
to destroy the whole land.<sup>[b]</sup>*

Verses 1-5 describe the setting of the coming Day of the LORD against Babylon.  
Babylon is portrayed as the godless city of man that characterizes “the world.”

The picture of the day of the LORD begins with the mustering of the armies, (2-5)  
followed by a description of the terror of that day (6-8)  
even the heavens will not give their light (9-10)  
At the heart of this message is God’s declaration of his purpose (11-12)  
Isaiah then points out that it is God who will shake the heavens and the earth (13)  
then he returns to the theme of the terror of those “like a hunted gazelle” (14)  
and concludes with the desolation wrought by the armies of verses 2-5 (15-16)

The Day of the LORD will bring about the humiliation of “the whole land” (v5)  
which could also be translated “the whole earth.”

Okay – so –

In chapters 1-12 we heard about God’s purposes for Jerusalem and Judah.  
And God used this sort of “Day of the LORD” language to speak of that.  
Now Isaiah starts part 2 of his book with a “Day of the LORD” against Babel.

And the humiliation of Babylon is shown forth in verses 6-22:

## **2. The Humiliation of Babylon (13:6-22)**

### **a. Misery: the Agony of the Day of the LORD (v6-8)**

<sup>6</sup> *Wail, for the day of the LORD is near;  
as destruction from the Almighty<sup>[e]</sup> it will come!*

<sup>7</sup> *Therefore all hands will be feeble,  
and every human heart will melt.*

<sup>8</sup> *They will be dismayed:  
pangs and agony will seize them;  
they will be in anguish like a woman in labor.*

*They will look aghast at one another;  
their faces will be aflame.*

The shorter catechism speaks of how the fall brought mankind into *an estate* (singular)  
of sin and misery.

Sin and misery go together.

It’s not just “if you sin then you’ll be miserable” –  
that’s true – but so often it’s also the other way around:  
if you are miserable, then you’ll sin.

How often have you heard someone say,  
“But he did it first!”

We teach our children that two wrongs do not make a right –  
but how often do we find ourselves simply acting like our parents –  
doing the very things that we swore that we would never do...

He sinned against me – and now I find myself imitating him in sinning against others...

Misery leads to sin – and sin to misery – and back and forth and up and down and...  
Lord, have mercy!

We hear the misery of that day in verses 6-8 – the wailing, the dismay, the agony –  
anguish like a woman in labor...

But we also hear about the sin that provoked this day –  
v9

**b. Sin: the Wrath of the Day of the LORD against the World's Evil (v9-16)**

**i. The Heavens Tremble**

**ii. The Earth Shaken**

**iii. Humanity Devastated**

<sup>9</sup> *Behold, the day of the LORD comes,  
cruel, with wrath and fierce anger,  
to make the land a desolation  
and to destroy its sinners from it.*

There is a way in which the Day of the LORD is the undoing of creation:  
the heavens are darkened –  
the earth is shaken –  
and humanity is devastated:

<sup>10</sup> *For the stars of the heavens and their constellations  
will not give their light;  
the sun will be dark at its rising,  
and the moon will not shed its light.*

<sup>11</sup> *I will punish the world for its evil,  
and the wicked for their iniquity;  
I will put an end to the pomp of the arrogant,  
and lay low the pompous pride of the ruthless.*

<sup>12</sup> *I will make people more rare than fine gold,  
and mankind than the gold of Ophir.*

<sup>13</sup> *Therefore I will make the heavens tremble,  
and the earth will be shaken out of its place,  
at the wrath of the LORD of hosts  
in the day of his fierce anger.*

Why is God angry?

Doesn't God love the world?

Our postmodern culture has pitted anger against love.

Well, not really.

Postmodern liberals think of themselves as being “loving” people –  
but they *hate* fascists with a bitter passion!  
And understandably so!

If you truly love something, then you will hate that which destroys what you love.

Who do you love?

Your spouse?

Your parent?

Your child?

Your friend?

A sweet, gentle mother will turn into a holy terror if you mess with her child!

And when I say “holy terror” – I mean both *holy* and *terror*!

It is entirely good and right that are angry at evil –  
because evil is destroying what you love!

And God loves the world – he loves all that he made –

and especially, he loves humanity – the people that he made in his own image.

And yet evil is destroying people.

Sin is destroying what he loves.

But you can’t just leave it as impersonal statement.

Evil doesn’t exist as a disembodied thing out there.

It is *people* who are doing wicked things to each other.

Humanity is destroying humanity.

And so because God loves the world – he must destroy the world.

This is the problem we saw this morning in Hebrews 2.

The prophet Isaiah was probably the OT prophet who understood this problem the best.

That’s why this prophet from Jerusalem will spend so much time talking and preaching  
about the nations!

Because they are included in God’s purposes for history.

<sup>14</sup> *And like a hunted gazelle,  
or like sheep with none to gather them,  
each will turn to his own people,  
and each will flee to his own land.*

<sup>15</sup> *Whoever is found will be thrust through,  
and whoever is caught will fall by the sword.*

*<sup>16</sup> Their infants will be dashed in pieces  
before their eyes;  
their houses will be plundered  
and their wives ravished.*

Earlier we sang Psalm 137 –

By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down and wept when we remembered Zion.  
It is a song of the exile.

And at the end of the song, there is that awful line about dashing children’s heads against a rock.  
Here in Isaiah 13:16 – Isaiah speaks of how this will happen to Babylon.

“Their infants will be dashed in pieces before their eyes;  
their houses will be plundered and their wives ravished.”

This is what Babylon did to others –

and so, in God’s poetic justice, this is what will happen to Babylon.

And you won’t be able to buy them off! (v17)

**c. Destruction: Babylon Will Become Like Sodom and Gomorrah (v17-22)**

*<sup>17</sup> Behold, I am stirring up the Medes against them,  
who have no regard for silver  
and do not delight in gold.*

*<sup>18</sup> Their bows will slaughter<sup>[d]</sup> the young men;  
they will have no mercy on the fruit of the womb;  
their eyes will not pity children.*

*<sup>19</sup> And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms,  
the splendor and pomp of the Chaldeans,  
will be like Sodom and Gomorrah  
when God overthrew them.*

This oracle is spoken against Babylon.

But it speaks of more than just Babylon.

This speaks of God’s purposes against rebellious humanity.

The city of man will be laid low.

All that is dear to mankind—whether possessions, children, wife, or life itself,  
will be removed in the day of the Lord.

Those who oppress you will receive the same judgment that they brought against you.

But if God merely said, “someday I will destroy those who oppress you,”  
then why should we believe him?

If God claims to be the God of the end of history,

but never does anything in the middle of history,  
then there would be no reason to believe  
that he is capable of doing anything at the end of history.

But from time to time, God does remarkable things in the middle of history  
as a reminder of what he will do at the end.

God gives his people a clear picture of what will happen to Babylon:

The Medes will be raised up against them.

The revived neo-Babylonian Empire will last only 150 years,  
before it too will fall.

And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the splendor and pomp of the Chaldeans,  
will be like Sodom and Gomorrah when God overthrew them.

<sup>20</sup> *It will never be inhabited  
or lived in for all generations;  
no Arab will pitch his tent there;  
no shepherds will make their flocks lie down there.*

<sup>21</sup> *But wild animals will lie down there,  
and their houses will be full of howling creatures;  
there ostriches<sup>[e]</sup> will dwell,  
and there wild goats will dance.*

<sup>22</sup> *Hyenas<sup>[f]</sup> will cry in its towers,  
and jackals in the pleasant palaces;  
its time is close at hand  
and its days will not be prolonged.*

God promises that Babylon will be a desolation.

Never again will it be rebuilt.

And it never has been.

For a thousand years after the fall of Babylon,  
the city slowly dwindled in importance –

and for the last thousand years, no one has dwelt there.

For nearly 2,500 years it has never again returned to prominence in the world.

When it says that “wild goats” will dance there (v21),  
the phrase is literally “goat demons.”

Babylon will become the abode of goat demons.

In other words, it will be so unfit for human habitation

that only the strangest of creatures will dwell there.

We come then to the center of this passage—the center of the oracle concerning Babylon.

And here we learn that the oracle concerning Babylon is really about Israel,  
which is not surprising.

Read 14:1-2

### 3. The LORD's Decree Regarding the Restoration of Jacob (14:1-2)

*14 For the LORD will have compassion on Jacob and will again choose Israel, and will set them in their own land, and sojourners will join them and will attach themselves to the house of Jacob.  
2 And the peoples will take them and bring them to their place, and the house of Israel will possess them in the LORD's land as male and female slaves.<sup>[g]</sup> They will take captive those who were their captors, and rule over those who oppressed them.*

God will again choose Israel.

And God's elect will rule the nations.

Isaiah has told us about the Son who will restore the throne of David.

And the Psalms had promised that the son of David would rule the nations,  
so Isaiah promises that when God against elects Israel,  
sojourners will join them,  
and the peoples will united themselves to Israel.

This didn't happen in the restoration after the Exile.

The restoration from Exile was only partial.

But Jesus Christ is the elect one.

He is the true Israel who rules over the nations,  
and as we have seen in John's gospel,  
all the world flocks to Jesus.

At Pentecost, the curse of Babel was undone.

At Babel the languages of the nations were divided.

At Pentecost, the languages of the nations were united –  
not in some strange new language –

but united in telling the mighty deeds of God in the gospel of Jesus Christ!

## 2'. The Proverb against the King of Babylon (14:3-21)

### a. The Earth Rejoices that the LORD Breaks the Staff of the Wicked (v3-8)

*3 When the LORD has given you rest from your pain and turmoil and the hard service with which you were made to serve, 4 you will take up this taunt against the king of Babylon:*

*"How the oppressor has ceased,  
the insolent fury<sup>[h]</sup> ceased!*

*5 The LORD has broken the staff of the wicked,  
the scepter of rulers,*

*6 that struck the peoples in wrath  
with unceasing blows,  
that ruled the nations in anger  
with unrelenting persecution.*

<sup>7</sup> *The whole earth is at rest and quiet;  
they break forth into singing.*

<sup>8</sup> *The cypresses rejoice at you,  
the cedars of Lebanon, saying,  
'Since you were laid low,  
no woodcutter comes up against us.'*

14:3-23 consists of a parable about the king of Babylon

Some translations say a “taunt,” but this is a *mashal*—a proverb.

And once again it is a chiasm that begins and ends with God’s action.

God’s action in breaking his power (4-6)

the earth is at rest because of the downfall of this king (7-8)

Sheol (the grave) greets him with derision (9-11)

Contrast between heaven and the grave (12-17)

No tomb is given him (18-19) [the one who chopped branches is  
now a rotten branch—19]

No offspring will continue his line on earth (20-21)

the LORD’s action in cutting of posterity (22-23)

Who is this “king of Babylon”?

In one sense, you could say it is the last king of Babylon...

and yet, as we begin to see that Babylon here is really Babel –

the city of man – the city that sets itself up against the LORD –

the king of Babylon could be seen as Satan –

or also as *any* antichrist – any ruler who sets himself up against the LORD.

Think of verse 5 –

“The LORD has broken he staff of the wicked, the scepter of rulers,  
that struck the peoples in wrath with unceasing blows,  
that ruled the nations in anger with unrelenting persecution.”

This is *any ruler* who fits the bill!

Because these rulers will end in the grave.

Listen to this description:

**b. The Dead Mock the King of Babylon (v9-20a)**

<sup>9</sup> *Sheol beneath is stirred up  
to meet you when you come;  
it rouses the shades to greet you,  
all who were leaders of the earth;  
it raises from their thrones  
all who were kings of the nations.*

<sup>10</sup> *All of them will answer*

*and say to you:  
'You too have become as weak as we!  
You have become like us!'  
<sup>11</sup> Your pomp is brought down to Sheol,  
the sound of your harps;  
maggots are laid as a bed beneath you,  
and worms are your covers.*

This is where every king will end.  
He may have been powerful for a time – but now he is pathetic!

This is a warning to all of us!  
If you become obsessed with power –  
if you become fixated on controlling everything –  
this is where you will end!  
You might succeed in being on top of the world – for a little while –  
but then come the maggots...

Some have tried to say that this passage is about Satan (especially 12-15),  
but that would wrench this section out of context.  
Of course, the King of Babylon *is* a type of Satan,  
but the language of verses 12-15 is not too exalted for the kings of Babylon.

<sup>12</sup> *“How you are fallen from heaven,  
O Day Star, son of Dawn!  
How you are cut down to the ground,  
you who laid the nations low!  
<sup>13</sup> You said in your heart,  
'I will ascend to heaven;  
above the stars of God  
I will set my throne on high;  
I will sit on the mount of assembly  
in the far reaches of the north;'<sup>[1]</sup>  
<sup>14</sup> I will ascend above the heights of the clouds;  
I will make myself like the Most High.’  
<sup>15</sup> But you are brought down to Sheol,  
to the far reaches of the pit.*

Remember, after all the original Babel.  
It sought to reach to heaven,  
and Babylon has tried to do the same ever since.  
Daniel would speak of the pride and arrogance of Nebuchadnezzar,  
and later of Belshazzar.

It would be better to say that these verses are speaking of any king – any ruler –  
who seeks his own glory!

Verses 16-20 then mock him for his failure to have a tomb or heirs.

Elaborate tombs and a royal dynasty are the hopes of the great kings of the middle east.  
But he will have neither. (Tomb in verse 18 is a mausoleum)

He will have an unmarked grave, and people will trample him underfoot.  
There will be no inheritance for Babylon.

<sup>16</sup> *Those who see you will stare at you  
and ponder over you:  
'Is this the man who made the earth tremble,  
who shook kingdoms,  
who made the world like a desert  
and overthrew its cities,  
who did not let his prisoners go home?'*  
<sup>18</sup> *All the kings of the nations lie in glory,  
each in his own tomb;<sup>[1]</sup>  
<sup>19</sup> *but you are cast out, away from your grave,  
like a loathed branch,  
clothed with the slain, those pierced by the sword,  
who go down to the stones of the pit,  
like a dead body trampled underfoot.  
<sup>20</sup> *You will not be joined with them in burial,  
because you have destroyed your land,  
you have slain your people.***

A king who destroys his own land – who slays his own people –  
is a fool.

But of course, this is what so many kings do!

Idolatry has a long habit of destroying the very thing that they claim to love and worship.

When a Black lives matters protest turns violent – what do they destroy?

Their own neighborhoods – you so often saw footage of Black businesses trashed.

When a right wing protest turned violent – what did they smash?

The symbol of liberty that they claim to cherish – the U.S. Capitol!

### **c. The Evildoers Will Come to an End (v20b-21)**

*“May the offspring of evildoers  
nevermore be named!  
<sup>21</sup> Prepare slaughter for his sons  
because of the guilt of their fathers,*

*lest they rise and possess the earth,  
and fill the face of the world with cities.”*

And in verse 21, notice why God brings Babylon to an end:

*“lest they rise and possess the earth, and fill the face of the world with cities.”*

The last thing this world needs is a whole bunch of Babylons!

So what will God do?

In chapters 9-12 God spoke of Assyria as an axe in his hand to chop down the forests of Israel,  
now God comes after Babylon with a broom!

**d. Babel Will Be No More (14:22-23)**

<sup>22</sup> *“I will rise up against them,” declares the LORD of hosts, “and will cut off from Babylon name and remnant, descendants and posterity,” declares the LORD.* <sup>23</sup> *“And I will make it a possession of the hedgehog,<sup>[k]</sup> and pools of water, and I will sweep it with the broom of destruction,” declares the LORD of hosts.*

You gotta love Isaiah’s use of imagery!

The God of heaven comes with the broom of destruction!

To sweep away the dust and chaff–like Babylon.

Here is the greatest and most glorious kingdom of the ancient world,

and it doesn’t even warrant getting chopped down with an axe.

It is not a great forest—it is but dust that is swept away by the broom of destruction!

**1’. The Purpose of the LORD: Assyria – and All Nations – Will Fall (14:24-27)**

<sup>24</sup> *The LORD of hosts has sworn:*

*“As I have planned,*

*so shall it be,*

*and as I have purposed,*

*so shall it stand,*

<sup>25</sup> *that I will break the Assyrian in my land,*

*and on my mountains trample him underfoot;*

*and his yoke shall depart from them,*

*and his burden from their shoulder.”*

<sup>26</sup> *This is the purpose that is purposed*

*concerning the whole earth,*

*and this is the hand that is stretched out*

*over all the nations.*

<sup>27</sup> *For the LORD of hosts has purposed,*

*and who will annul it?*

*His hand is stretched out,*

*and who will turn it back?*

Verses 24-25 then assure Judah that this is God's plan for the destruction of Assyria.  
After all, the immediate threat in Isaiah's day is not Babylon,  
but Assyria.  
But God tells Isaiah that his purposes are so well planned,  
that he already has the judgment of Assyria's destroyer planned.  
And if God has Babylon's downfall planned,  
then you may be certain that Assyria's fate is sealed.

Because this is God's purpose for the whole earth.  
Assyria thinks that their hand is stretched out over the nations,  
but truly it is God's hand!

The LORD of hosts has a purpose.  
He has a plan.

And his plan was for his only-begotten Son –  
who was with him in the beginning –  
the Word who was with God – the Word who was God –  
that Word would become flesh and join himself to our humanity.

Not only did he come to share in our weakness and frailty –  
he also came to take the judgment of the King of Babylon.

And all the shades of Sheol laughed and mocked when they saw him!  
You too!  
Ha – you have become like us!

But our Lord Jesus was nothing like them!  
Unlike the Kings of the earth – he did not exalt himself!  
He humbled himself – to take the form of a servant.  
He did not seek to ascend to heaven –  
he descended from heaven to bear our lowly humanity!

And so when Sheol sought to claim him –  
when the grave started to mock him –  
then he revealed his mighty power!  
And thus came to pass the death of death in the death of Christ!

“The situation would surely have been hopeless had the very majesty of God not descended to us, since it was not in our power to ascend to Him. Hence, it was necessary for the Son of God to become for us Immanuel, that is, God with us, and in such a way that His divinity and our human nature might by mutual connection grow together. Otherwise, the nearness would not have been near enough, nor the affinity sufficiently firm, for us to hope that God might dwell with

us...Even if man had remained free from all stain, his condition would have been too lowly for him to reach God without a Mediator. What, then, of man: plunged by his mortal ruin into death and hell, defiled with so many spots, befouled with his own corruption, and overwhelmed with every curse?...For the same reason it was also imperative that He who was to become our Redeemer be true God and true man. It was His task to swallow up death. Who but the Life could do this? It was His task to conquer sin. Who but very Righteousness could do this? It was His task to rout the powers of world and air. Who but a power higher than world and air could do this? Now where does life or righteousness, or lordship and authority of heaven lie but with God alone? Therefore our most merciful God, when he willed that we be redeemed, made himself our Redeemer in the person of his only-begotten Son.”

Calvin, J., *Institutes of the Christian Religion* II.xii.1-2.