

ISAIAH 13 | *Babylon Bulldozed*

Babylon Oracle

1 The oracle concerning Babylon which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw.

Soldiers Summoned

2 On a bare hill raise a signal.¹ Cry aloud to them. Wave the hand for them² to enter the gates of the nobles. 3 I myself have commanded my consecrated ones and have summoned my mighty men to execute my anger, my proudly exulting ones.

Multitudes Mustered

4 The sound of a tumult is on the mountains as of a great multitude! The sound of an uproar of kingdoms, of nations gathering together! Yahweh of hosts is mustering a host for battle. 5 They come from a distant land, from the end of the heavens, Yahweh and the weapons of his indignation, to destroy the whole land.

Day of Yahweh's Fierce Anger

6 Wail, for the day of Yahweh is near. As destruction (רָצוּחַ) from the Almighty (יְהוָה) it will come! 7 Therefore all hands will be feeble, and every human heart will melt.³ 8 They will be dismayed. Pangs and agony will seize them. They will be in anguish like a woman in labour. They will look aghast at one another. Their faces will be aflame.⁴ 9 Behold, the day of Yahweh comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the land a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it.⁵ 10 For the stars of the heavens⁶ and their constellations will not give their light.⁷ The sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light. 11 I

¹ **Is 5:26** 26 [Yahweh] will raise a signal for nations far away and whistle for them from the ends of the earth.

² **Is 41:25** 25 I stirred up one from the north, and he has come, from the rising of the sun, and he will call upon my name. He will trample on rulers as on mortar, as the potter treads clay.

³ **Jos 2:11** 11 As soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you, for Yahweh your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath.

⁴ **Na 2:10** 10 Desolate! Desolation and ruin! Hearts melt and knees tremble. Anguish is in all loins. All faces grow pale!

⁵ **Ps 104:35** 35 Let sinners be consumed from the earth, and let the wicked be no more!

⁶ **Is 34:4** 4 All the host of heaven shall rot away, and the skies roll up like a scroll. All their host shall fall, as leaves fall from the vine, like leaves falling from the fig tree.

⁷ **Joe 2:31** 31 The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of Yahweh comes. **Joe 3:15** 15 The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining. **Eze 32:7** 7 When I blot you out, I will cover the heavens and make their stars dark. I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon shall not give its light. **Mt 24:29** 29 Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, the moon will not give its light, the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. **Mk 13:24** 24 In those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light. **Lk 21:25** 25 There will be signs in sun, moon, and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves.

will punish⁸ the world (תְּבַל) for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity. I will put an end to the pomp of the arrogant (רָד) and lay low the pompous pride⁹ (הַגָּאִי) of the ruthless. 12 I will make people (אֲנָשִׁים) more rare¹⁰ than fine gold and mankind (בָּשָׂר) than the gold of Ophir. 13 Therefore I will make the heavens tremble, and the earth will be shaken¹¹ out of its place, at the wrath of Yahweh of hosts in the day of his fierce anger. 14 And like a hunted gazelle or like sheep with none to gather them, each will turn to his own people, and each will flee to his own land.¹² 15 Whoever is found will be thrust through, and whoever is caught will fall by the sword. 16 Their infants will be dashed in pieces before their eyes.¹³ Their houses will be plundered and their wives ravished.

Babylon Wildlife Sanctuary

17 Behold, I am stirring up the Medes¹⁴ against them, who have no regard for silver and do not delight in gold. 18 Their bows¹⁵ will dash in pieces the young men. They will have no mercy on the fruit of the womb. Their eyes will not pity children. 19 And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the splendour and pomp of the Chaldeans, will be like Sodom and Gomorrah when God overthrew them.¹⁶ 20 It will never be inhabited or lived in for all generations.¹⁷ No Arab will pitch his tent there. No shepherds will make their flocks lie down there. 21 But

⁸ **Is 24:21** 21 On that day Yahweh will punish the host of heaven in heaven, and the kings of the earth on the earth.

⁹ **Is 2:11** 11 The haughty looks of man will be brought low, and the lofty pride of men will be humbled, and Yahweh alone will be exalted in that day.

¹⁰ **Is 24:6** 6 A curse devours the earth, and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt. Therefore the inhabitants of the earth are scorched, and few men are left.

¹¹ **Hag 2:6** 6 Yet once more, in a little while, I will shake the heavens, the earth, the sea, and the dry land.

¹² **Je 50:16** 16 Because of the sword of the oppressor, every one will turn to his own people, and every one will flee to his own land. **Je 51:9** 9 We would have healed Babylon, but she was not healed. Forsake her, and let us go each to his own country, for her judgment has reached up to heaven and has been lifted up even to the skies.

¹³ **Ps 137:9** 9 Blessed will he be who takes your [Babylon's] little ones and dashes them against the rock!

¹⁴ **Is 21:2** 2 Go up, Elam. Lay siege, Media. All the sighing [Babylon] has caused I bring to an end. **Je 51:11** 11 Yahweh has stirred up the spirit of the kings of the Medes, because his purpose concerning Babylon is to destroy it, for that is the vengeance of Yahweh, the vengeance for his temple. **Je 51:28** 28 Prepare the nations for war against [Babylon], the kings of the Medes, with their governors and deputies, and every land under their dominion. **Da 5:28** 28 Peres, your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians. **Da 5:31** 31 Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old.

¹⁵ **Je 50:14** 14 Set yourselves in array against Babylon all around, all you who bend the bow. Shoot at her, spare no arrows, for she has sinned against Yahweh. **Je 50:29** 29 Summon archers against Babylon, all those who bend the bow. Encamp around her. Let no one escape. Repay her according to her deeds. Do to her according to all that she has done. For she has proudly defied Yahweh, the Holy One of Israel. **Je 51:3** 3 Let not the archer bend his bow, and let him not stand up in his armor. Spare not [Babylon's] young men. Devote to destruction all her army.

¹⁶ **Ge 19:24** 24 Yahweh rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulphur and fire from Yahweh out of heaven. **Je 50:40** 40 As when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah and their neighbouring cities, declares Yahweh, so no man will dwell [in Babylon], and no son of man will sojourn in her.

¹⁷ **Je 51:37** 37 Babylon will become a heap of ruins, the haunt of jackals, a horror and a hissing, without inhabitant. **Je 51:43** 43 [Babylon's] cities have become a horror, a land of drought and a desert, a land in which no one dwells, and through which no son of man passes.

wild animals will lie down there, and their houses will be full of howling creatures. There ostriches/owls will dwell, and there wild goats will dance. 22 Hyenas/foxes will cry in its towers, and jackals in the pleasant palaces.¹⁸ Its time is close at hand and its days will not be prolonged.¹⁹

¹⁸ **Is 34:13-14** 13 Thorns will grow over its strongholds, nettles and thistles in its fortresses. It will be the haunt of jackals, an abode for ostriches. 14 And wild animals will meet with hyenas. The wild goat will cry to his fellow. Indeed, there the night bird settles and finds for herself a resting place. **Je 50:39** 39 Wild beasts will dwell with hyenas in Babylon, and ostriches will dwell in her. She will never again have people, nor be inhabited for all generations.

¹⁹ **Is 25:2** 2 You have made the city a heap, the fortified city a ruin. The foreigners' palace is a city no more. It will never be rebuilt.

Commentary

1. Isaiah 13-23

- a. Is 13-23 is a harsh and sobering picture of Yahweh's wrath upon sinful humanity. The doom of Gentile powers one after another is predicted.²⁰ God punishes these nations because they made themselves enemies of Israel.²¹
 - (1) **Ge 12:3** 3 Him who dishonours you I will curse.
- b. There are ten oracles (Is 13:1; 14:28; 15:1; 17:1; 19:1; 21:1, 11, 13; 22:1; 23:1).²²
- c. Isaiah follows a pattern established by Amos in Am 1-2 (also see Nahum and Obadiah). A similar group of oracles against the nations occurs in Je 46-51 and Ezekiel 25-32.
- d. These oracles go beyond the more immediate judgment to a worldwide view.²³
- e. Is 13-14 focuses on Yahweh's punishment of Babylon.

2. Babylon Oracle (Is 13:1).

- a. **Is 13:1** 1 The oracle concerning Babylon which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw.
- b. Isaiah's oracles are not sourced from himself but from Yahweh (v. 1).
 - (1) **Is 1:1** 1 The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.
 - (2) **Is 2:1** 1 The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.
 - (3) **Is 7:3** 3 And Yahweh said to Isaiah, Go out to meet Ahaz, you and Shear-jashub your son, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool on the highway to the Washer's Field.
- c. Yahweh's oracles to Isaiah (v. 1) concern Gentile nations, not just Judah and Israel. The God of Israel is the God of the nations. All nations exist at his permission and they are subject to his judgment.
- d. This oracle concerns Babylon (v. 1) and by extension all who rebel against Yahweh. Babylon comes first because she has always taken the lead in man's rebellion against God. Just as one city, Zion, stands for God's kingdom, so also one city, Babylon, stands for man's kingdom. See *Babylon*.
 - (1) **Re 14:8** 8 Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who made all nations drink the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality.
 - (2) **Re 16:19** 19 The great city was split into three parts, the cities of the nations fell, and God remembered Babylon the great, to make her drain the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath.

3. Soliders Summoned (Is 13:2-3).

- a. **Is 13:2-3** 2 On a bare hill raise a signal (סֵּנַל). Cry aloud to them. Wave the hand for them to enter the gates of the nobles. 3 I myself have commanded my holy (שְׁדֵּקִים) ones

²⁰ W. E. Vine, *Isaiah*, 52.

²¹ V. Buksbazen, *Isaiah*, 189.

²² J. A. Motyer, *Isaiah*, 131.

²³ W. E. Vine, 52.

and have summoned my mighty men to execute my anger, to those who exult in my majesty.

- b. Yahweh summons his holy ones/mighty men to enter the gates of the nobles and execute his anger (vv. 2-3). Yahweh himself serves as the commander-in-chief of Medo-Persian army that is to destroy Babylon (V. Buksbazen, 193). As the sovereign King, God is directly involved in the rise and fall of nations. World history “is organized in the interests of the people of God.”²⁴

(1) **Is 5:26** 26 [Yahweh] will raise a signal for nations far away and whistle for them from the ends of the earth. And behold, quickly, speedily they come!

(2) **Is 41:25** 25 I stirred up one from the north, and he has come, from the rising of the sun, and he will call upon my name. He will trample on rulers as on mortar, as the potter treads clay.

4. Multitude Mustered (Is 13:4-5).

- a. **Is 13:4-5** 4 The sound of a tumult is on the mountains as of a great multitude! The sound of an uproar of kingdoms, of nations gathering together! Yahweh of hosts is mustering a host for battle. 5 They come from a distant land (אַרְצוֹת), from the end of the heavens, Yahweh and the weapons of his indignation, to destroy the whole land (אַרְצָא) [of Babylon].
- b. Yahweh musters a great multitude of nations for battle against Babylon (v. 4).
- c. They come from a distant land (v. 5).
- d. Their mission is to destroy the whole land of Babylon (v. 5).

5. Day of Yahweh’s Fierce Anger (Is 13:6-16).

- a. **Is 13:6-16** 6 Wail, for the day of Yahweh is near. As destruction (שֹׁד) from the Almighty (יְהוָה) it will come! 7 Therefore all hands will be feeble, and every human heart will melt. 8 They will be dismayed. Pangs and agony will seize them. They will be in anguish like a woman in labor. They will look aghast at one another. Their faces will be aflame. 9 Behold, the day of Yahweh comes, cruel (אֶזְרָא), with wrath (עֶבְרָה) and fierce anger (אֶזְרָא), to make the land a desolation (שָׁמָה) and to destroy (שָׂמַד) its sinners (חַטָּאִים) from it. 10 For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light. The sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light. 11 I will punish (פָּקַד) the world (תְּבַל) for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity. I will put an end to the pomp of the arrogant and lay low the pompous pride of the ruthless. 12 I will make people (אֲנָשִׁים) more rare than fine gold and mankind (אָדָם) than the gold of Ophir. 13 Therefore I will make the heavens tremble, and the earth will be shaken out of its place, at the wrath of Yahweh of hosts in the day of his fierce anger. 14 And like a hunted gazelle or like sheep with none to gather them, each will turn to his own people, and each will flee to his own land. 15 Whoever is found will be thrust through, and whoever is caught will fall by the sword. 16 Their infants will be dashed in pieces before their eyes. Their houses will be plundered and their wives ravished.

²⁴ J. A. Motyer, *Isaiah*, 131.

- b. The Day of Yahweh.
 - (1) There are many types of the day of Yahweh leading up to the antitypical day of Yahweh, which is future to us.
 - (2) The ultimate day of Yahweh begins with the rapture of the Church and ends with the new heavens and earth.
 - (3) Days of Yahweh are times when God's activity in history is absolutely clear to everyone.
 - (4) The Bible says a lot about the day of Yahweh. Why don't we hear more about it?
- c. Man's Response in the Day of Yahweh.
 - (1) **Is 26:17** 17 Like a pregnant woman who writhes and cries out in her pangs when she is near to giving birth, so were we because of you, Yahweh.
 - (2) **Je 6:24** 24 We have heard the report of it. Our hands fall helpless. Anguish has taken hold of us, pain as of a woman in labor.
 - (3) **Re 6:15-17** 15 The kings of the earth, the great ones, the generals, the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, 16 calling to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb, 17 for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?
- d. The Wrath of God.
 - (1) **Is 24:4-6** 4 The earth mourns and withers. The world languishes and withers. The highest people of the earth languish. 5 The earth lies defiled under its inhabitants, for they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant. 6 Therefore a curse devours the earth, and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt. Therefore the inhabitants of the earth are scorched, and few men are left.
 - (2) **Mt 24:22** 22 If those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.
 - (3) In the future, when God executes his wrath on the unbelieving world, few people will be left on the earth. The Flood, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the destruction of the Canaanites in Joshua's day foreshadow this.
- e. Darkening of the Sun, Moon, and Stars.
 - (1) **Joe 2:31** 31 The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of Yahweh comes.
 - (2) **Joe 3:15** 15 The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining.
 - (3) **Eze 32:7** 7 When I blot you out, I will cover the heavens and make their stars dark. I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon shall not give its light.
 - (4) **Mt 24:29** 29 Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, the moon will not give its light, the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.
 - (5) **Mk 13:24** 24 In those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light.
 - (6) **Lk 21:25** 25 There will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves.
- f. Pride.

- (1) **Is 2:11** 11 The haughty looks of man will be brought low, and the lofty pride of men will be humbled, and Yahweh alone will be exalted in that day.
- g. The Flight of the Sinners.
- (1) **Je 50:16** 16 Cut off from Babylon the sower and the one who handles the sickle in time of harvest. Because of the sword of the oppressor, every one will turn to his own people, and every one will flee to his own land.
- (2) **Je 51:9** 9 Forsake [Babylon], and let us go each to his own country, for her judgment has reached up to heaven and has been lifted up even to the skies.
- (3) The day of Yahweh will cause universal panic, especially among foreign merchants who had thronged to Babylon (Buksbazen, 193).
- h. Is God a Moral Monster?
- (1) **Ps 137:9** 9 Blessed will he be who takes your [Babylon's] little ones and dashes them against the rock!
- (2) God is perfectly just in his punishment of sinners and sinful nations.

6. Babylon Wildlife Sanctuary (Is 13:17-22).

- a. **Is 13:17-22** 17 Behold, I am stirring up the Medes against them [the Babylonians], who have no regard for silver and do not delight in gold. 18 Their bows will dash in pieces the young men. They will have no mercy on the fruit of the womb. Their eyes will not pity children. 19 And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the splendor and pomp of the Chaldeans, will be like Sodom and Gomorrah when God overthrew them. 20 It will never be inhabited or lived in for all generations. No Arab will pitch his tent there. No shepherds will make their flocks lie down there. 21 But wild animals will lie down there, and their houses will be full of howling creatures. There ostriches [owls] will dwell, and there wild goats will dance. 22 Hyenas [foxes] will cry in its towers, and jackals in the pleasant palaces. Its time is close at hand and its days will not be prolonged.
- b. Medo-Persia.
- (1) **Is 21:2** 2 Go up, Elam. Lay siege, Media. All the sighing [Babylon] has caused I bring to an end.
- (2) **Is 44:28** 28 ...[Cyrus] is my shepherd, and he shall fulfill all my purpose....
- (a) Cyrus was of Median descent (Buksbazen, 193).
- (3) **Je 51:11** 11 Yahweh has stirred up the spirit of the kings of the Medes, because his purpose concerning Babylon is to destroy it, for that is the vengeance of Yahweh, the vengeance for his temple.
- (4) **Je 51:28** 28 Prepare the nations for war against her, the kings of the Medes, with their governors and deputies, and every land under their dominion.
- (5) **Da 5:28** 28 Peres, your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians.
- (6) **Da 5:31** 31 Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old.
- c. Babylon Wildlife Refuge.
- (1) **Je 50:39** 39 Wild beasts will dwell with hyenas in Babylon, and ostriches will dwell in her. She will never again have people, nor be inhabited for all generations.

- (2) **Je 50:40** 40 As when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah and their neighbouring cities, declares Yahweh, so no man will dwell [in Babylon], and no son of man will sojourn in her.
 - (3) **Je 51:37** 37 Babylon will become a heap of ruins, the haunt of jackals, a horror and a hissing, without inhabitant.
 - (4) **Je 51:43** 43 [Babylon's] cities have become a horror, a land of drought and a desert, a land in which no one dwells, and through which no son of man passes.
 - (5) In 20 bc, Strabo described the site of Babylon as “a vast desolation” (Vine, 53).
- d. Babylon's Future Judgment.
- (1) There has not been a complete fulfillment of vv. 19-22 (Vine, 53).
 - (2) Very possibly, the future Anti-messiah will defy God by resuscitating the great city Babylon (Vine, 53).
 - (3) **Zec 5:10-11** 10 I said to the angel who talked with me, Where are they taking the basket [of wickedness]? 11 He said to me, To the land of Shinar, to build a house for it. And when this is prepared, they will set the basket down there on its base.
 - (4) **Re 18:2** 2 [The angel] called out with a mighty voice, Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place for demons, a haunt for every unclean spirit, a haunt for every unclean bird, a haunt for every unclean and detestable beast.