

# The Burden against Babylon – *Isaiah 13:1 – 14:23*

**Introduction** – Isaiah is a book of promise surrounded by heavy oracles of judgment. We begin the second section of Isaiah (13-27) with a series of judgments upon what might appear to be a random set of nations (Babylon, Assyria, Philistia, Moab, Syria, Ethiopia, Egypt – chapters 13-20). One thing they all had in common was that they were all threatened by Assyria at one time or other and were actual or potential partners with Judah in anti-Assyrian alliances (or in the case of Assyria, an alliance formed to hold off Syria/Israel). These nations most likely never heard these oracles; but in actuality they were not for their ears; they were for Judah. But another way to look at this is that these messages were for the nations as they saw their fulfillment with the fall of Babylon – the one in 70AD. And that is how we come to understand that these messages are for us, the new Jacob, the new Israel, as well.

**Overview** – Long before Babylon is the world empire, Isaiah pronounces the Lord's demise upon that nation. The Lord musters His army of nations *"to destroy the whole land"* (vv1-5). This is *"the day of the LORD"* and *"every man's heart will melt"* over the destruction (vv6-8). The stars of heaven will grow dark (v10), and the heavens and earth will be shaken (v13). A boundless capacity for human cruelty will be unleashed for even *"their children also will be dashed to pieces before their eyes"* (vv9-16). The Medes will be stirred up to overthrow Babylon *"as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah"* (vv17-20) and the result will be a deserted, uninhabited land except for the unclean animals (vv19-22).

Through this, the LORD will have mercy on Jacob and all Israel, settling them again in their land (14:1). Strangers will gather to them and they will take captive those who had once been their captors (vv1-2). A great Sabbath from all sorrow and fear and bondage will be enjoyed (v3). Then a taunt is given to the king of Babylon who will experience a different kind of Sabbath – a ceasing of his oppression which will bring forth great praise (vv4-8). Sheol will be excited to receive him along with the other wicked rulers sent there where the worms will cover him (vv9-11). A great lament is sung to he who had been the bright day star; in his arrogance he thought he ruled even over God and instead has now fallen to the lowest parts (vv12-15). This will be a great shock to those who witness his demise (vv16-17). He will not lie in glory like the kings of nations, but will be forgotten; even his children, his future posterity, will be slaughtered (vv16-22). The LORD of armies will *"sweep it with the broom of destruction"* (v23).

**Who is Babylon?** – First, Hebrew makes no distinction between *"Babel"* and *"Babylon."* They are the same word (Gen 11:9, Isaiah 13:1). Babel is the City of Man, a place built to *"let us make a name for ourselves."* It is named Babel because there the LORD confused us all with a variety of tongues. Babylon is in the same geographic-area and is a nation that, in Isaiah's future, does carry Judah off into captivity (and this becomes the focus of warnings in Isaiah – i.e. Isaiah 39:5-7). Babylon is later overthrown by the Medes (see Daniel) but not by a violent bloodbath (as vv17-22 indicate), hinting that this was only a shadowy type. Israel is delivered out of exile, but she doesn't rule over her oppressors (as 14:1-2 indicate) – more hints. Let the New Testament teach us.

**Babylon the Great/Mother of Harlots** – We saw in Isaiah 1:21 that Jerusalem is called a harlot city for her spiritual adultery. Jesus foretells the destruction of that city within one generation (Matt 24:34). He uses the language of a collapsing solar system (Matt 24:29) just as Isaiah did (13:10) and John will do the same in Revelation (Rev 6:12-13). Isaiah speaks of a desolate and unclean land (Isaiah 13:21) and so does John (Rev 18:2). In fact, Revelation 17-18 is all about the fall of Babylon, the woman *"drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus"* (Rev 17:6) and John, like those in Isaiah's vision, marvel at the fall of this city (Rev 17:6b, Isaiah 14:16f). That *"great city"* was *"where our Lord was crucified"* (Rev 11:8). Babylon is the city of rebellion, the city of man, the city of pride and arrogance, the city of perversions unleashed. And Babylon, the city of man and the center of the universe between God and man, was utterly destroyed from ever again being that temple-center, when Jerusalem was decimated in 70AD. Babylon is Old Jerusalem.

**Then Who is Jacob/Israel?** – Well then, what are we to make of the promises to Jerusalem, the capital of Jacob and Israel, in Isaiah 14:1-3? If Babylon historically is Jerusalem, then who is the saved, restored Jerusalem? The events that brought forth the destruction of Jerusalem began with the rejection and crucifixion of the Messiah, the Son of God. And those events brought forth the New Jerusalem revealed in the reversal of Babel at Pentecost where the gift of tongues is given as a sign to the nations of the salvation of the world through Jesus (Acts 2). John sees this New Jerusalem coming down from heaven where all things are made new (Rev 21:1-4). She now goes about bringing those who had made her captive her captives (Isaiah 14:1-2, Eph 4:7-8) and so the nations stream to this holy mountain (Isaiah 2:1-4). They are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens (Eph 2:19). Jacob and Israel, when these prophecies were fulfilled, are the church, the New Jerusalem, the bride of Christ (Rev 21). Great covenantal upheavals, earthquakes and great shakings, have occurred and the center of the world has moved. Now it resides here as we gather each Lord's Day in worship, and this kingdom cannot be shaken (Heb 12:28f).

**And What is This Promised Sabbath?** – Therefore, the promised settling in their own land (14:1) and the Sabbath rest from all sorrows, fear and bondage (14:3) is ours through Christ Jesus. His victory was made complete at Calvary (Col 2:15) and declared in His resurrection (Rom 1:4). His work is finished and so we may enter into that rest. No more striving against God; no more war with God. And so, nothing can separate us from the love of God (Rom 8:31-39).