

### The Lord's Denunciation of Babylon

#### Isaiah 13

Isaiah 13 - *"The burden against Babylon which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw. <sup>2</sup>"Lift up a banner on the high mountain, raise your voice to them; wave your hand, that they may enter the gates of the nobles. <sup>3</sup>I have commanded My sanctified ones; I have also called My mighty ones for My anger—those who rejoice in My exaltation."*

*<sup>4</sup>The noise of a multitude in the mountains, like that of many people! A tumultuous noise of the kingdoms of nations gathered together! The Lord of hosts musters the army for battle. <sup>5</sup>They come from a far country, from the end of heaven— the Lord and His weapons of indignation, to destroy the whole land."*

*<sup>6</sup>Wail, for the day of the Lord is at hand! It will come as destruction from the Almighty. <sup>7</sup>Therefore all hands will be limp, every man's heart will melt, <sup>8</sup>and they will be afraid.*

*Pangs and sorrows will take hold of them; they will be in pain as a woman in childbirth; They will be amazed at one another; their faces will be like flames.*

*<sup>9</sup>Behold, the day of the Lord comes, cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate; and He will destroy its sinners from it. <sup>10</sup>For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not give their light. The sun will be darkened in its going forth, and the moon will not cause its light to shine.*

*<sup>11</sup>"I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity. I will halt the arrogance of the proud, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible. <sup>12</sup>I will make a mortal more rare than fine gold, a man more than the golden wedge of Ophir.*

*<sup>13</sup>Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth will move out of her place, in the wrath of the Lord of hosts and in the day of His fierce anger. <sup>14</sup>It shall be as the hunted gazelle, and as a sheep that no man takes up; every man will turn to his own people, and everyone will flee to his own land. <sup>15</sup>Everyone who is found will be thrust through, and everyone who is captured will fall by the sword. <sup>16</sup>Their children also will be dashed to pieces before their eyes; their houses will be plundered and their wives ravished.*

*<sup>17</sup>"Behold, I will stir up the Medes against them, who will not regard silver; and as for gold, they will not delight in it.*

*<sup>18</sup>Also their bows will dash the young men to pieces, and they will have no pity on the fruit of the womb; their eye will not spare children.*

*<sup>19</sup>And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldeans' pride, will be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. <sup>20</sup>It will never be inhabited, nor will it be settled from generation to generation; nor will the Arabian pitch tents there, nor will the shepherds make their sheepfolds there. <sup>21</sup>But wild beasts of the desert will lie there, and their houses*

*will be full of owls. Ostriches will dwell there, and wild goats will caper there. <sup>22</sup> The hyenas will howl in their citadels, and jackals in their pleasant palaces. Her time is near to come, and her days will not be prolonged.”*

## Background Notes

Isaiah 13-23 is a subdivision of the book, in which judgment is pronounced against the foreign nations surrounding Judah. Chapter 13 and in a good portion of chapter 14 contain Isaiah’s oracle of judgment against Babylon.

In commentaries on Isaiah 13, there is a lot of discussion about the fulfillment of the details of this prophecy. The authors are not all in agreement.

When Isaiah wrote this prophecy of judgment against Babylon, the Assyrian Empire was in power. Assyria attacked Babylon in 689 BC. So, in Isaiah 13 - was Isaiah 13 predicting the 639 BC attack by Assyria - or was Isaiah predicting the conquering of Babylon by the Medes and the Persians in 539 BC?

The second is the more common interpretation, because of what verse 17 says: *“Behold, I will stir up the Medes against them.”* The fall of Babylon to the Medes took place in Daniel 5, on the very night that Daniel interpreted the handwriting on the wall to the Babylonian ruler, Belshazzar. So Daniel 5 may be the account of the historical fulfillment of the Isaiah 13 prophecy of judgment against Babylon.

However, the Isaiah 13 prophecy of judgment against Babylon was only partially fulfilled in history. Besides the *historical* fulfillment of this prophecy against Babylon, there is an *eschatological* End Time aspect to this prophecy of judgment as well. There will be a judgment that will come upon the “Babylon” of the Last Days. So there is both an historical fulfillment and an eschatological (future) fulfillment of this prophecy of judgment against Babylon.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. The historical day of the Lord for Babylon was near.

*“Wail, for the day of the Lord is at hand!*

*It will come as destruction from the Almighty” (v6).*

In Scripture, “the Day of the Lord” can refer to **any** time that the Lord intervenes in the affairs of nations. The Lord’s intervention could be for blessing, or it could be for judgment. That is why both the judgments of the future Tribulation period and the blessings of the future Millennial kingdom of Christ are referenced and included in “the Day of the Lord.”

Besides the future aspect, there is also an historical aspect to “the Day of the Lord.” Isaiah predicted that the Day of the Lord was near – it was *“at hand”* for proud Babylon. Babylon would rise to power and conquer Assyria, but then in turn

the Medes and the Persians would conquer Babylon. The magnificent Ishtar Gate of Babylon would open to the conquerors (v2).

The invading forces would be “set apart” by God Himself for this work of judgment (v3). The use of the word “*sanctified*” in connection with the conquering forces (v3) does not mean that they were holy! No. They were pagans. The meaning of the word *sanctified* is “set apart.” God would “set apart” those conquering pagan armies for the purpose of bringing His judgment upon Babylon.

In a similar way, in Isaiah 45:1 Cyrus, the Persian emperor, was described as “God’s anointed.” Cyrus was not a believer - but he was “anointed” because God used Cyrus to issue an edict to allow the captive Jews in Babylon to return home to Jerusalem after the Medes and the Persians conquered Babylon in 539 BC.

Verse 9 says that when the Day of the Lord came, it would affect both the land and the people - all because of the people’s sin. The Medes and the Persians would not be bought off with silver and gold (v17) but they would conquer without mercy (v18). Typical of all warfare and invasions (both then and today), citizens would flee or be murdered, children would be savagely killed, women would be raped, and homes would be looted and destroyed (v16). All of this death and destruction is the sad fallout of sin.

Babylon, that glorious city of the ancient world with its beautiful hanging gardens, would lie in ruins. Over the ensuing centuries, the buried ruins of Babylon have fulfilled the prophetic predictions of verses 20-22. The ruins of the once-proud city have remained desolate; its only inhabitants desert creatures and wild animals (v21-22). Nomadic Arabic peoples have not settled there (v20).

Verse 22 says that this fateful time for Babylon was near - and this prophecy was fulfilled with the fall of Babylon in history. The historical Day of the Lord for Babylon was near.

## **2. The eschatological Day of the Lord for Babylon is still future.**

Many have pointed out that the prophecies of judgment against Babylon in Isaiah, as well as the prophecies of judgment against Babylon in Jeremiah 15 & 51, were never completely fulfilled in history. For example, at the end of Isaiah 13:19 says that the destruction would be “*as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah.*” That type of destruction did not happen when the Medes and Persians conquered Babylon in 539 BC.

However, Revelation 17-18 says that there will be a “Babylon” in the future – in the End Times. We don’t know whether the “Babylon” of Revelation 17-18 is a symbolic name for the one-world government or one-world religion of the End Times, or whether it includes the rebuilding of the literal ancient city of Babylon. In any case, revelation predicts that the “Babylon” of the End Times will be destroyed with the kind of devastation that characterized the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah. Revelation 18:8 says, “*...she will be utterly burned with fire.*”

So there is an eschatological Day of the Lord for Babylon, and it is seen in verses 10-13. Notice that there will be cosmological disturbances in the heavens (v10) – just as is described in the book of Revelation and in Old Testament prophecies of the Last Days. See Joel 2 for example. And remember - in His Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24, our Lord predicted cosmological disturbances in the last days.

In Isaiah 13:11, notice that the entire world will be judged - not just Babylon. Verse 12 predicted that mortal man would become scarce and rare on the face of the earth. When we read about the judgments in the book of Revelation, we learn that a great percentage of the world population will perish during the Tribulation period of the future. Regarding the coming judgment on this earth, verse 13 is certainly universal in scope.

So there is a future aspect of the Day of the Lord for Babylon in Isaiah 13. The eschatological Day of the Lord for Babylon is still future.

## **Practical Application**

### **Remember the “Mountain Peak” illustration**

One of the best and most helpful illustrations of the fulfillment of many Old Testament prophecies is the “Mountain Peak” illustration. I’m sure I’ve shared it with you before. The Mountain Peak illustration goes this way:

Imagine that the Old Testament prophet is standing on the plains. He’s looking toward some mountains that are in the distance - which illustrates the future. From a distance, all the mountains, including foothills and high peaks, appear to be just a single line against the horizon. They appear to be fused together as one mountain range in the distance.

Thus the Old Testament prophets saw the historical day of the Lord and the eschatological day of the Lord as fused together - a single entity (as a child might draw a line of mountains). And thus the prophets may mention historical and future events together - even in the same verse - because all the prophecies were future to them.

Only when we travel forward and get into the mountains do we realize that first we come into foothills – and they represent the past fulfillments and partial fulfillments of certain prophecies. And then farther on we get into the high peaks – and they represent the future and ultimate fulfillments of certain prophecies.

Thus, in Isaiah 13, both the historical Day of the Lord and the eschatological Day of the Lord are mentioned – often in the same chapter. So - whenever you’re dealing with prophetic Scripture, remember the “Mountain Peak” illustration!