

The God of all Nations

Chapters 13-23 of Isaiah bring us to a new section of the book. These chapters speak about God establishing justice and righteousness in the whole world, not just in Judah. This section, together with the worldwide-visions (chapters 24-27), serve as an interlude between the promised Assyrian crisis (chapters 1-12) and its onset (chapters 28-39).

Invitation to Pray: Great Lord, we humbly ask for Your instruction. Enlarge our understanding of your role as Sovereign King over heaven and earth. Reinforce our trust in Your holy ways of righteousness and justice.

1. What comes to mind when you think of the wrath of God?

Carefully read chapters 13 and 14 of Isaiah. If time permits, continue reading chapters 15-23; otherwise skim these chapters to get an overall view. *Look for the ways God deals with nations.* You will notice that Isaiah moves from one country to another, predicting the judgment of God on Babylon (13), on Assyria (14:24-27), on Philistia (14:28-32), on Moab (15-16), on Damascus (17-18), on Egypt (19-20), on Babylon, Dumah, and Arabia (21), and finally on Jerusalem (22) and Tyre (23). Locate as many nations as you can on the map. Refer to the handout for historical background on each oracle. Record your first thoughts.

A Closer Look

Oracle: A biblical oracle is often, but not necessarily, a judgment. The term is derived from a word that denotes something heavy, and thus came to have the connotations of “burden” and “an important utterance.” The King James Version translates the term as “burden” and attaches it to each of the messages.

2. Why do you think Isaiah delivered these oracles to Israel, rather than the nations mentioned?

3. The first and longest prophecy in this section concerns Babylon. This fits with the importance of Babylon in the book as a whole. What do you learn about the origin and significance of Babylon from the following references (Genesis 10:8-10,11:1-9)?

The Old Babylonian Kingdom was at its peak during the time of God's calling of Abraham. The New Babylonian Empire emerged around 626 B.C. This great empire reached the height of its glory under King Nebuchadnezzar. It was during his rule that Babylon conquered the southern kingdom of Judah (586 B.C.), and carried the people of Judah off into captivity.

4. **Re-read chapter 13** with this background in mind. Why would this prophecy have been a startling revelation to those in Isaiah's day (740-681)? The Isaiah Timeline may be helpful.
5. In verses 2-5 God summons his warriors to assemble. Look at the vivid descriptions and the sights and sounds of battle.
 - a. What is the "day of the Lord" like for Babylon (verses 6-9)?
 - b. Who were to be the agents who would topple the great empire?
 - c. What does Daniel 5:22-30 add to this perspective?
 - d. How do you reconcile the wrath of God (13:9) with the teaching that "God is love?"
 - e. Describe in your own words the final portrait prophesied for historical Babylon (verses 19-22).

6. What greater aspect of prophetic fulfillment does Isaiah envision in verses 3-18? (Compare Joel 2:10, 30-31; Matthew 24:29-31; Revelation 6:12-16; 2 Peter 3:10-13.)

7. Centuries after the destruction of the Babylonian empire, Babylon reappears in a dramatic role in the book of Revelation.
 - a. What does this city symbolize that is timeless and bigger than itself (Revelation 14:8, 17:3-6, 18:1-24)?

 - b. Where in our culture, and in your life, do you see the attitudes typified by Babylon?

 - c. What are you doing to help keep God's values primary in your life? (Your answer may encourage others in your small group.)

8. What is the positive side and the real purpose of this judgment (Isaiah 14:1-2)?

9. Having described the future destruction of Babylon, Isaiah now foretells the coming destruction of Babylon's king. **Re-read 14:3-23 with this thought in mind.** Ask God to help you absorb all that is being said. (Many see the destruction of the boastful king (vv.12-21) as a portrait of Satan's fall from heaven (Luke 10:18).)
 - a. Reflect on the spiritual realities found in this prophecy; then summarize the main truths.

 - b. How can a person really become "like the Most High" (14:14)? Contrast Philippians 2:5-11 with Isaiah 14:13-15.

10. What single sin caused this total loss and suffering among the nations (13:11,19; 14:13-15; 16:6; 23:9)?
11. What impresses you the most about the prophecies concerning Egypt (chapter 19)?
12. What object lesson was assigned to Isaiah in chapter 20?
13. What impressions about God does Isaiah give you in chapters 13-23?
14. How are these oracles a warning to modern nations?

True or False

- ___ God is sovereign over every event in every nation.
15. How does the sovereignty of God challenge you? How does it encourage and strengthen you?
 16. How can a growing awareness of the sovereignty of God lead to true stability?
 17. What personal applications can you make from this lesson to your life?

Background on Oracles Against the Nations

Isaiah chapters 13-23

Babylon (13:1-14:23)

Babylon is mentioned more than 250 times in Scripture, more than any other city except Jerusalem. Babylon was a literal city on the Euphrates River, and was later the capital of the empire that cruelly conquered Judah. The term “Babylon” also carries a spiritual meaning in Scripture.

Note: While some believe chapter 13 is a message addressed to the empire of Assyria, in which the city of Babylon was very important, most scholars view this passage as a message addressed to the great Babylonian empire of the seventh century. This is the approach that we will take in this lesson.

Assyria (14:24-27)

Under Tiglath-pileser, Assyria destroyed the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Assyria also invaded the Southern Kingdom of Judah. They destroyed the walled cities and carried away thousands of captives. Later, King Sennacherib overran Judah, but was unable to take Jerusalem.

Philistia (14:28-32)

In 715 B.C. the Philistines revolted against Assyria. They sent an envoy to Hezekiah, the new king of Judah, to urge him to join their rebellion. Isaiah gave him the counsel of 14:28-32.

Moab (15:1-16:14)

This prophecy describes the calamities that came upon Moab as a result of the invasions by Assyria (715-713 B.C.). It depicts the flight of refugees after Moab’s strongholds have been taken. (Moab was the nation that came from the incestuous relationship Lot had with one of his daughters.)

Damascus (17:1-14)

This oracle appears to belong to the time before Damascus and Israel (Jacob) were destroyed, and while they were allies against Assyria (740-732 B.C.).

Cush (18:1-7)

During 715 B.C. envoys of Cush (Ethiopia) tried to persuade Jerusalem to align with them against Assyria. This land was notable for its ships whose sails, from a distance, looked like the whirring wings of insects over water.

Egypt (19:1-25)

This prophecy tells of the disintegration of Egypt by Assyria. Judah made alliances with Egypt from time to time, to try to protect itself from Assyria.

Cush and Egypt (20:1-6)

The year of this prophecy is 711 B.C. when the Assyrians crushed the Philistine rebellion at Ashdod. Cush and Egypt promised to help, and Ashdod also appealed to Judah. Isaiah went to great lengths to persuade Hezekiah not to rely on Egyptian promises.

Babylon (21:1-10)

In this oracle, Isaiah foresaw Babylon's fall to the Elamites and Medes (539 B.C.), a century before Babylon became a world power. (The Elamites were part of the Persian army that conquered Babylon.)

Edom (21:11-12)

Isaiah sees someone calling to a watchman in Seir, the capital of Edom, to find out how much longer the night of oppression under Assyria will go on. The watchman replies that Assyria's night will end soon, but the morning of peace will be brief before Babylon brings a new night.

Arabia (21:13-17)

In this prediction, Isaiah pictures the Dedanites, a wandering Arabian Merchant tribe, fleeing from the terrors of war. (The Babylon envoys of 39:1 probably passed this way enroute to Judah in order to avoid going through Assyrian territory to the north.)

Jerusalem (22:1-25)

The most significant difference between this oracle and the rest is the emphasis on Jerusalem's spiritual crimes.

Tyre (23:1-18)

Tyre was the main seaport on the Phoenician coast and the great maritime power of the ancient world. Because of their excellent harbor and seamanship, they established a commercial empire far greater than one would expect, given their size and military power. Here, Isaiah may be prophesying one of the Assyrian attacks upon Tyre (705-701 and 679-671, or its final destruction by the Greeks 332 B.C.).