

ISAIAH 14 | Babylon Taunt

Israel Chosen Again

1 For Yahweh will have compassion on Jacob and will again choose Israel, and will set them in their own land, and sojourners will join them and will attach themselves to the house of Jacob. 2 And the peoples will take them and bring them to their place, and the house of Israel will possess them in Yahweh's land as male and female slaves. They will take captive those who were their captors, and rule over those who oppressed them.

Taunt against the King of Babylon

3 When Yahweh has given you rest (נוח) from your pain, turmoil, and the hard service with which you were made to serve, 4 you will take up this taunt against the king of Babylon:

Stanza 1: Rest and Quiet for the Earth

How the oppressor has ceased, the insolent fury ceased! 5 Yahweh has broken the staff of the wicked, the sceptre of rulers, 6 that struck the peoples in wrath with unceasing blows, that ruled the nations in anger with unrelenting persecution. 7 The whole earth is at rest (נוח) and quiet. They break forth into singing. 8 The cypresses rejoice at you, the cedars of Lebanon, saying, Since you were laid low, no woodcutter comes up against us.

Stanza 2: Shock of the Shades in Sheol

9 Sheol beneath is stirred up to meet you when you come. It rouses the shades to greet you, all who were leaders of the earth. It raises from their thrones all who were kings of the nations. 10 All of them will answer and say to you: You too have become as weak as we! You have become like us! 11 Your pomp is brought down to Sheol, the sound of your harps. Maggots are laid as a bed beneath you, and worms are your covers.

Stanza 3: Pride Personified

12 How you are fallen from heaven, Day Star, son of Dawn (הַיְלֵל בֶּן-דָּוָר)! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low! 13 You said in your heart,

I will ascend to heaven. Above the stars of God I will set my throne on high. I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north. 14 I will ascend above the heights of the clouds. I will make myself like the Most High (עֶלְיוֹן).

15 But you are brought down to Sheol, to the far reaches of the pit.

Stanza 4: Disgraceful Death

16 Those who see you will stare at you and ponder over you:

Is this the man (שִׂי) who made the earth tremble, who shook kingdoms, 17 who made the world like a desert and overthrew its cities, who did not let his prisoners go home?

18 All the kings of the nations lie in glory, each in his own tomb. 19 But you are cast out, away from your grave, like a loathed branch (נִצֵּץ), clothed with the slain, those pierced by the sword, who go down to the stones of the pit, like a dead body trampled underfoot. 20 You will not be joined with them in burial, because you have destroyed your land, you have slain your people.

Slaughter for the Sons

May the seed (זֶרַע) of evildoers nevermore be named! 21 Prepare slaughter for his sons because of the guilt of their fathers, lest they rise and possess the earth, and fill the face of the world with cities.

Babylon's Remnant Cut Off

22 I will rise up against them, declares Yahweh of hosts, and will cut off from Babylon name (שֵׁם) and remnant (שְׁאֵר), little shoots (נִיץ) and posterity, declares Yahweh. 23 And I will make it a possession of the hedgehog and pools of water, and I will sweep it with the broom of destruction (שֹׁמֵר), declares Yahweh of hosts.

Yahweh's Oath to Break Assyria

24 Yahweh of hosts has sworn:

As I have planned, so shall it be, and as I have purposed, so shall it stand, 25 that I will break the Assyrian (אֲשׁוּר) in my land, and on my mountains trample him underfoot. And his yoke shall depart from them [Judah], and his burden from their shoulder.

26 This is the purpose that is purposed concerning the whole earth, and this is the hand that is stretched out over all the nations. 27 For Yahweh of hosts has purposed, and who will annul it? His hand is stretched out, and who will turn it back?

No Refuge in Philistia

28 In the year that King Ahaz died [715 bc]¹ came this oracle:

29 Rejoice not, O Philistia, all of you, that the rod [Tiglath-pileser III] that struck you is broken, for from the serpent's root will come forth an adder [Sargon], and its fruit will be a flying fiery serpent [Sennacherib]. 30 And the firstborn of the poor [of Judah] will graze, and the needy lie down in safety, but I will kill your root (שָׁרֵשׁ) with famine, and your remnant (שְׁאֵרִית) it will slay. 31 Wail, O gate! Cry out, O city! Melt in fear, O Philistia, all of you! For smoke comes out of the north [Assyria], and there is no straggler in his ranks.

Refuge for the Afflicted in Zion

32 What will one answer the messengers of the [Philistine] nation?

Yahweh has founded Zion, and in her the afflicted of his people find refuge.

¹ This is when Hezekiah became king.

Commentary

1. Israel Chosen Again (Is 14:1-2).

- a. **Is 14:1-2** 1 For Yahweh will have compassion on Jacob and will again choose Israel, and will set them in their own land, and sojourners [Gentile believers] will join them and will attach themselves to the house of Jacob. 2 And the peoples will take them and bring them to their place, and the house of Israel will possess them in Yahweh's land as male and female slaves. They will take captive those who were their captors, and rule over those who oppressed them.
- b. These few verses contain the message of Is 40-66 in a nutshell (F. Delitzsch, in J. N. Oswalt, *NICOT*, 312).
 - (1) See Is 2:1-4; 4:2-6.
- c. God's compassion for Israel is linked to his destruction of Babylon (Is 13). God will bless all twelve tribes, not just Judah.
 - (1) **Is 54:7-8** 7 For a brief moment I deserted you, but with great compassion I will gather you. 8 In overflowing anger for a moment I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you, says Yahweh, your Redeemer.
 - (2) "Marduk and Baal and Chemosh are dead, but Yahweh lives on. So too, Assyria and Babylon have long since walked off the pages of history, but the people of Israel live on."²
- d. Israel's Election.
 - (1) **Dt 7:6** 6 You [Israel] are a people holy [set apart] to Yahweh your God. Yahweh your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.
 - (2) God's choice of Israel to be the bearers of the covenant was fixed in God's promise to Abraham. But any specific group or generation of that people had to receive the choosing for themselves (Oswalt, *NICOT*, 312).
- e. Israel and the Nations.
 - (1) As the Messianic kingdom begins, sojourners from the nations will attach themselves to Israel.
 - (2) Nations will transport the Jewish remnant to the land of Israel, where they will dwell permanently in peace and security.
 - (3) Israel will enjoy a privileged position with respect to the nations. Israel's oppressors will become her servants.
 - (4) Again and again, we see the same pattern: Israel's rebels, God uses Gentile powers to discipline her, the Gentile powers overdo the discipline in cruelty and wickedness, God's judgment comes upon them, Israel is miraculously restored, and God blesses the Gentile nations (W. E. Vine, *Isaiah*, 54).

2. Taunt against the King of Babylon (Is 14:3-8).

- a. **Is 11:3-8** 3 When Yahweh has given you [many nations, including Israel] rest (נוח) from your pain, turmoil, and the hard service with which you were made to serve, 4 you will take up this taunt against the king of Babylon: How the oppressor [Babylon] has ceased, the insolent fury ceased! 5 Yahweh has broken the staff of the wicked, the

² John N. Oswalt, *NICOT*, 1:313.

scepter of rulers, 6 that struck the peoples in wrath with unceasing blows, that ruled the nations in anger with unrelenting persecution. 7 The whole earth is at rest (נוח) and quiet. They break forth into singing. 8 The cypresses rejoice at you, the cedars of Lebanon, saying, Because you were laid low, no woodcutter comes up against us.

b. The Taunt-Song.

(1) By general agreement, this is one of the finest poems in the Old Testament. It is divided into four stanzas of almost equal length, each one describing a different scene (Oswalt, *NICOT*, 1:315).

(2) The idea of singing in view of deliverance is a special feature of the book of Isaiah (Oswalt, *NICOT*, 1:317).

(3) “While it is incumbent upon Christians to foster concern for their enemies and to seek reconciliation with them, nothing in the Christian faith says we ought to be sad when those who deny God and would destroy his people are overthrown” (Oswalt, *NICOT*, 1:313).

c. Rest.

(1) One day the whole earth will be at rest and quiet.

3. Second Stanza: Shock of the Shades in Sheol (Is 14:9-11).

a. **Is 14:9-11** 9 Sheol [Hades] beneath is stirred up to meet you when you come. It rouses the shades to greet you, all who were leaders [he-goats] of the earth. It raises from their thrones all who were kings of the nations. 10 All of them will answer and say to you: You too have become as weak as we! You have become like us! 11 Your pomp is brought down to Sheol, the sound of your harps. Maggots are laid as a bed beneath you, and worms are your covers.

b. Physical Death.

(1) No one can cheat death, not even the king of Babylon.

(a) **Is 40:23** 23 [He] brings princes to nothing and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness.

(b) See paintings by Hieronymus Bosch.

(2) After death, the soul continues to be conscious (Vine, 55).

(3) The soul does not wander the earth after death.

(a) In the Old Testament, souls departed to Sheol or Paradise.

(b) In the New Testament, souls depart either to torment or Abraham’s bosom.

(4) Those who claim to see ghosts are likely seeing demons, fallen angels.

(5) Many Kiwis push death as far as possible from their minds: “She’ll be right.”

4. Third Stanza: Pride Personified (Is 14:12-15).

a. **Is 14:12-15** 12 How you are fallen from heaven, Day Star (הַיְלֵל), son of Dawn (בֶּן־אֶשְׁתָּר)! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low! 13 You said in your heart, I will ascend to heaven. Above the stars of God I will set my throne on high. I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north. 14 I will ascend above the heights of the clouds. I will make myself like the Most High (עֶלְיוֹן). 15 But you are brought down to Sheol, to the far reaches of the pit.

b. Satan.

(1) Interpreters debate whether Isaiah is speaking of a literal king of Babylon, a king of Assyria, Satan, or no one in particular.

- (2) Tertullian and Gregory the Great taught this passage refers to Satan.
- (a) **Lk 10:18** 18 [Jesus] said to them, I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.
 - (b) **Re 12:8-9** 8 But [the dragon] was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. 9 And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.
 - (c) *Helel*, translated “Day Star” in the ESV, is translated “Lucifer” in the KJV. It means “shining one” or “morning star” (Buksbazu, *Isaiah*, 198) and refers to the planet Venus (Oswalt, *NICOT*, 1:321). The brilliance of a star in the early dawn suddenly vanishes when the sun rises (Martin, *BKC*, 1:1062).
 - (d) The fall of Satan is discussed in Eze 28:12-19.
- (3) Some suggest it refers to Sennacherib (705-681 bc), who as the king of Assyria claimed also to be the king of Babylon (Martin, *BKC*, 1:1061).
- (a) See Is 37:21-29.
 - (b) Sennacherib’s death by assassination (2 Ki 19:37) brought joy and comfort to the surrounding nations, especially Judah (Martin, *BKC*, 1:1061).
 - (c) Sennacherib was assassinated by his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer, who were then unable to rule in his place because they had to run for their lives (Martin, *BKC*, 1:1062). See 2 Ki 19:37.
- c. Pride.
- (1) In any case, the king of Babylon personifies pride. Vv. 13-14 are one of the clearest images of pride in the Bible:
- (a) I will ascend to heaven.
 - (b) I will set my throne on high, above the stars [angels] of God.
 - (c) I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north.
 - 1) “The mount of assembly” is associated with Mount Zaphon or Mount Cassius in north Syria, where the gods were reputed to meet as did the Greek gods on Mount Olympus (Oswalt, *NICOT*, 1:322).
 - (d) I will ascend above the heights of the clouds.
 - (e) I will make myself like the Most High (עֶלְיוֹן).
 - 1) **Ge 3:5** 5 For God knows that when you [Eve] eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.

5. Fourth Stanza: Disgraceful Death with no Descendants (Is 14:16-21).

- a. **Is 14:16-21** 16 Those who see you will stare at you and ponder over you: Is this the man (אִישׁ) who made the earth tremble, who shook kingdoms, 17 who made the world like a desert and overthrew its cities, who did not let his prisoners go home? 18 All the kings of the nations lie in glory, each in his own tomb. 19 But you are cast out, away from your grave, like a loathed branch (גֶּזֶר), clothed with the slain, those pierced by the sword, who go down to the stones of the pit, like a dead body trampled underfoot. 20 You will not be joined with them in burial, because you have destroyed your land, you have slain your people. 20 May the seed (זֶרַע) of evildoers nevermore be named! 21 Prepare slaughter for his sons because of the guilt of their fathers, lest they rise and possess the earth, and fill the face of the world with cities.
- b. Resurrection.

- (1) **Is 25:6-8** 7 [Yahweh] will swallow up on this mountain [Zion] the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. 8 He will swallow up death forever. And Lord Yahweh will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for Yahweh has spoken.
- (2) **Is 26:19** 19 Your dead shall live. Their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a dew of light, and the earth will give birth to the dead.

6. No Seed, No Land for Babylon (Is 14:22-23).

- a. **Is 14:22-23** 22 I will rise up against them, declares Yahweh of hosts, and will cut off from Babylon name (בָּבֶל) and remnant (רְשָׁרְשָׁתָּהּ), little shoots (נִינִי) and posterity, declares Yahweh. 23 And I will make it a possession of the hedgehog and pools of water, and I will sweep it with the broom of destruction (שֹׁמֵר), declares Yahweh of hosts.
- b. Judgment on Babylon.
 - (1) God promised seed, land, and blessing to Abraham and Israel. By contrast, Babylon, the greatest of human kingdoms, gets no seed and no land.
 - (2) For many centuries no one was sure exactly where Babylon once was (Buksbazen, 199).
- c. History.
 - (1) Never far from Isaiah's consciousness is the direct involvement of God in history (Oswalt, *NICOT*, 1:325-326).

7. God's Purpose for Assyria and the Whole Earth (Is 14:24-27).

- a. **Is 14:24-27** 24 Yahweh of hosts has sworn: As I have planned, so shall it be, and as I have purposed, so shall it stand, 25 that I will break the Assyrian (אַשּׁוּר) in my land, and on my mountains trample him underfoot. And his yoke shall depart from them, and his burden from their shoulder. 26 This is the purpose that is purposed concerning the whole earth, and this is the hand that is stretched out over all the nations. 27 For Yahweh of hosts has purposed, and who will annul it? His hand is stretched out, and who will turn it back?
- b. Judgment on Assyria.
 - (1) In v. 25, God tells Judah ahead of time it will not be Assyria who conquers her. These verses are fulfilled in Is 36-37.
 - (2) Mentioning Assyria here makes sense. The listener probably wonders, why is Isaiah talking so much about Babylon? Assyria is the the threat. Shouldn't Isaiah be talking about God's judgment of Assyria? Isaiah's answer is that Assyria will not be the one to conquer Judah. It will be Babylon. That is why he delivered the previous oracle against Babylon.
 - (3) The Mesopotamian power, symbolized by Babylon, represents the power and glory of this world ranged against the God of Israel who has promised to redeem his people. The superiority of the Lord to that symbol has been shown. But what about the specific, current representative of that power? Do these truths apply to the actual as well as to the symbolic? The answer is a resounding yes! (Oswalt, *NICOT*, 1:327).
- c. God's Plan and Purpose.

- (1) No one can annul God's purpose. History is under his control. "Man proposes, but God disposes."
- (2) **Da 4:25** 25 The Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.

8. No Refuge in Philistia (Is 14:28-31).

- a. **Is 14:28-32** 28 In the year that King Ahaz died [715 bc]³ came this oracle: 29 Rejoice not, Philistia, all of you, that the rod [Tiglath-Pileser] that struck you is broken, for from the serpent's root will come forth an adder [Sargon], and its fruit will be a flying fiery serpent [Sennacherib]. 30 And the firstborn of the [Jewish] poor will graze, and the [Jewish] needy lie down in safety, but I will kill your root (שָׁרֵיֶשׁ) with famine, and your remnant (שְׁאֵרִית) it will slay. 31 Wail, O gate! Cry out, O city! Melt in fear, O Philistia, all of you! For smoke comes out of the north [Assyria], and there is no straggler in his ranks [it is a well disciplined army].
- b. With this oracle Isaiah begins the series of judgments against those neighbouring nations in whom Judah might be tempted to trust for deliverance from Assyria.⁴
- c. Hezekiah himself struck down the Philistines.
 - (1) **2 Ki 18:7-8** 7 [Yahweh] was with [Hezekiah]. Wherever he went out, he prospered. He rebelled against the king of Assyria and would not serve him. 8 He struck down the Philistines as far as Gaza and its territory, from watchtower to fortified city.
- d. In 712 bc, only three years after this oracle, Assyria under Sargon II defeated Ashdod and made Philistia an Assyrian province.⁵ In 701 bc, another Assyrian king, Sennacherib, punished anti-Assyrian elements in Philistia.
- e. Unlike Israel, the Philistines will have no root or remnant (v. 30). The last time they are mentioned in the Bible is in the prophecy of Zechariah, after the return from the Exile.⁶

9. Refuge for the Afflicted in Zion (Is 14:32).

- a. **Is 14:32** 32 What will one answer the messengers of the nation [of Philistia who are proposing alliance against Assyria]? Yahweh has founded Zion, and in her the afflicted of his people [both Israel and the nations] find refuge.
- b. Isaiah is a court prophet intimately involved in the international diplomacy of his day. When messengers (v. 32; Is 18:2) from various nations visit Ahaz and Hezekiah, Isaiah is right there to interject. In this sense, he is very political.
- c. Philistia (vv. 28-31) is directly contrasted with Judah (v. 32). There is no refuge in Philistia (v. 30); there is a refuge in Zion (v. 32). Zion figures very prominently in the oracles to the nations (Is 13-23).

³ This is when Hezekiah became king.

⁴ John N. Oswalt, *NICOT*, 1:330.

⁵ John A. Martin, *BKC*, 1:1062.

⁶ T. C. Mitchell, "[Philistines, Philistia](#)," ed. D. R. W. Wood et al., *New Bible Dictionary* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 921.

- (1) **Is 12:6** 6 Shout and sing for joy, inhabitant of Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.
 - (2) **Is 16:1** 1 Send the lamb to the ruler of the land, from Sela, by way of the desert, to the mount of the daughter of Zion.
 - (3) **Is 18:7** 7 At that time tribute will be brought to Yahweh of hosts from a people tall and smooth, from a people feared near and far, a nation mighty and conquering, whose land the rivers divide, to Mount Zion, the place of the name of Yahweh of hosts.
- d. Zion will be a place of refuge for God's afflicted ones. This is so because that's where the Davidic king, Jesus, is. If a Philistine wants to take refuge in Zion, he/she is allowed to. But he/she must submit to the Davidic king.
- (1) This prophecy is literally fulfilled in 701 bc (Hezekiah) and will be typically fulfilled in Re 19 (Jesus). Only Judah is able to maintain independence at the high point of the Assyrian empire.
- e. With Hezekiah as her new king, Judah is to place trust in Yahweh, not in the Philistines or any other foreign alliance.

XXX

Asdûdu led a revolt of Philistines, Judeans, Edomites, and Moabites against Assyria after expulsion of king Ahimiti, whom Sargon had installed instead of his brother Azuri. Assyrian king **Sargon II's** commander-in-chief (*turtanu*), whom the **King James Bible** calls simply "Tartan" (**Isaiah 20:1**), regained control of Ashdod in 712-711 bc and forced the usurper Yamani to flee. Sargon's general destroyed the city and exiled its residents, including some Israelites who were subsequently settled in **Media** and **Elam**. Mitinti was king at the time of Sargon's son **Sennacherib** (r. 705–681 BCE), and Akhimilki in the reign of Sennacherib's son **Esarhaddon** (r. 681–669 BCE).

Tadmor, Hayim. "Philistia under Assyrian Rule." *The Biblical Archaeologist* 29, no. 3 (1966): 86–102. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3211004>.