

## ISAIAH: JUDGMENT AND HOPE

### 15. Isaiah 14

#### The Oracle Concerning Babylon.

Tonight is our 15<sup>th</sup> installment in our study through the Book of Isaiah where we pick up in Chapter 14.

**Isaiah 13** opened with the words: *The oracle concerning Babylon which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw*. Beginning with those words we enter a section of Isaiah that is **eleven chapters long** that contains a series of prophecies that are deal with a long list of nations —

Babylon – Assyria  
Philistia – Moab  
Syria – Ethiopia  
Egypt – Edom  
Arabia – Tyre

All of that is followed by four chapters dealing with God’s judgment on the whole world and the establishing of His Kingdom.

Each of these prophecies begin with *“The oracle concerning...”* The word *oracle* is from a verb that means *to lift up*. So it can mean *to carry* or *to lift up the voice*.<sup>1</sup> The NKJV translates it as *“the burden concerning.”* Isaiah uses this word to introduce each of these messages because they are *heavy* in the sense of its importance; heavy in the sense that they are foretelling events that produces sorrow or grief.

**In our last study** we learned that we can only understand the prophetic books of the Old Testament in light of **the redemptive narrative** of the Old Testament — which is tied to God’s covenant with a man named Abraham — and his descendants that would come to be known as Israel. We understand the prophetic books in light of the story of God’s Covenant relationship with Abraham (and Abraham’s descendants).

**We also learned that** these oracles show that YHWH controls and governs not just Israel but the entire world. He is sovereign over all nations. YHWH alone defines what is right and wrong. YHWH alone makes future plans that shall certainly come to pass.

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<sup>1</sup> Guzik, D. (2000). *Isaiah* (I s 13:1). Santa Barbara, CA: David Guzik.

**QUOTE: Peter Gentry** — *No one and no nation can challenge his right, spurn his will, or thwart his actions.*<sup>2</sup>

**THAT IS WHAT** God wanted His people to understand in the day of Isaiah as the events and the superpowers of that rolled across the stage of history

**THAT IS WHAT** God wants you and me to understand as we watch the events and the superpowers of our day roll across the stage of history.

**Isaiah 13-14** deal almost entirely with Babylon. **We noted that** at the time of this prophecy, Babylon was a significant nation — an emerging superpower. But the Assyrian Empire was still the superpower. In these two chapters we see that YHWH knows the end from the beginning! He is speaking of His judgment on the pride of Babylon a hundred years before the judgment comes.

**We also said noted that** this prophecy was probably never published in Babylon. It wasn't given as a warning to them. This oracle concerning Babylon was given to **help the people of God**. The oracle against Babylon reveals that God is just — It was not just the Israelites that were going to be judged for their covenant failure. He will also judge the wicked nations around them.

**Isaiah 13** closed with these words concerning Babylon

**Isaiah 13:17–22)** 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 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. <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 will dwell, and there wild goats will dance. <sup>22</sup>Hyenas will cry in its towers, and jackals in the pleasant palaces; its time is close at hand and its days will not be prolonged.

**THAT** is HEAVY — hence, *the burden of the Lord concerning/against Babylon*.

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<sup>2</sup> Peter J. Gentry “How to Read and Understand the Biblical Prophets”

**THREE BIG THINGS** for us to remember here

**FIRST** — God was telling Judah and Jerusalem what was going to happen to Babylon in a hundred years because at the moment of Isaiah's prophecy they were looking towards Babylon for geopolitical help rather than looking to the faithfulness and steadfast love of the Covenant keeping God of Abraham. YHWH is pretty much asking the question: *Why would you do that?*

**<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.**

Babylon would become FAMOUS for its glory. The hanging gardens of Babylon was known as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. But you and I have never seen it, have we? That's because it doesn't exist anymore! But Hezekiah was impressed by the growing glory of Babylon. YHWH wanted Hezekiah (and all of Judah and Jerusalem) to know that when the dust settles YHWH is the only One left standing.

Life in 21<sup>st</sup> century western culture does a pretty amazing job at masking that reality. Modern medicine and morgues keep death and disease out of our every day life. If you were living in the time of Isaiah and your father died, he would lay in your house until he was buried. It's easy for us to live without a pressing sense of mortality. Couple that with how we are, by and large, terrible students of history we tend to think that our glorious civilization is never going to end — when in reality kingdoms have come and gone. We need to live like those we read about in the book of Hebrews

*Hebrews 11:14; 16 For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland... <sup>16</sup>But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.*

**SECOND** — It's so important to remember that at the moment of this oracle the utter desolation of Babylon is **yet** WAY down the line. It wouldn't be until after God used Babylon as His instrument of judgment against Judah that God would judge Babylon for its idolatry and arrogance. Cyrus the Great would make his stunning conquest of Babylon in 539 B.C. — but Cyrus didn't level the city when he conquered it. Babylon didn't become desolate until the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.

THAT is a LONG time. But Isaiah speaks of it as a CERTAINTY! He speaks of its INEVITABILITY!

***2 Peter 3:8** But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.*

We must never confuse God's patience with indifference. Sometimes we think that God is indifferent to wickedness because we don't see Him acting immediately to judge it. We need to understand that there's a HUGE difference between indifference and patience. Here's the difference: Patience ends.

***2 Peter 3:9 (NIV)** The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.*

**THIRD** — We also noted that this is a yet future fulfillment of this oracle. There is coming a day when the “world system” in opposition to God will cease to exist.

**CHAPTER 14** begins with the word **For** — which means the Lord is going to lay out THE REASON for the judgment upon Babylon.

**<sup>1</sup>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.**

God promises — that judgment is going to come upon Judah and DISPLACE them **from** the land promised to Abraham and PLACE them **into** Babylon a foreign land of idols. Through the prophet Jeremiah — He said that they would be displaced for 70 years.

***Jeremiah 29:10** “For thus says the Lord: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place.*

While living in captivity in Babylon the prophet Daniel came across that prophecy of Jeremiah and it drove him to his knees to seek God because Daniel understood that those 70 years were coming to a close.

***Daniel 9:2–3** in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, perceived in the books the number of years that, according to the word of the Lord to Jeremiah the prophet, must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years. <sup>3</sup>Then I*

*turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes.*

As we'll see later in Isaiah God is going to raise up the Persian king Cyrus who will conquer Babylon. That change of power led to a change of policy concerning the Jews in captivity. Cyrus gave the remnant of the Jews in captivity permission to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple.

THAT is what Isaiah is looking forward to here. YHWH's judgment against Babylon would make the way for the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to return to the land of promise.

**and sojourners will join them and will attach themselves to the house of Jacob.**

THIS IS HUGE — This is a recurring theme throughout the book of Isaiah telling us that God is going to do something for Israel that is NOT just for Israel. In His covenant with Abraham God promised that Israel would be a blessing to all peoples. These sojourners joining themselves to Israel are the precursor of God rescuing men and women from every tribe, people language and nation.

**<sup>2</sup>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. They will take captive those who were their captors, and rule over those who oppressed them.**

The fulfillment of **verse 1** is about 500 years before the birth of Jesus. But from that point Israel lives under the thumb of Persia; then the Persian empire would fall to Greece which would dominate that region; then after that the region would be under the thumb of a violent man named Antiochus Epiphanes. That was a time of tremendous persecution of the Jews IN the land. By the way, Hanukkah is the celebration of how God delivered the Jews from his brutal and oppressive rule. Then Rome comes on the scene as the dominant world empire. So, by the time we get to Jesus, we don't see Israel positioned as the top power in the region with people from the nations serving them in the land. We find them on the bottom. That's why we find Roman centurions in the Gospel. They're not on leave taking vacation in Judea — they're on duty guarding land that belongs to Rome. Any Roman soldier could walk up to any Jew, tap them on the shoulder with their sword and demand that the Jew carry his heavy military gear for a mile. That's why Jesus would say to His disciples in the Sermon on the Mount

*Matthew 5:42 And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.*

So WHAT is verse two talking about? WHEN is verse 2 happening. It appears it is talking of something that is YET FUTURE from where we sit tonight. Isaiah has already said that

*Isaiah 2:2–3 It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, <sup>3</sup>and many peoples shall come, and say: “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.” For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.*

AGAIN — think of what the Jews are doing at the moment Isaiah is pronouncing this oracle against Babylon! Isaiah pronounces something that is way down the pipe of History to show them how foolish and absurd their present choices were concerning their relationship with YHWH! Isaiah is talking about a time when the world will flock to Jerusalem to know God — but right now you are flocking to THEIR gods! Isaiah says — THIS is the direction of YHWH’s plans and purposes — and you’re headed in the opposite direction. They were heading towards judgment because they were neglecting God’s plan! Nothing has changed in 2 ½ millennia. Men and women are headed for trouble because they aren’t interested in God and His plan. THAT is happening in the lives of individuals who claim faith in the name of Jesus. THAT is happening in marriages where husbands and wives claim faith in the name of Jesus. That was a huge take away from Paul Tripp’s first session on the subject of marriage. God’s plan for the husband and wife in marriage is greater than their marriage. It is holiness — not happiness.

What we learn here is that God has a plan, not just for Israel — He has a plan for Babylon — Assyria — Philistia — Moab — Syria — Ethiopia — Egypt — Edom — Arabia — Tyre. He is involved in the history of the nations. He is driving His plans for the nations through the descendants of Abraham to bring the SAVIOR OF THE WORLD into the world making a way for men and women of all nations to be reconciled to God and become citizens in His forever Kingdom. If THAT is where God is driving HIS mission — Why would we want to drive in the opposite direction?

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

What follows is a song. And the genre of the song is a “lament.” I’m certainly no scholar on Hebrew literary forms — I’m just sharing with you from the rich resources available for us in the study of the Bible. Hebrew “laments” have a structure called “limping couplets.” The first line is normal — the following is shorter — creating a cadence that has the feel of someone walking with a limp.

When we read it is clearly not a lament — it’s a satire. Think of a pop tune with sad lyrics (Pumped Up Kicks is a dark song about a teenager who wants to shoot all the cool kids at school — but it is put to a super poppy melody).

Isaiah’s message here is the exact opposite of a lament — it’s a *taunt* framed in the genre of a lament. It’s written in the form of a lament, but it is GREAT good news for Israel. It’s talks about those who were once conquered and held captive erupting into rejoicing

**“How the oppressor has ceased, the insolent fury ceased! <sup>5</sup>The Lord has broken the staff of the wicked, the scepter of rulers, <sup>6</sup>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.**

AGAIN — This has a near fulfillment — but it also looks forward to a yet distant fulfillment

*Revelation 11:15–18* <sup>5</sup>Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.” <sup>16</sup>And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God, <sup>17</sup>saying, “We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign. <sup>18</sup>The nations raged, but your wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, and for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear your name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth.”

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

This lyric was rooted in the reality of the natural resources involved for a nation to conquer the then known world. For a nation to cut down nations they had to

cut down forests. The forests were rejoicing because there was no one to cut them down anymore.

**<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.**

This is describing the events following the death of the ruler of Babylon. All the kings he had killed stand up to greet him as he enters into the place of the dead.

Check out what they say to him! They essentially say — YOU TOO!?

**<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.**

There is not a man — mighty or weak — rich or poor — who escapes death.

As we move into verse 12 we move from the horizontal to the vertical.

**<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>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.**

The leaders of the church in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries unanimously took the position that this was not talking about the king of Babylon — this is more than a king who wanted to conquer the world — this is a one who wants to be worshipped as God, Himself. Those leaders of the early church said that this certainly is clearly talking about the devil himself. In fact. The name “Lucifer” is Latin for “Morning Star.”

In the Old Testament “stars” is a way the Scriptures speak of angels. In the celestial realm the “morning star” is the most significant star — the last and brightest star we see in the night sky before the dawn.

Luke at Luke 10.



*Luke 10:17–18* The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!” <sup>18</sup>And he said to them, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.

That seems much like what Isaiah is saying here. IN fact — when we get to the last book of the Bible in **Revelation 12**, we see something that looks like what Isaiah is describing. (Bear in mind that scholars differ on the chronology of this event — Is it distant past? Is it in the recent past at the time of the book of Revelation was written? Is it yet future?)

*Revelation 12:7–9* Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, <sup>8</sup>but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. <sup>9</sup>And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

So when the church fathers looked at the way Jesus described the fall of Satan in Luke 10; when they looked at the dragon in Revelation 12; when they looked at this passage in Isaiah 14 as well as the passage in Ezekiel 14 (the prince of Tyre) they formulated an understanding that all of these are speaking about the figure that shows up at the very beginning of the Bible. God creates the earth, all the creatures on the earth, Adam, and Eve from Adam — and suddenly there appears this serpent who is described as the wisest of all the creatures — the same one referenced in **Revelation 12** (that ancient serpent, the deceiver of the whole world who is called ‘the devil’).

The believe that the one speaking here in verses 13-14 — *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>14</sup>I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High*’ is one of God’s highest ranking angelic beings. Those words are in perfect alignment with the lie of lies that the serpent used to deceive our first parents: *You don’t have to be beneath God! You can take the place of God!* Later in church history the heavy weight reforms (Calvin, Luther) said, “No, Isaiah is only talking about the king of Babylon.

I believe it is not an either/or — I believe it is a both/and. I lean into the early church fathers simply because some of them were disciplined by the disciples of Jesus. I also believe that at the LEAST Isaiah is talking about Satanic inspiration

in the arrogance of the ruler of Babylon — the arrogance that seems standard fare among earthly rulers.

We need to understand the world around us in light of the fact that Satan is waging war against the worship of the True and Living God. He is constantly at work in the hearts of men and women to align themselves against God in that battle.

*<sup>15</sup>You said in your heart.... I will make myself like the Most High.'*

**Verse 16** moves us back into the horizontal / the earthly realm.

*<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, <sup>17</sup>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>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.*

Look at **Job 20**

*Job 20:4–7 Do you not know this from of old, since man was placed on earth, <sup>5</sup>that the exulting of the wicked is short, and the joy of the godless but for a moment? <sup>6</sup>Though his height mount up to the heavens, and his head reach to the clouds, <sup>7</sup>he will perish forever like his own dung; those who have seen him will say, 'Where is he?'*

**Let's not miss the forest for the trees** — Whether this is talking about Satan or the kingdoms of the world or human hearts in general — we **MUST NOT MISS** the primacy of pride in our fallen world the affront it is to the living God because it claims independence from Him. It places man at the center. It positions self as ultimate in the place of God! It supplants God and places self as most high.

*<sup>20</sup>You will not be joined with them in burial, because you have destroyed your land, you have slain your people. "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."*

*<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, and pools of water, and I will sweep it with the broom of destruction,” declares the Lord of hosts.

NOTICE THE CONTRAST — God has promised to bring judgment on Judah and Jerusalem because they are no better than Babylon. He’s already brought judgment on the Northern Kingdom because they were no better than the Assyrians.

BUT HERE — God says that he will leave NO REMNANT in Babylon. Babylon will be left to hedgehogs — but he promises a future and a hope for Jerusalem. That is NOT because of the righteousness of His people but because of His longstanding plan concerning Israel; that through them He would bring into the world the One who would redeem not just Israel — but the whole world. The same longstanding plan that he spoke of back in **Isaiah 7** concerning *Emmanuel* — *God with us*. The same longstanding plan He spoke of in **Isaiah 9** concerning the *child born, the son given*.

In **verse 24** God now shifts from Babylon to the Assyrian empire. Again — at the time Isaiah is giving this *oracle against Babylon*, Assyria is the one flexing their muscles in the world scene.

<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?

In **verse 28** Isaiah begins the oracle against Philistia.

<sup>28</sup>In the year that King Ahaz died came this oracle:

<sup>29</sup>Rejoice not, O Philistia, all of you, that the rod that struck you is broken, for from the serpent’s root will come forth an adder, and its fruit will be a flying fiery serpent. <sup>30</sup>And the firstborn of the poor will graze, and the needy lie down in safety; but I will kill your root with famine, and your remnant it will slay. <sup>31</sup>Wail, O gate; cry out, O city; melt in fear, O Philistia, all of you! For smoke comes out of the north, and there is no straggler in his ranks.

<sup>32</sup>What will one answer the messengers of the nation? “The Lord has founded Zion, and in her the afflicted of his people find