

LESSON 6

ORACLES AGAINST FOREIGN NATIONS

ISAIAH 13:1—23:18

Introduction

The first twelve chapters of Isaiah are largely prophecies concerning Israel and Judah. Although the two kingdoms had separated in 922 B.C., their unity as the people of God caused many of the prophets to include both. Beginning with chapter 13, the section on oracles against foreign nations is recorded. It opens with a new superscription: "The burden of Babylon, which Isaiah the son of Amoz did see" (13:1). This verse gives the impression of being a title to a section of prophecy circulated independently for a period of time. The oracles are difficult to date since they do not reflect particular historical situations.

The Burden of Babylon

Isaiah 13:1—14:23

Some scholars attribute the oracle to a later prophet since Babylon did not rise to power before the sixth century. It describes Babylon as proud and haughty, but it reveals that the day of judgement was approaching quickly when the people would become fearful and the land would be made desolate. Babylon had come to be recognized as a major foe of the people of God. The name became synonymous with tyranny and oppression and was used in the New Testament as a symbol for Rome. Babylon's dominance lasted from 626 B.C., when Nabopolassar defeated the Assyrians, until 539 B.C., when Cyrus of Persia conquered the Babylonian Empire.

An apocalyptic description of the Day of the Lord (13:2-16).—The oracle begins with a description of the Lord's army (His separated or sanctified ones) which would execute His anger (vv. 2-3). The troops were to gather on a bare hill in order that surrounding nations might see the size and strength of the Lord's people. The unusually large number of troops was gathered from many nations (vv. 4-5). A vivid description of the terror of the Day of the Lord is given in verses 6 through 16. "It shall come as a destruction from the Almighty," "every man's heart shall melt," and people "shall be in pain as a woman that travaileth" in childbirth (vv. 6-8). The land of Babylon would be made desolate, and sinners would be exterminated (v. 9). Verse 10 used apocalyptic language

Some scholars conclude that Isaiah 13--23 was a separate section of prophecy circulated independently because these chapters open with a new s _____.

(superscription)

Find that superscription in Isaiah 13:1 and write it.

(See Isaiah 13:1 and the text.)

Some scholars date the writing of the oracle against Babylon in the sixth century because B _____ did not rise to power until the s _____ century.

(Babylon, sixth)

which is found also in Matthew 24. The Medes would be agents of God in bringing about the overthrow of arrogant, proud, haughty, and ruthless Babylon (vv. 11, 17). The mention of the Medes has been used by scholars to argue that this oracle was given after 539 B.C. Much of the material is traditional in character and probably existed at a much earlier date than the time of the rise of the Medes in 550 B.C. It may have been spoken originally against Assyria by Isaiah and later adapted to apply in Babylon. On the other hand, it may have referred originally to the defeat of Babylon by Assyria in 689 B.C. and received an adaptation for the second defeat of the Babylonians by the Medes and Persians in 539 B.C. The description in chapter 14 fits the circumstances of 545 B.C.

The defeat would be so complete that scarcely a mortal man would be left in the land (v. 12). The victory of the Medes and Persians over the Babylonians was not looked upon by the prophet as the result of their strength but rather as Yahweh's expressing His fury and His burning anger (v. 13). The few men left in the land would flee from the avenger like hunted animals and be scattered like sheep without a shepherd (v. 14). The horrors of warfare are vividly described in verses 15 and 16.

The defeat of Babylon by the Medes (13:17-22).— Babylon's offering of wealth and tribute to the Median army would not stop its destructive conquests (vv. 17-19). The ferocious warriors would kill the young men of Babylon and have no pity for women and children. The once mighty Babylon would be so completely destroyed that it would be compared to Sodom and Gomorrah and would never be inhabited again (vv. 19-20). The deserted houses would become the dwelling places of owls, and the land which once was inhabited by an advanced civilization would become the habitat of wild animals (vv. 21-22).

The taunt against the king of Babylon (14:1-23).— The fall of Babylon meant that Yahweh had compassion on Israel and Judah and would restore them to their own land (v. 1). Rather than being servants and slaves to a foreign nation, the restored people would have strangers as their servants (v. 2). Those who formerly oppressed God's elect would find themselves in the reversed role of servant. The delivered people would taunt the king of Babylon who had once oppressed Israel but who would become a slave to help return Israel to her land. Israel, or the Northern Kingdom, was taken into captivity by the Assyrians in 722 B.C. Judah, or the Southern Kingdom, was taken into captivity by the Babylonians in 587 B.C. Since the Babylonians captured Judah rather than Israel, the terms Israel and the house of Jacob probably signify the covenant relationship rather than denoting the Northern Kingdom.

Underline the the names of the two armies that are mentioned as bringing about the defeat of Babylon.

1. The sanctified ones of Yahweh
2. The Assyrians
3. The Medes
4. The Romans

(1, 3)

The prophet predicted that the once mighty Babylon would be c _____ d _____.

(completely destroyed)

What did the fall of Babylon mean? _____

(Yahweh had compassion on Israel and Judah and would restore them to their own land.)

The once victorious king of Babylon would become a s _____ to help return I _____ to her land.

(slave, Israel)

The tyrant Babylon had terrorized the whole world and had been unrelenting in persecution. With the approach of Babylon's defeat, the whole earth breathed a sigh of relief (vv. 5-8). Suffering had been so intense that even nature rejoiced in the defeat of the enemy (v. 8). The one who had made himself like the Most High was actually weak and would be cast down into Sheol, the abode of the dead (v. 9). The Jews believed that at death all men would enter the shadowy regions of Sheol where they would continue to exist as shades. In Sheol, all distinction between kings and peasants would be erased; all former glory of the dead laid aside; and all political and military power lost (vv. 9-10). In addition, the comforts of wealth would be lost, and the maggots would become the bed of the king as well as of the poor. The description of a bed of maggots and worms in Sheol is used in the New Testament to describe hell.

The pride of the Babylonian king was depicted as his self-exaltation to heaven (v. 12). Isaiah used the metaphor of a falling star to describe the rapid descent of the Babylonian king from pomp to decay. The morning star shines brightly before the dawning of day but disappears quickly as the sun rises. In a similar manner, the Babylonian kings had risen to power and splendour but had retained that position only briefly before being cut down to the ground by the Medes and Persians (v. 12). Formerly defeated earthly leaders would be surprised to see the world conquerors reduced so quickly to weakness and decay in Sheol (v. 16).

Perhaps Isaiah's description of the haughty king's fall made use of a mythological story from Canaanite religion. The myth related how a minor Canaanite deity, Helal ben Shahar (Day Star, son of Dawn), sought to ascend to heaven and to sit in the assemblies of the gods in the far north and to make himself like the chief god (Most High) in the Canaanite pantheon. His self-exaltation was short-lived, and he was cast down from the heavens to the depths of Sheol.¹ The king of Babylon attempted to ascend to heaven as if he were God and to make himself like the Most High (v. 14); however, his death and the decay of his body revealed his weakness—his being cast down to Sheol. The story of Helal was only an illustration of the fall of an earthly tyrant. The Latin Vulgate, however, translated Helal (morning star) ben Shahar (son of Dawn) as Lucifer (light-bearing, morning star); and early Christian commentators (Tertullian, etc.) related the passage to Luke 10:18 which speaks of the

¹See Page H. Kelley, "Isaiah," The Broadman Bible Commentary, ed. by Clifton J. Allen, 12 vols. (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1971), 6:239, for a fuller discussion.

Define Sheol.

(Sheol is the abode of the dead.)

List three things the Jews believed about Sheol.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

(Compare your answer with the text.)

Finish reading the remainder of this page before doing the following exercise.

True or False?

The story of Helal was only an illustration of the fall of the king of Babylon. _____

The Babylonian king had exalted himself to heaven as a god and there he stayed. _____

The Babylonian king would retain his splendour and power only briefly before defeat by the Medes. _____

(Compare your answer with the text.)

fall of Satan from heaven. Jesus may have used Isaiah 14:12 as an analogy of Satan's defeat and fall by the Christ, but He was not referring to the pre-history and origin of Satan. Tertullian's interpretation was popularized by Dante's Inferno and Milton's Paradise Lost. To interpret Isaiah 14:12 as referring to the origin of Satan—the fall from heaven of an angel of light—is to revive a Canaanite myth in which Helal (a minor god of Canaan) competed with 'Elyon (the high god of Canaan).² Isaiah did not use the myth to explain the origin of demons. He simply used it as an illustration of an arrogant king who was destroyed by death like other mortals.

The king who had made the earth tremble and kingdoms shake and who had defeated cities and made the world like a desert eventually met a violent death by the sword. His death was similar to that of thousands whom he had slain in battle (vv. 17-19). Like the bodies of slain soldiers which were left unburied on the battlefield, the king's body was left to rot where it had fallen. Normally kings were buried with pomp and ceremony. Perhaps a few stones were cast over his body like the hasty burials given those slain on the battlefields. The king who trampled people underfoot in gaining fame and authority had succeeded at death in becoming the object of widespread anger and hatred for his cruel deeds. Death reduced the arrogant conqueror who tried to be God to the status of other mortals. Actually, he was less than they in the grave, or Sheol, because he had ruined the country and slain many people. His body would be trodden under foot.

The taunt song concluded with the reiteration of the threats made to Babylon (vv. 22-23).

The Downfall of Assyria and Philistia

Isaiah 14:24-32

The destruction of Assyria (14:24-27).—The preceding oracle against Babylon may have applied originally to Assyria. The message was given that the plan of the sovereign Lord to defeat Assyria in the land of Judah would be executed (vv. 24-25). Probably the oracle had reference to Sennacherib's invasion of Judah in 701 B.C. "The hand that is stretched out upon all the nations" means that Yahweh has control of the history of every nation, and His purpose cannot be thwarted (vv. 26-27). Even though Assyria had her own god (a lifeless idol), Yahweh had control of the nation's future.

The warning to Philistia (14:28-32).—This oracle was given in the year that King Ahaz died (715 B.C.; see v. 28). The Philistines had settled along

²Ibid.

Underline the experience which would reveal that the Babylonian king was no more than other men.

1. *His living as other men during battle.*
2. *His death which was similar to that of other soldiers and reduced him to the status of other mortals.*

(2)

What does "the hand that is stretched out upon the nations" mean?

(Yahweh has control of the history of every nation, and His purpose cannot be thwarted)

the southern coastal plain of Palestine in the twelfth century. Five Philistine cities had continued to be relatively strong. The Philistines were rejoicing over troubles which the Assyrian nation was experiencing. Merodach-baladan, the Babylonian leader, had revolted successfully and was able to maintain independence for more than ten years. Ahaz had opposed a coalition against the Assyrians. Perhaps his death pleased the Philistines because they anticipated that the new king would be more favourable to a coalition. The oracle was given as a message from Yahweh, warning the Philistines that defeat instead of victory lay ahead. Apparently the ruler of Ashdod, the leader of the Philistine revolt against Assyria, had sent messengers to Hezekiah to gain his support (v. 32). Isaiah did not approve of the alliance and expressed his opposition by walking bare-foot and naked through the streets of Jerusalem for three years (see 20:1-6). He believed that Assyria would return to power and the new king would be like an adder which had come forth from the serpent's root (v. 29). While the poor of Israel dwelt in safety, the remnant of Philistia would be slain (v. 30). The smoke from the north which would bring destruction to Philistia was the Assyrian host. On the other hand, Yahweh had founded Zion and would protect her against the enemy (v. 32).

The Burden of Moab

Isaiah 15:1-16:14

The historical background.—Moab was a monarchical state established on the plateau east of the Dead Sea in the thirteenth century B.C. During the twelfth and eleventh centuries B.C., she took over the area previously occupied by the Israelite tribe of Reuben on the north-eastern side of the Dead Sea. King David conquered Moab in the tenth century, but she later gained her independence. The historical situation at the time of the oracle of Moab's doom is unknown. It had been spoken at an earlier time, and the prophet warned that the predictions were about to be fulfilled (see 16:13-14). A great and terrible disaster was about to fall on Moab, desolating the country and forcing the inhabitants to flee. The entire land was to be afflicted. It may be that Isaiah adapted an earlier oracle and made it apply to the destruction of Moab by the Assyrians under Sargon in 715 B.C.

The funeral lament for Moab (15:1-9).—The funeral dirge has historical value because it names several Moabite towns. Ar, a fortified city lying south of the Arnon River, was overthrown in a night (v. 1). After the same experience came to Kir, word spread to Dibon, the site where the Moabite Stone was discovered in A.D. 1868. The people climbed to high places and house-tops to weep, and they expressed their grief by shaving their heads and their beards and by putting on sackcloth (vv. 2-3). The suffering would become so great that even the armed men would join in the grief and despair (v. 4). Fugitives would flee

Underline the correct word or words.

The Philistines rejoiced in the success of the Babylonian revolt and (tried, did not try) to enlist Ahaz in a coalition against (Moab, Assyria). Isaiah warned that the new Assyrian king (would not, would) return to power and (would not, would) slay the remnant of Philistia.

(tried, Assyria, would, would)

List three historical facts about Moab.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

(Compare your answers with the text.)

List 5 statements that describe the suffering of Moab.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

(Compare your answer with the text.)

to Zoar, near the southern end of the Dead Sea, and to other areas (v. 5). Fugitives would crowd the roads to escape from the land which would become so desolate that there would be "no green thing" (vv. 6-7). The water of the brooks would dry up and the waterways would run with blood (vv. 7-9).

Moab's quest for refuge (16:1-14).—The fugitives would seek safety in the protection of the house of David, and they would send tokens of their submission to Jerusalem (vv. 1-4). The request would be either for admission into Judah or into Edom which was controlled at that time by Judah. The Moabite diplomats would flatter the king of Judah with references to his faithfulness and righteousness (vv. 4-5). Flattery would fail to gain the approval of the Judaeen king, and Moab's plea would be rejected. Her sincerity would be doubted because of her past pride (vv. 6-7). Since raisin-cakes of Kir-hareseth were used in religious festivals, the implication is that the gods of Moab would be unable to deliver the land from the enemy (v. 7). The invasion of the land would leave Moab desolate.

A dirge, which describes the destruction of the vineyards and the fields, is given in verses 8 through 11. It pictures ruin everywhere and the land without gladness and joy. The tragic situation was caused by Moab's idolatry (v. 12). Verses 13 and 14 identify the lament as the word which the Lord had spoken previously and warned that destruction would come quickly again in three years.

The Burden of Damascus and Israel

Isaiah 17:1-11

An oracle concerning Damascus (17:1-6).—These verses prophesy of the destruction of Damascus in the near future. The background is probably the Syro-Ephraimitic alliance against Judah in 735-734 B.C. Isaiah declared that Damascus would cease to exist and the fortified cities of Ephraim would disappear (vv. 1-3). A remnant would survive in both Syria and Ephraim, but the survivors would be brought low by famine and poverty (vv. 4-6).

The futility of idolatry (17:7-11).—Famine and poverty would show the people that they were in need of Yahweh's provisions. The Israelites were reminded that their condition was the result of turning to idols rather than trusting in their Maker (vv. 7-8). Their hardships would teach them to look no longer to the gods which they had made with their own hands. The worship of Asherim was widespread in Canaan. She was a Canaanite mother-goddess who was the mistress of El and the mother of seventy gods, including Baal. Asherim was represented by wooden posts erected beside altars. The male deities were represented by stone pillars.

The destruction of the vineyards and the fields in Moab was caused by M _____
i _____.

(Moab's, idolatry)

Israel turned to the worship of idols Asherim, Baal, Tammuz instead of Yahweh. From the list below underline the results of that idol worship.

1. a closer fellowship with Yahweh
2. famine
3. removal from the land
4. a desire by the rich to help the poor
5. poverty

(2, 3, 5)

The Hivites and the Amorites inhabited the land of Canaan before Israelite occupation. Since Judah had adopted the Canaanite religion, the prophet predicted that the Israelites would leave the land desolate like the Hivites and Amorites before them (v. 9). The ritual of worshipping the Babylonian vegetation god Tammuz involved the planting of fast-growing seeds in pots or baskets to represent resurrection from death after the winter season. Those who planted the seeds believed that their germination would bring to life the dead god of vegetation. The tender plants could not survive adverse conditions and would wither away. The frailty of the plants represented the frailty of a religion based on an idol, in contrast to the God of Israel who is the rock of refuge and salvation (vv. 10-11).

Oracles Against Unnamed Nations

Isaiah 17:12-18:7

The defeat of a strong nation (17:12-14).—The strength of an unnamed people of a hostile nation is symbolized by the roaring of a sea (vv. 12-13). The historical background to the passage appears to be an attack on Judah by the Assyrian army. The strong people would be rebuked by Yahweh and would become like chaff blown about in the whirling wind before the storm. Before darkness, the assembled armies would appear to be terrifying, but the next morning they would be seen no more (v. 14).

Envoys from the nation beyond Cush (18:1-7).—

An unnamed nation beyond the rivers of Cush (Ethiopia) sent envoys to Hezekiah for the purpose of drawing him into an alliance against Assyria (vv. 1-2). The envoys represented the twenty-fifth dynasty of Egypt (an Ethiopian dynasty) which seized power in 715 B.C. and ruled until its defeat when the Assyrians overran Egypt and destroyed the capital city of Phebes in 663 B.C. The Ethiopians are described as a conquering people who were greatly feared. Perhaps they had just completed the conquest of Egypt when the oracle was written. Regardless of the Ethiopians' military prowess, only the Lord could bring about the overthrow of Assyria. When Yahweh, who holds the destiny of nations in His hands, gives a signal on the mountains and blows a trumpet, all nations should listen carefully. Premature efforts by Judah and Egypt to overthrow Assyria would be fatal. When Yahweh arose to bring judgement against His foes, they would be like shoots cut off with pruning hooks (v. 5). When God brought about the defeat of the Assyrians, the Ethiopians would recognize and fear Him (v. 7).

The Burden of Egypt

Isaiah 19:1-25

Egypt's doom (19:1-15).—The historical circumstances of the message are uncertain. Egypt was corrupted by idolatry and was in civil war (vv. 1-2). In the midst of the confusion, the people resorted to

Who was Tammuz?

(the Babylonian vegetation god)

In as few words as possible explain the meaning of Isaiah 17:12-14.

(Compare your answer with the text.)

Only the L _____ could bring about the overthrow of A _____, and efforts by J _____ and E _____ would be fatal.

(Lord, Assyria, Judah, Egypt)

idols and spiritual media (v. 3). The strife had demoralized the people, perhaps permitting the Ethiopians to seize the throne (v. 4). Egypt was to be delivered into the hands of a hard master and to be ruled by a fierce king. This Scripture may refer to the conquest of Egypt by the Ethiopian Piankhi in 714 B.C. The second burden to Egypt would come with the drying up of the Nile River (v. 5). The life of Egypt was dependent on the waters of the Nile, without which the nation would have become only a part of the Sahara Desert. The river provided fish and irrigation waters for the farms (vv. 8-9). A third predicted burden would be political confusion. The wise men would give foolish counsel (v. 11). Their unwise counsel would lead Egypt astray and bring about instability which was compared to the staggering of a drunken man (v. 14). Although the Egyptian wise men resorted to spiritual media, they were unable to learn Yahweh's plans concerning their country. Without discerning the divine plan, the country was left in confusion.

Complete the following sentence.

Three burdens predicted for Egypt were-

(Compare your answer with the text.)

Egypt's recognition of Yahweh (19:16-25).—The Egyptians would realize eventually that the source of their trouble was Yahweh, Judah's God, against whom their own gods or idols had no power (vv. 16-17). The verses seem to recall the plagues sent upon Egypt and the release of the slaves after the first-born were taken. The Egyptians would realize that their own gods were helpless before Israel's mighty God. Some of the Egyptians would recognize the power of Yahweh, resulting in the conversion of five cities (vv. 18-19). The relief from suffering would come to Egypt only when she acknowledged Yahweh and called upon Him for deliverance (v. 20). The Egyptians would begin to worship with sacrifices and burnt offerings. In addition, the Assyrians would begin to worship Israel's God, and peace would be established between the two empires (v. 23). Israel would share in the peace and common worship, and allegiance to Yahweh would enable all nationalities to unite in one brotherhood (vv. 23-25). These verses say that people of Egypt and Assyria would take their places alongside the Israelites as God's people.

The Egyptians would begin to worship with sacrifices and b _____ o _____ to acknowledge Y _____. The A _____ would also begin to worship I _____ God, and p _____ would be established between the two empires.

(burnt, offerings, Yahweh, Assyrians, Israel Israel's peace)

Prophetic Symbolism

Isaiah 20:1-6

The people of Ashdod, a Philistine city, joined the Ethiopian rulers of Egypt in a revolt against Assyria in 714 B.C. (see v. 1). Assyrian forces were sent against the rebellious city, and Isaiah was instructed to symbolize the crushing of the revolt and the captivity of the rebelling nations. Isaiah was told to walk "naked and barefoot three years for a sign and wonder [token] upon Egypt and upon Ethiopia" (v. 3). Isaiah's removal of his outer garment and his sandals, leaving him half-clad, symbolized captivity which would be the fate of Egypt and those who trusted in her. The revolt would last for three years (714—711 B.C.) before the victorious Assyrians would lay siege to Ashdod.

Rewrite the following statement to make it true.

Isaiah's removal of his outer garment and his sandals, leaving him half-clad, symbolized the peace which would be the fate of Egypt and those who trusted her.

(Compare your answer with the text.)

Isaiah's symbolic action probably was a protest against the Egyptianizing party in Jerusalem.

The Burden of Babylon, Edom, and Arabia

Isaiah 21:1-17

The vision of Babylon's downfall (21:1-10). —

The prophet described a "stern vision" which rushed upon him like a whirlwind from the desert in the Negeb (South Country desert storm; v. 1). The burning wind from the desert was destructive. Although the prophet claimed that the meaning of the vision was made known to him, he did not explain it fully. He only said, "The treacherous dealer dealt treacherously, and the spoiler spoileth" (v. 2). Recent scholars have suggested that the vision may have referred to the revolt of Babylon against Sennacherib in 691—689 B.C. The Medes and the Edomites, who are mentioned in verse 2, may have aided the Babylonians at that time. Assyria was the nation Judah hoped would be defeated; however, Isaiah prophesied the terrible fall of Babylon to Sennacherib. The prophecy that Babylon would fall was a bitter message for the Jews. The Assyrians had caused people taken into captivity to sigh, and their defeat would have been greatly welcomed (v. 2). However, the prophet's vision caused his body to be seized with pain, and his spirit was dismayed because Assyria, as the oppressor, was not defeated (v. 3). His and the people's hope was turned into trembling (v. 4). A victory banquet celebrating the downfall of Assyria had been prepared already, and watchmen had been sent to receive the news of the outcome of the battle (vv. 5-6). When the horsemen arrived from the battlefield, their message was not that the destroyer is destroyed but rather that the destroyer continues to destroy (see v. 2). The prophet himself was the watchman who stayed at his post day and night until the horsemen arrived (vv. 8-9). The message he received was that Babylon had been defeated and the images of her gods had been broken; that is, the gods had been unable to give Babylon victory (v. 9). Some scholars believe that the vision may have referred to the fall of Babylon at the hands of the Medes and Persians in 539 B.C. (v. 9). The shattering of Babylon's idols implies that Yahweh had gained victory over the pagan nation. Perhaps the vision related originally to Assyria but was applied later to Babylon as well.

The danger to Edom (21:11-12).—Arabia, the area east and southeast of Palestine including Dumah, Dedan, Tema, and Kedar, was endangered apparently by an Assyrian attempt to gain control of the trade routes of central Arabia. An inquiry came to the watchman (the prophet) concerning the hour of darkness (the duration of the danger yet to be faced; v. 11). The watchman revealed that the danger would be relaxed for a brief period, but another crisis would follow quickly (v. 12).

True or False?

1. *Babylon revolted against Assyria in 691. _____*
2. *The Jews did not want Babylon to defeat Assyria. _____*
3. *The Assyrians suppressed the Jews. _____*
4. *Assyria's victory brought pain and dismay. _____*

(1. True, 2. False, 3. True, 4. True)

In as few words as possible explain Isaiah 21:11-12.

(Compare your answer to the text.)

The doom of Dedan and Kedar (21:13-17).—The Dedanites were nomadic traders who occupied the Arabian desert about 250 miles southeast of the Dead Sea. An invasion of their territory forced them to flee from their oasis settlement and to take refuge in the desert (vv. 14-15). Tema was an important caravan station located about fifty miles northeast of Dedan on the road to Damascus. The inhabitants of this station were instructed to take bread and water to the fugitive Dedanites (v. 14). Kedar, a desert tribe near Dedan and Tema, was informed that its destruction would come within a year (see vv. 16-17).

The Burden of the Valley of Vision

Isaiah 22:1-14

The despair of the prophet (22:1-4).—Apparently the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem had been lifted (perhaps 701 B.C.), and the people had gone to the house-tops to celebrate (v. 1). The prophet rebuked them for their conduct during the siege and for their celebrating victory as if they had won the battle (vv. 2-3). Actually, Yahweh had caused the withdrawal of the Assyrians by sending a plague which devastated their troops. Judaeans who had been slain during the battle were not victims of combat but had been captured while trying to escape and put to death as prisoners. Even the rulers were guilty of forsaking their posts and fleeing. The victory had not come as a result of the army's courage and sacrifice, yet the celebration implied such. The siege and withdrawal of the Assyrians had not caused the people of Jerusalem to recognize their need for repentance and righteous living. Since they failed to repent, the prophet recognized that destruction would come to the "daughter of my people" (v. 4). The weaknesses of the city were evident, but the people did not turn to Yahweh. Yahweh planned the siege for the purpose of bringing about repentance, but the danger did not cause the people to depend on God.

Destruction in the Day of the Lord (22:5-14).—

Isaiah reminded the people that the dangers and the losses were mild compared to the suffering and loss in the Day of the Lord (v. 5). The Assyrian siege had brought tumult, trampling, and confusion. The future Day of the Lord would be a time of discomfiture. In the day of Sennacherib, the surrounding outposts had been defeated and the chariots stood in the valleys around Jerusalem (vv. 6-8). Even in the hour of desperation, the people did not look to Yahweh but sought to repair the breeches in the walls of the city of Jerusalem (v. 9). They broke down the houses of Jerusalem to fortify the walls and attempted to secure the water supply of the old pool, but they did not look to Yahweh (vv. 10-11). The prophet called upon the people to mourn and to repent, but they responded with merry-making, feasting, and drinking (vv. 12-13). The prophet warned that Yahweh would not forgive their frivolous and sinful celebration (v. 14).

What was Tema to do for the fugitive Dedanites?

(The people of Tema were to take bread and water to the fugitive Dedanites.)

Underline the correct word or words.

The people celebrated the withdrawal of Assyrian troops as if they (had not, had) won the battle. The troops and leaders (had been, had not been) guilty of fleeing. God (had, had not) caused the Assyrian troops to withdraw.

(had, had been, had)

Rewrite the following statement to make it true.

Isaiah reminded the people that the dangers and the losses were greater than they would be in the Day of the Lord.

(Compare your answer with the text.)

The Condemnation of Shebna

Isaiah 22:15-25

Shebna was the steward of the royal household, a position equivalent to prime minister. The offence of Shebna is not clear. He may have been carving a tomb among those of the nobility, indicating that he was ambitious to gain position for himself (v. 16). It is also possible that he misused his office. Perhaps his spirit of arrogance and vainglory and his support of the pro-Egyptian party in Jerusalem caused him to come under the fire of the prophet. He was denounced as a political opportunist. Isaiah revealed that he would meet death in the open country, and Eliakim would replace him in the office (vv. 17-20). According to Isaiah 36:3 and 37:2, the prophecy was only partially fulfilled. Eliakim did replace Shebna, but Shebna continued to occupy the subordinate position of "scribe" or secretary of state. Verse 22 may give a background to Jesus' giving Peter the keys of the Kingdom (see Matt. 16:19). Peter who confessed Jesus as Messiah was representative of the stones that make up the building which was used as an analogy of God's Kingdom. Those who professed faith in Jesus as the Messiah would be made stewards and entrusted with the gospel of the Kingdom.

Although Eliakim was chosen to receive the uniform and authority of Shebna, he would fail to use the authority bestowed upon him with integrity and would fall from his position (vv. 24-25). His descent from power was described to be like a peg which has too much weight placed on it. Perhaps his fall came as a result of his placing too many family members in important positions (v. 24).

The Burden of Tyre and Sidon

Isaiah 23:1-18

The defeat of Tyre and Sidon (23:1-12).—The inhabitants of Phoenicia were the descendants of the old Canaanites who established world fame as merchants. The chief city Tyre boasted of a great fleet of trading vessels, "the ships of Tarshish" (v. 1). Phoenician trade and colonization extended as far as Spain and Sardinia. Tyre was involved in a general revolt against Sennacherib. When the city was besieged, the king fled to Cyprus. The "ships of Tarshish" were called on to mourn the destruction of Tyre. They received word of its destruction when they stopped at Cyprus on their homeward journey (v. 1). The commercial enterprises of Sidon extended to many countries (vv. 2-4). Since so many of the Sidonians lived on the sea, it is depicted as their mother (v. 4). The defeat of these people is described as their never having been born. The news of their defeat would bring Egypt to despair because of the trade relations of the two people (v. 5). The despairing news would pass quickly over to Tarshish and Cyprus and would cause sorrow (vv. 6ff.).

In your own words compare Isaiah 22:22 and Matthew 16:19.

Rewrite the following statement to make it correct.

The defeat of Sidon brought joy to Egypt because of the trade relations of the two nations.

(Compare your answer with the text.)

Isaiah faced the question of why the ancient city of Tyre would be brought to defeat. He discovered that Yahweh had purposed it because of Tyre's pride (v. 9). Isaiah's God was not limited to one country but could extend His hand of judgement over the seas and shake kingdoms in distant places (v. 11). Even though the merchants escaped from the fallen city, God would be able to bring judgement upon them in distant lands (v. 12).

Tyre's restoration (23:13-18).—Verse 13 speaks of the Babylonians and is difficult to relate to the previous section which appears to have referred to the Assyrians. Perhaps it is a transitional verse which was added later to apply the oracle to the time of the Babylonian Empire. Verse 13 identifies Babylon rather than Assyria as the power which would be used by Yahweh to bring punishment upon Tyre. After the laying waste of Tyre and her desolation for seventy years (the days of one king), Tyre would be permitted to return to her trade (v. 15). The merchants were compared to forgotten harlots who attempt to regain their old customers by singing songs that they remember (v. 16). The emphasis was not on the immorality of the merchants but rather on their mercenary interests (vv. 17-18). Since Yahweh permitted them to return to their commerce, they would recognize Him and use their hire to supply food and clothing for those who served the Lord (v. 18).

In Isaiah 23:17-18 the emphasis is not on the i _____ of the merchants but rather on their mercenary interests.

They would r _____ y _____ had permitted them to return to their c _____ and would s _____ Him.

(immorality, recognize, Yahweh, commerce, serve)

Home Study Exercise

Basic activity (Levels 1, 2, and 3)

After reading Isaiah 13:1–23:18 and the study guide text, answer the following questions.

1. Why do some scholars conclude that Isaiah 13–23 was a separate section of prophecy circulated independently and that the oracle against Babylon should be dated in the sixth century? _____

2. Name two armies that are mentioned as bringing about Babylon's defeat. _____

3. What did the prophet predict concerning the fate of Babylon and her king? _____

4. What did the Jews believe about Sheol? _____

5. Interpret Isaiah 14:12-15. _____

6. What experience would reveal that the king of Babylon was no more than any other man? _____

7. What warning did Isaiah give to Philistia? _____

8. Give four statements that describe the anticipated suffering of Moab. _____

9. What did Isaiah interpret to be the cause of Israel's famine, poverty, and removal from the land? _____

10. Why did Isaiah oppose an alliance with Egypt against Assyria? _____

11. What three burdens were predicted for Egypt? _____

12. What method did Isaiah use to predict Ashdod's defeat? _____

13. Interpret Isaiah 21:2-3. _____

14. Why did Isaiah rebuke Judah in 22:1-3? _____

15. What light does Isaiah 22:22 give to Matthew 16:19? _____

16. Why would the defeat of Sidon bring despair to Egypt? _____

17. Interpret Isaiah 23:17-18. _____

Supplementary activity (Levels 2 and 3)

Read pages 52-64 in The Book of Isaiah, by Wright, and answer the following questions.

1. What is the meaning of oracle?

2. Who is "Lucifer, son of the morning"?
3. Why did Isaiah oppose an Ethiopian alliance?
4. What are the "ships of Tarshish"?

Advanced activity (Level 3)

1. Interpret Isaiah 14:12-15 and relate its message to the New Testament.
2. Explain why Isaiah included foreign nations in his prophecies.
3. What did Isaiah understand to be "the Day of the Lord"?

Seminar Discussion

1. Describe Isaiah's concept of Yahweh as reflected in these chapters.
2. Did Isaiah 13:6-13 influence Matthew 24:29-31? What doctrine is set forth in both?
3. Matthew 24:14 speaks of the gospel preached in all the world before the end comes. Are there any evidences that Isaiah 13-23 influenced the concepts of missions and the "Day of the Lord" in the mind of Jesus?
4. Was Jesus' reference to Satan's fall from heaven in Luke 10:18 based on Isaiah 14:12?
5. According to Isaiah, what would be the cause of Israel's famine, poverty, and captivity?