

Isaiah – Chapter 14:1-23

BABYLON TAUNTED

Isaiah 14:3-5 – And it will be in the day when the Lord gives you rest from your pain and turmoil and harsh service in which you have been enslaved, that you will take up this taunt against the king of Babylon, and say, “How the oppressor has ceased, And how fury has ceased! “The Lord has broken the staff of the wicked, The scepter of rulers.

HISTORICAL BACKDROP

In 700 AD, standing in Jerusalem, seeing past the walls, you’d see nothing but enemies. Israel and Syria are defeated, but the Assyrian horde is far more deadly and more aggressive. The Egyptian army is as strong as ever and threatening in from the south. Babylon is rising and would defeat Judah easily if they were to get passed Assyria.

This chapter continues in the context of the prophecy of complete and absolute judgment but with the promise that complete and absolute restoration and glory of Israel is the ultimate conclusion. The phrase “on that day” refers to the day of restoration, therefore this is about the eschatological hope, not in the immediate context of judgment. This is about the future expectation and reality of salvation and glory. In order for the restoration to be complete, the enemies of Israel need to be destroyed.

CONTEXT

Chapter 14 begins with the hope of Israel. Verses 1-3 tell us when and the circumstance of the following oracle. God is done with His fury, and compassion will be again on Jacob and Israel’s restoration is happening.

They will be in their own land and “strangers will join then and attach themselves to the house of Jacob.” This is also a concept found in Zechariah 8:20-23. This is not a forced subservience but a desire; they will attach themselves; they want insight, and Israel will be the ones who will give it to them: a Kingdom of Priests (Isaiah 2:2-3).

The Hebrew verb for “have compassion” is רָחַם (rāḥam), the same covenant love used constantly in chapters 40 and following. God has not cast off His people permanently. He will “again choose Israel,” a phrase that echoes the original election language of Deuteronomy. The result is not only physical return to the land but a complete reversal; the nations that once carried Israel into captivity will now carry them home and attach themselves to the house of Jacob.

Israel will possess the land and people from the time of difficulty will become their captors, Israel will rule over their oppressors.

The Lord will give rest to Israel. There will be no more pain, no hard labor, no harsh service. They will be slaves no more, and they will instead take their place with God on Zion and be rulers in a time of peace.

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Now, there are a lot of details about the kingdom benefits for the Nation of Israel, but the question here is “When?” There is only one answer here that maintains a consistent reading of the text. This is eschatological Israel at their final restoration. This is consistent with the rest of the context (Isaiah 13:9-13).

The problem in Isaiah 14 is that there are many that take this prophecy to say it is about the current king of Babylon when he was defeated by Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, in 689 BC, King Nebuchadnezzar when he was humbled in Daniel 4, or about Belshazzar and the fall of Babylon recorded in Daniel 5. The problem with those interpretations is that none of the other prophecies about the restoration of Israel have ever taken place. In that day, when the Lord gives you rest, then you will say....

Isaiah is not writing about the current king of Babylon or even the kingdom that takes Israel captive in 586 BC. Rather, this is about the future king of Babylon and the destruction of Babylon, full and complete. This is consistent with the immediate context and the future prophecies (Jeremiah 51:24-26; Revelation 17:1-7, 14-18, 18:1-2).

EXPOSITION

Isaiah 14:1-8

In verse 4, Israel will join in the taunt (the world will lament; the righteous will rejoice). Verses 4-8 indicate that the evil power over the world, which is coupled with the false messianic kingdom of the anti-Christ, is destroyed.

The beast (the false messianic king) and his kingdom are political and military. They use Babylon the harlot for a time, but they are not identical to her. Revelation 17 shows the harlot (Babylon) riding the beast, meaning the commercial system supports the political ruler for a season.

Babylon was the oppressor and had the staff of the wicked. This kingdom enslaved much of the world and was the power behind many of the evil nations. So, the first event we have is a removal of the oppressor.

In verse 7, we have a worldwide rest and the world is quiet. The monetary arm of the beast is destroyed; the false messianic kingdom is also at odds with Babylon at this time and is the entity that will bring Babylon down.

Later, in verse 7, we have worldwide joy, singing, and shouting in joyous happiness.

In verse 8, nature itself is rejoicing that Babylon is defeated. The cedars and the cypress are no longer in danger with Babylon in ruins.

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Isaiah 14:9-21

Now comes the most difficult part in Isaiah. Who is this about? The vast majority of pastors and theologians believe that Isaiah is speaking not to the actual king of Babylon but the force behind the king of Babylon.

Specifically, in verses 12-15, their points are as follows:

1. This is about the fall of Satan (Luke 10:18; Revelation 12:8-9)
2. Stars are often referred to angels
3. “Star of the Morning” is one word, “hêlêl,” which is translated into Latin as “Lucifer.”
4. The “I will” statements are the original sin of pride by Satan.
5. His end is with the grave, just like the rest of the lost.

However, this does not hold up under close scrutiny.

1. Babylon is a real place with a real king who will do atrocities. The future Babylon will not have Satan as the power behind him but will be an adversarial ally with the beast, the anti-Christ, who will eventually rebel.
2. The content of verses 12-21 fits in the context of the previous section. We need to follow the pronoun “you.” This is translated from the “Second Person Masculine Singular” and is consistently used from verse 8 thorough verses 21.
3. The language is used for a human being and does not indicate a spiritual being.
 - a) Sheol is the grave and is not a place for Satan but is used always for the grave of humans.
 - b) He is called a man (ish) in verse 16.
 - c) Rotting flesh and being eaten by maggots are descriptive of physical beings.
 - d) Called a corpse
 - e) Said to have offspring
4. “Fallen from heaven” – the word heaven can be and is used of for a lofty place or for someone arrogant (Lamentations 2:1; Matthew 11:20-23).
5. The “I will” statements indicate a man who believes he can exalt to deity and is in competition with the beast.
6. The language is poetic, and we must be careful about imagery, but the language is never said about Satan in any other text.

In the context of Isaiah 14, these five proud “I will” statements are not the words of Satan himself, but of a powerful human ruler of eschatological Babylon. When the Old Testament descriptions of Babylon are compared with the picture given in the book of Revelation, a

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clear portrait emerges of an intense end-time rivalry between Babylon and the Antichrist. It is this struggle for worldwide dominance that motivates the Babylonian ruler to utter his egocentric five-fold “I will” declaration as he desperately seeks to bring the entire world under his control. This desire for power is without doubt inspired by Satan. Therefore, the five “I will” statements can legitimately be said to express Satan’s rebellious character. But the actual speaker in the text is not Satan, but this future human ruler of Babylon.

The king’s fall is described in terms that go far beyond any ancient Babylonian monarch. He is brought down to Sheol, the pit, and the worms become his covering. The nations that once trembled at his power now rejoice at his destruction.

Isaiah 14:22-23

In this section God takes up His declaration against Babylon. Babylon, the king, will be left utterly destroyed with no offspring. This language of total, permanent desolation matches Jeremiah 50–51 and reaches its climax in Revelation 18. Historical Babylon fell in 539 BC, but the complete fulfillment awaits the day the Lord returns. Babylon the great—the mother of harlots and the center of the final world system—will be swept away forever so that the Holy One of Israel can reign unopposed from Zion.

TYING THE THREADS TOGETHER

- The Motif of the City reaches another high point. Proud Babylon, the center of rebellion, is swept away with the broom of destruction. Zion, once shaken by invaders, becomes the joyful center to which the nations come because they have heard that God is with her.
- The Holy One of Israel stands at the center of everything. His compassion on Jacob is the reason the strangers attach themselves. The same holiness that demands the destruction of the proud king guarantees comfort and praise for His people.
- The Messianic Hope shines quietly but powerfully. The king who falls from arrogance is a powerful counterfeit. The true King (the Branch, the Child, the Servant) will one day return to reign in righteousness, and every boast of rebellious rulers will be silenced forever.

The hand stretched out in anger is terrifying. But that same hand has compassion on Jacob, gathers the remnant, and brings the day when nothing hurts or destroys in all God’s holy mountain. The light we saw in 9:1-7 still has the last word.

CONCLUSION

We live in the time between the two mountain peaks. We have seen the sufferings of Christ. We await the glories to follow. In that day, the Holy One of Israel will again choose Jacob, the nations will grasp the garment of a Jew, and Babylon—both the system and its proud ruler—will be swept away forever. Until then, may we, like the remnant of Isaiah’s day, draw water with joy from the wells of salvation and make His deeds known among the peoples. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.