

• *Babylon will also fall beneath God's anger*

## 1. God chastises the chastisers

• *Isaiah foretells the fall of Babylon a century beforehand*

• *The empire will be reduced to nothing*

• *There will be nothing left but smoke – like Sodom and Gomorrah*

## 2. Paganism is exterminated but God's people are preserved

We continue to look at God's decisions concerning Babylon, in Isaiah 13:1–14:27. The Day of the Lord will come to Babylon<sup>□1</sup>. First, God's anger will fall on Israel via the instrumentality of Babylon, but then Babylon also will fall beneath the anger of God.

1. **God chastises the chastisers.** The very people who have been used to discipline Israel are themselves subject to God's determination to punish all sin.

*<sup>17</sup> See I will stir up against them the Medes, who think nothing of silver and have no delight in gold.*

A century ahead of the event Isaiah foretells the fall of the Babylonians at the hands of the Medes. They could not be turned aside by the offer of money. In addition to the Medes, the Persians were also involved but they were not so well known in Isaiah's time.

*<sup>18</sup> Their bows will strike down the young men; they will have no mercy on those who have just been born nor will they look with compassion on sons.*

The empire will be reduced to nothing.

*<sup>19</sup> Babylon, the jewel of kingdoms, the beauty of the Babylonians' pride, will be overthrown by God like God's overturning of Sodom and Gomorrah.*

Sodom and Gomorrah were famous as examples of extermination. After the cities had been destroyed Abraham went to look at them and there was nothing left but smoke<sup>□1</sup>. In the same way Babylon will be so devastated that nothing of her mighty empire will be left.

*<sup>20</sup> She will never be inhabited or lived in through all generations; no Arab will pitch his tent there, no shepherd will rest his flocks there. <sup>21</sup> But desert ghosts will rest there, jackals will fill her houses; there the owls will dwell, and there the goat-demons will leap about. <sup>22</sup> Hyenas will howl in her strongholds, jackals in her luxurious palaces. Her time is at hand, and her days will not be prolonged.*

2. **Paganism is exterminated but God's people are preserved.** God is not a respecter of persons. God's people are judged for their sins as well as Babylon. Yet there is one difference. God's punishments of his people are not everlasting judgements; they are rather refining judgements. Eventually God picks up with his people again. He has sworn never to leave them or forsake them.

*<sup>1</sup> Yahweh will have compassion on Jacob; once again he will choose Israel and will give them rest in their own land.*

'Choose' sometimes means 'put a choice into effect'. In the days of Ezra and Nehemiah God arranged for many Judeans to be taken back to their own land. No doubt the restoration to the land foreshadows greater

□1 13:1-16

□1 Genesis 19:27-28

- God's punishments of His people are refining – not everlasting

- Restoration to land foreshadows greater restorations

- 'New Israel' has victory and peace – includes all nations

### 3. 'Babylon' is judged fully and finally

- Songs of excitement

- Babylon had persecuted all those who did not submit to its ways

- Creation rejoices at the destruction of Babylon – including the trees that Babylon cut down

- The dead welcome Babylon

- Those who no longer exist in this world are still conscious but shadows of their former selves

restorations that would come yet further in the future – the greatest of which is the new heavens and new earth in which righteousness dwells.

*Aliens will join them  
and unite with the house of Jacob.  
<sup>2</sup>The peoples will possess them for themselves  
and bring them to their own place.  
And the house of Israel will possess the nations  
as menservants and maidservants in Yahweh's land.  
They will make captives of their captors  
and totally rule over their oppressors.*

In the 'new Israel' which Isaiah sees in prophetic vision there is total victory and peace. Gentiles are part of the new people of God. All nations are won over to be part of God's people. There comes into being a kingdom of peace in which one-time oppressors become citizens and fellow-members of the kingdom of God.

3. **'Babylon' is judged fully and finally.** The day will come when 'Babylon' – and all that it represents – will come to an end.

*<sup>3</sup>On the day Yahweh gives you relief from suffering and turmoil and cruel bondage, <sup>4</sup>you will take up this taunt against the king of Babylon:*

*How the oppressor has come to an end!  
How his fury has ended!*

The end of Babylon's rule will lead to songs of excitement that the proud kingdom has been abolished.

*<sup>5</sup>Yahweh has broken the rod of the guilty, the sceptre of the rulers,  
<sup>6</sup>which in anger struck down peoples with unceasing blows, and in fury subdued nations with relentless persecution.*

Babylon had wickedly persecuted all who did not submit to its ways.

*<sup>7</sup>All the earth is at rest and at peace;  
they break into singing.  
<sup>8</sup>Even the pine trees and the cedars of Lebanon exult over you and say,  
'Now that you have been laid low,  
no woodsman comes to cut us down.'*

When Babylon is defeated and destroyed even the creation itself rejoices. The mighty cedars of Lebanon had been cut down by Babylon, but now the trees rejoice that Babylon is itself cut down.

*<sup>9</sup>Sheol below is all excited,  
eager to meet you at your coming; it rouses the shadowy ones to greet you – all those who were he-goats in the world; it makes them rise from their thrones – all those who were kings over the nations.  
<sup>10</sup>They will all respond,  
they will say to you,  
'You also have become weak, as we are; you have become like us.'*

'Sheol' is the place where the dead are to be found, or it is death itself viewed as a place. In this imaginative poem the dead are viewed as welcoming Babylon. The kings of previous empires greet the new arrival. Babylon has died just as they died. We must not press the details of the poem. For example, we must not assert that dead pagan kings sit on

thrones in hell. That would be to press the details of a piece of poetry too far. But it certainly teaches that those who have been removed and no longer exist in **this** world are still conscious, still retain their identity, but are only feeble shadows of their former selves unable to influence anything in this world at all.

• *All mighty pagan empires will be reduced to nothing*

What is true of historical 'Babylon' is also true of everything that 'Babylon' represents. Mighty pagan empires – whether military or whether they are empires of commerce, 'entertainment', or whatever – are destined to be reduced to nothing. They will survive while they practise ways of righteousness but when they turn to become persecutors and oppressors they set themselves up for removal from this world altogether. It is bad news for them, but good news for everyone else.



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