

Isaiah Lesson 8 Articles

God musters His army (Isa. 13:1–5, 17–18). God is sovereign. He is able to call any army He desires, to accomplish any task He assigns. He can summon them with a whistle (7:18), or by using leaders to raise a banner, shout, and beckon to the soldiers (13:2). In this case, God is mustering the army of the Medes (v. 17; 21:2); and He calls them “My sanctified ones.” Even though they did not believe in Jehovah God, the Medes were set apart by God to do His holy work.

God punishes His enemies (Isa. 13:6–22). The city of Babylon was completely destroyed in 689 B.C. by Sennacherib and the Assyrian army, but it was rebuilt by Sennacherib’s son. In 539 B.C., Darius the Mede captured the city (Dan. 5:31), but he did not destroy it. In the centuries that followed, Babylon had its “shining moments,” but after the death of its last great conqueror, Alexander the Great, the city declined and soon was no more. Isaiah’s prophecy was fulfilled, for the city was not rebuilt.

But it is clear that Isaiah’s prophecy describes something more significant than the ups and downs of an ancient city. The prophets often began a message by focusing on local events, but then enlarged their vision to reveal something greater. Isaiah saw in the fall of Babylon a picture of “the day of the Lord” (Isa. 13:6, 9, 13), that time when God will pour out His wrath on the whole world (v. 11). The image of the woman in travail is used in Scripture to describe a time of judgment (v. 8; 21:3; 26:17; Jer. 6:24; Micah 4:9–10; Matt. 24:8, where “sorrows” is “birthpains”; 1 Thes. 5:3). Isaiah looked beyond that day to the day when the Babylonian world system would be destroyed (Rev. 17–18). Compare Isaiah 13:10 with Matthew 24:29; Joel 2:10; and Revelation 6:12–14; and see Jeremiah 50–51.

God delivers His people (Isa. 14:1–23). Isaiah warned that the kingdom of Judah would be taken into captivity by Babylon (5:13; 6:11–12; 11:11, where “Shinar” is Babylon; 39:6), and this happened in 586 B.C. Jeremiah prophesied that the Captivity would last for seventy years. Then Babylon would be judged and the Jews permitted to go home (Jer. 25:1–14). So, the capture of Babylon by Darius would be good news to the Jews; for it would mean the end of their exile and bondage.

The picture in Isaiah 14:1–23 is that of a mighty monarch whose pride brought him to destruction. This is what happened to Belshazzar when Darius the Mede captured Babylon in 539 B.C. (Dan. 5). Isaiah described the king’s arrival in sheol, the world of the dead, where the king’s wealth, glory, and power vanished. The dead kings already in sheol stood in tribute to him (Isa. 14:9), but it was all a mockery. Death is the great leveler; there are no kings in the world of the dead. “Lucifer” (v. 12) is Latin for “morning star” and suggests that this king’s glory did not last very long. The morning star shines but is soon swallowed up by the light of the sun.

The prophet saw in this event something far deeper than the defeat of an empire. In the fall of the king of Babylon, he saw the defeat of Satan, the “prince of this world,” who seeks to energize and motivate the leaders of nations (John 12:31; Eph. 2:1–3). Daniel 10:20 indicates that Satan has assigned “princes” (fallen angels) to the various nations so that he can influence leaders to act contrary to the will of God.

This highest of God’s angels tried to usurp the throne of God and capture for himself the worship that belongs only to God (Matt. 4:8–10). The name “Lucifer” (“morning star”) indicates that Satan tries to imitate Jesus Christ, who is “the bright and morning star” (Rev. 22:16). “I will be like the Most High” reveals his basic strategy, for he is an imitator (Isa. 14:14; 2 Cor. 11:13–15). Like the king of Babylon, Satan will one day be humiliated and defeated. He will be cast out of heaven (Rev. 12) and finally cast into hell (20:10). Whether God is dealing with kings or angels, Proverbs 16:18 is still true: “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall” (NKJV).

God announces the victory (Isa. 21:1–10). “The desert of the sea” is probably the area around the Persian Gulf. Isaiah uses the image of a “desert storm” as he describes the attack of the Assyrians against Babylon, which took place in 689 B.C. At that time, Babylon and Assyria were rival powers, although Assyria was stronger; and the nations in the Fertile Crescent hoped that Babylon would stop the advance of Assyria. Alas, Babylon fell to Assyria; opening the way for Assyria to sweep across the region in conquest.

Realizing the consequences of Babylon’s fall, the prophet experienced pain like a woman in travail (vv. 3–4) and felt crushed like grain in a mill (v. 10). Had this announcement referred to the fall of Babylon in 539 B.C., the Jews would have rejoiced; for it would have meant release from captivity. But in 689 B.C., Babylon’s defeat meant the destruction of the Northern Kingdom and the devastation of the Southern Kingdom. Note that Jeremiah (Jer. 51:8) and John (Rev. 14:8; 18:2) both adopted Isaiah’s words, “Babylon is fallen, is fallen!”¹

¹ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *Be Comforted* (pp. 44–47). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.