

ISAIAH 13

THE DOOM OF BABYLON, PART 1

The thirteenth and fourteenth chapters of Isaiah contain one entire prophecy foretelling the destruction of the great city of Babylon. The main purpose of this prophecy was to predict the destruction of that city, but it was also intended to provide consolation to the Jews. The people of the Southern Kingdom of Judah would one day be carried into captivity there, and the prophet's purpose here was to assure them that the city to which they would be carried as exiles would eventually be completely destroyed.

The vision which Isaiah saw concerning Babylon was represented to his mind as clearly and fully as if he had seen it with his physical eyes. This vision is called a burden, because it was a lesson that would be a burden to the mind and memory of those who heard it. At the time when Isaiah lived, Babylon was a city in the Assyrian monarchy (the capital of which was Nineveh); but eventually, it revolted from Assyria and became a monarchy of its own – and a very strong one, too; especially under the leadership of King Nebuchadnezzar.

Isaiah himself prophesied of the captivity of the Jews in Babylon (chapter 39:6); but here, he foretells the reprisals which God would make upon Babylon for the wrongs that they would do to His people. In verses 1-5, a summons is given to those powerful and warlike nations whom God would use as the instruments of his wrath upon Babylon; and those nations (verse 17) were the Medes and the Persians, under the command of Darius and Cyrus. The Medes and Persians only intended to enlarge their own empire; but the Lord ordained these events in such a way that their conquest of Babylon effectively secured the release of His people from captivity, and also provided a picture of the destruction of the spiritual Babylon. Although Cyrus did not know Jehovah, nor did he intend to honor Him in what he did; yet the Lord used him as His servant (chapter 45:4). Great princes and great armies are only tools in God's hand; they are weapons that He is pleased to use as He does His work, and it is His wrath that arms them and gives them success.

In verses 6-18, we have a very lively description of the terrible confusion and desolation which would be made in Babylon by the Medes and Persians. Those who were secure and easy were now bidden to howl and make sad lamentation, for it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of an angry God! The day of the Lord is at hand (verse 6), when He will act as the just Avenger of His own and His people's injured cause. He will deal in severity with oppressors for the cruelties which they have exercised upon His people. Let us not delay placing our trust in the Lord Jesus, so that we may be sheltered in Him on that day!

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ A description of the forces that God would use to destroy Babylon – verses 1-5
- ❖ An account of the dreadful, bloody work that those forces would do – verses 6-18
- ❖ A picture of the utter ruin and desolation of Babylon – verses 19-22

On that day, the hearts of the Babylonians would fail them; they would have neither courage nor comfort left. In the days of their peace, they were proud, haughty, and terrible (verse 11); but when trouble came, they would be quite at their wits' end. All hands would be faint and unable to hold a weapon; every man's heart would melt, so that they would be ready to die for fear. All comfort and hope would fail them (verse 10).



God would punish the Babylonians for their iniquity – particularly the sin of pride (verse 11). The haughtiness of terrible tyrants must be laid low – especially that of Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar, who had proudly trampled upon the people of God. The prophet says that there would be such a great slaughter in Babylon, that it would produce a scarcity of men (verse 12). No matter how much money someone might bring forward, they would still be unable to find a man to be employed in any of the affairs of state, or a man to be enlisted in the army, or a man to marry a wife for the building up of a family. There would be a universal confusion and consternation in this day of judgment upon Babylon – such a confusion of their affairs that it would be like the shaking of the heavens with dreadful thunders, and the trembling of the earth by terrifying earthquakes (verse 13). Moreover, a general scene of blood and horror would accompany this battle, for there would be a most cruel and barbarous slaughter (verse 15) of even the women and children. The Babylonians themselves had dealt in this way with God's people (Lam. 5:11); but in the day of their own judgment, they would be justly paid back in their own coin (Rev. 13:10).

The great havoc and destruction which the Medes and Persians would make in Babylon would ultimately end in the final destruction of that great city (verses 19-22). Although it would not be overthrown so miraculously or so suddenly as Sodom and Gomorrah, the destruction on Babylon would come upon them in the same manner as it did upon Sodom – when they were secure in their sins, eating and drinking and making merry (Luke 17:28-29). Accordingly, we find that Babylon was taken by the enemy when Belshazzar was in the midst of his drunken revelry; and although Cyrus and Darius did not demolish it immediately, yet it gradually wasted away and finally went all to ruin. And the prophet foretold (verse 20) that the city of Babylon would never again be inhabited, but the place would become the dwelling-place of wild beasts.

This prophecy of Babylon's destruction was intended to be for the support and comfort of the people of God when they were captives there, and grievously oppressed. When the Jews were groaning under the heavy yoke of Babylonian tyranny, they would be comforted by remembering that her day to fall was near!

Lord, You are the Avenger of Your oppressed people. We beseech You to return speedy vengeance and justice upon those who seek to destroy Your Church! Amen.