

Isaiah 14 Handout

When we last met, we studied Isaiah 13 which was a prophecy against the nation of Babylon. We saw that this referred to both the literal city of Babylon and to the God hating, self-exalting “spirit of Babylon” that permeates human history. This prophecy announced a coming destruction that would be God’s judgment on them. We saw that God is sovereign over every nation and that He humbles the proud and carries out justice on the wicked. We saw that Babylon’s destruction served as both a historical warning and a symbol of final judgment of all worldly powers that oppose the Lord.

Today’s chapter continues the prophecy against the nation of Babylon by declaring judgment on the king of Babylon. Between the announcement of destruction in chapter 13 and that of the nation’s king here in this chapter are words of promise to Israel. We see this in the first two verses.

Verses 1-2

After judgment has been brought upon God’s people, He will show compassion on them.

Who will God chose? _____

Where will He settle them? _____

Despite their past failures, God will restore His people to their land.

It says that foreigners will join them suggesting that God’s blessing will extend beyond Israel. This foreshadows the inclusion of Gentiles into God’s plan.

It seems like roles will be reversed. The nations that once oppressed God’s people would now be subject to them instead.

What do these first two verses teach us about God’s heart for His people even after judgment?

Verses 4-21 are seen as a poem that works as a mocking lament or taunt against the king of Babylon. This poetic oracle describes the king’s fall from his lofty position of power. We need to understand this section as a poetic dramatization of a king’s downfall, not necessarily literal descriptions.

Verses 3-4a

Once the people are delivered from oppression in Babylon, who will they taunt?

The word ‘taunt’ in Hebrew is *mashal*. It can refer to a proverb, parable, poetic saying, a taunt or song with poetic structure. It shows that what follows is poetry, not literal narrative.

When we talk about the king of Babylon in verse four, this is most likely not referring to one king in particular, but the many kings of Babylon (and really every tyrant king in the world) as a whole.

Verses 4b-8

Who has met their end? _____

What good news to hear that they will finally be free from the fury of their oppressor.

What does verse 7 say about the lands? _____

Verse 8 mentions how the trees will even gloat over them. Mesopotamian kings often cut timber down in the forests of Lebanon to build their palaces and public buildings, because timber was unavailable in their region.

The once feared empire of Babylon is brought low, humbled. Even nature will rejoice at its destruction. This shows that Babylon's power and terror are completely broken.

Verses 9-11

The picture changes from the earth to the underworld.

Who will meet this king? _____

Some translations say Sheol, which means grave or realm of the dead.

We get this picture of past kings sitting on their thrones, rising up to see the newcomer. The mighty king who terrorized nations has met the same fate as everyone else. In the end, his death is no grand event; it is an embarrassing descent to the realm he thought he was above. Verse 11 shows sarcasm and irony. All the king's boastfulness and vanity has brought him low. There is no honorable burial, but rather he would get maggots and worms for a bed and covering. Everything that made him impressive has been replaced by the filth of the grave. Isaiah gives such a vivid contrast between the king's former pride and his current humiliation.

What do verses 3-11 show us about how temporary worldly power is?

Verses 12-15

We now shift from the underworld to heaven.

The king of Babylon with his former splendor, glory and power has fallen. His falling from heaven seems to be a metaphor showing the loss of his exalted status.

What is the king referred to at the beginning of verse 12? _____

This is thought to be referring to Venus which shines brightly before the dawn, but quickly fades once the sun rises, capturing the fleeting nature of worldly glory.

In the New King James version verse 12 reads,

*"How you are fallen from heaven,
O Lucifer, son of the morning!
How you are cut down to the ground,
You who weakened the nations!"*

The name Lucifer means "light bearer" or "day star/light star" and was a common name for Venus, which was seen to be the morning star.

The king of Babylon thought himself high, bright and powerful, but his fall was sudden and humiliating. He is brought low and humbled by God's judgment.

In verses 13-14 Isaiah exposes the inner arrogance of the king using five 'I will' statements. The king of Babylon's pride led him to see himself as exalted to a position of God.

- I will ascend to the heavens
- I will raise my throne above the stars of God
- I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly; on the utmost heights of Mount Zaphon (located to the north of Canaan and was the mythical residence of the gods)
- I will ascend above the tops of the clouds
- I will make myself like the Most High - this is saying, "I will be equal to God". He tried to seize god-like authority and glory. This is the essence of pride - the sin of trying to be God.

These statements express the spirit of the king of Babylon.

Where was he brought though?

Many see these verses on two levels:

1. The original meaning - Isaiah's intent: a poetic description of the king of Babylon and his fall using cosmic symbolism.
2. Later theological reflection - Jewish and Christian interpreters saw parallels between the king's pride, self-glory and fall with the fall of Satan.

They see the primary meaning being that of the king of Babylon and a secondary application being a pattern that reflects Satan's rebellion.

Verses 16-21

After seeing the king's arrogant rise and humiliating fall (vs.4-15), Isaiah now shifts to the reaction people have to seeing the fallen king.

What is the reaction of the people (vs.16-17)?

They can hardly believe what they are seeing - the one who terrified nations, seemed unstoppable, who conquered and oppressed nations has become weak and powerless. This shows just how empty earthly power is.

(vs. 18-20) Typically kings receive an honorable burial where they are placed in royal tombs and remembered with dignity.

What about this king?

Not only will he not receive an honorable burial, he won't be buried at all. This would have been the worst possible insult in the ancient world. We see that his cruelty and arrogance result in public dishonor, even in death.

(vs. 21) Not only does this proud king not receive a decent burial. He will also be denied a continuing dynasty. It will be wiped out. This verse expresses the hope that this oppressor will

have no offspring to carry on his name. This is about ending the legacy of tyranny so that injustice doesn't continue. God will completely dismantle oppressive systems. In the ancient world at this time a dynasty was judged by the fate of its descendants. Destroying the family line symbolizes the end of the kingdom and ensures that the oppressive reign would never re-emerge. This seems to be saying that God will not allow Babylon's oppressive empire to be rebuilt by his heirs. The dynasty ends.

Verses 22-23

What will the Lord do?

The taunt against the king of Babylon has ended. These two verses form a conclusion to the poem that began back in verses 3 and 4.

God will wipe out:

- Babylon's name
- Survivors
- Offspring
- Descendants

There is no remnant remaining here. God is closing the door on any hope of Babylon's return to power. This is divine devastation.

The next four verses shift in attention to the primary threat against Judah at this time: Assyria.

Verses 24-27

What does it say the Lord Almighty has done in verse 24?

When God *swears*, it means absolute certainty. This means that God's plans for the nations cannot be resisted, overturned, delayed or altered. Whatever God intends to do, He accomplishes.

Who does Isaiah pivot to in verse 25?

God's judgment against Assyria is a part of a larger picture. This is showing that God rules over all nations, not just Babylon. Assyria's oppression on Judah will be broken and end. God will free His people. We will see this happen in Isaiah 36-37 when Assyria's army is destroyed.

What does His plan include according to verse 26?

His hand will stretch out over all nations, showing that His sovereignty is global.

We get two rhetorical questions in verse 27:

- Who can thwart the Lord Almighty?
- Who can turn back His outstretched hand?

What is the answer?

This verse focuses on both God's plan and His hand.

In Andrew M. Davis's commentary on Isaiah, he writes this about verses 26-27: "Isaiah 14:26-27 focuses on God's plan and God's hand. God's **plan** is infinitely wise, made before the foundation of the world and founded on God's omniscience. Nothing can ever surprise God; every single detail of human history has been thought through, and the best outcome for the glory of God has been determined. This infinitely wise plan would be worthless, however, apart from the sovereign **hand** of God to put it into practice. The hand of God stretches out over every nation, and no one is able to turn it back."

The Oracle of Philistia (vs.28-32)

To the west of Judah was Philistia, another nation that Judah wanted to trust in for protection. She too was under judgment from God.

Verses 28-30

When did this prophecy come? _____

What are the Philistines told not to do? _____

They shouldn't rejoice over temporary relief.

With the death of Judah's king (Ahaz), Philistia is hoping that a shift in leadership will weaken Judah and allow them to finally get out from under Assyrian rule, especially since at this time Assyria was having some internal issues. King Ahaz was a loyal Assyrian ally who used them in the past when threats from Philistia came at Judah. God quickly warns them though not to rejoice.

What will spring up from the root of that snake in verse 29? _____

We get a sequence here:

Snake → earlier ruler (one who oppressed Philistia)

Viper → a strong successor

Fiery serpent → an even more dangerous ruler

This is saying that an even worse enemy is coming. If the last king was a "snake", the one to come will strike even harder and faster.

We get a contrast in verse 30 between Judah (poor) and Philistia (your root).

What will God do for His people? _____

How will Philistia be destroyed? _____

A famine will be the instrument used, striking at the very heart of the land's productivity and life. This gives us a picture of total judgment.

What is going to come from the north (v.31)?

A metaphor for the approaching army; an unstoppable conquest. Assyria typically attacked from the north. It says, “there is no straggler in his ranks”. This shows the discipline and tightly organized and relentlessness of the coming destruction.

Verse 32 imagines envoys asking Judah something. Perhaps they are asking, “is rebellion against us wise?” or “What hope do you have as nation after nation falls?”

What answer should they give?

God Himself is the strength of His people. Zion will stand because God has established it. The afflicted, those who are weak and vulnerable will find refuge in the Lord, not in outside alliances. This is the theological heart of the passage.

One of the biggest things we see in this chapter is that God’s rule undercuts all human pretension. *Human pride builds towers – God brings them down*

A couple of world leaders who could represent the “king of Babylon” in our day would be Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin. Both sought an extensive territorial expansion and spheres of influence that would secure global dominance for their respective ideologies and nations. Both men exalted themselves claiming ultimate authority and rejected moral and divine limits. Both crushed nations and peoples engaging in mass murder and terror on an unprecedented scale. However, despite decades of terror, both Hitler and Stalin’s regimes collapsed, leaving their ideologies discredited and themselves condemned in history. Both of these men fit the pattern of humanity’s desire to “be like God” through power and domination.

Our culture today promotes everything about self. As Christians, we are invited to model a different way.

We are called to:

- Servant leadership
- Humility
- Dependence on God
- Compassion over domination
- Integrity over image
- Faithfulness over success

This is the anti-Babylon life.

Pride can lead us to try to “ascend” in ways that compete with God’s place in our lives?

Let’s look at how that might play out in our lives.

**Pride makes us want to control instead of trust -*

Ascend = “I want to be in charge.”

-refusing to pray because you can handle it

-making decisions without seeking God’s wisdom

-feeling angry when things don’t go according to our plan

Pride whispers, *“If I don’t control this, everything will fall apart”*

Trust says, *“God is sovereign, I can trust”*

**Pride makes us crave recognition rather than God's glory -*

Ascend = "I want people to notice me, praise me, or rely on me."

-wanting certain roles in ministry or spiritual influence mainly for validation.

-being offended when you are unnoticed or unappreciated

-measuring success by applause rather than faithfulness

Pride says, "I should be admired"

Humility says, "Let them see Christ, not me"

**Pride makes us self-reliant instead of dependent on God -*

Ascend = "I can define what is right for myself."

-ignoring scripture when it challenges our desires

-choosing convenience over holiness

-acting as though we are the final authority on truth

Pride says, "I know best"

God says, "My ways are higher"

**Pride makes us build our own kingdom -*

Ascend = my will be done

-living as though our comfort and preferences are the ultimate priority

-treating people as obstacles or tools

-asking God to bless our plans rather than seeking His

What might be some warning signs that pride is gaining ground in our lives?

Practical applications:

- Anchor your hope in God's unshakable purposes

- When overwhelmed by news or personal stress, rehearse this truth:

"God's plans cannot be stopped—not by nations, not by people, not by circumstances, not by my failures."

- When facing a threat (job loss, conflict, health worry, etc), ask:

"Am I trusting God, or scrambling for my own safety plan first?"

- Choose humility as an intentional daily practice

- Start each day with the prayer, "God, decrease my self-focus today and increase my awareness of You."

- Do one hidden act of kindness without telling anyone

- When tempted to take credit, redirect with gratitude - "Thank God - He helped me."

- Recognize that leadership (at home, work, church, etc) is stewardship, not entitlement.

- How am I using my influence – with my family, team, friends, etc?

- Replace a demanding attitude with a servant leadership mindset by listening before speaking, apologize quickly, and put others' good ahead of your preferences.