

APPLICATION

1. How may Isaiah's statement "to teaching and to the testimony" be applied by Christians today? Isa. 8:20
2. What application for today's world may be made of God's use of Assyria as "the rod of my anger, etc." Isa. 10:5-19
3. How may Isaiah, chapter 12, apply to the New Testament church?

III. PEOPLE AND PAGANS - CHAPTERS 13 - 23

A. IMPLACABLE EMPIRE CH. 13-14

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

1. BABYLON

a. PREDICTION OF JUDGMENT

TEXT: 13:1-8

- 1 The burden of Babylon, which Isaiah the son of Amoz did see.
- 2 Set ye up an ensign upon the bare mountain, lift up the voice unto them, wave the hand, that they may go into the gates of the nobles.
- 3 I have commanded my consecrated ones, yea, I have called my mighty men for mine anger, even my proudly exulting ones.
- 4 The noise of a multitude in the mountains, as of a great people! the noise of a tumult of the kingdoms of the nations gathered together! Jehovah of hosts is mustering the host for the battle.
- 5 They come from a far country, from the uttermost part of heaven, even Jehovah, and the weapons of his indignation, to destroy the whole land.
- 6 Wail ye; for the day of Jehovah is at hand; as destruction from the Almighty shall it come.

- 7 Therefore shall all hands be feeble, and every heart of man shall melt;
8 and they shall be dismayed; pangs and sorrows shall take hold of them; they shall be in pain as a woman in travail: they shall look in amazement one at another; their faces shall be faces of flame.

QUERIES

- a. How does Isaiah know of an empire 100 years from his time?
- b. Who is from the "uttermost part of heaven"?
- c. How was it "the day of Jehovah"?

PARAPHRASE

This is the vision God showed Isaiah (son of Amoz) concerning Babylon's doom. See the flags waving as their enemy attacks. Shout to them, O Israel, and wave them on as they march against Babylon to destroy the palaces of the rich and mighty. I, the Lord, have set apart these armies for this task; I have called those rejoicing in their strength to do this work, to satisfy my anger. Hear the tumult on the mountains! Listen as the armies march! It is the tumult and the shout of many nations: the Lord of Hosts has brought them here, From countries far away. They are His weapons against you, O Babylon. They carry his anger with them and will destroy your whole land. Scream in terror, for the Lord's time has come, the time for the Almighty to crush you. Your arms lie paralyzed with fear; the strongest hearts melt, and are afraid. Fear grips you with terrible pangs, like those of a woman in labor. You look at one another, helpless, as the flames of the burning city reflect upon your pallid faces.

COMMENTS

V. 1-5 REQUIEM FOR BABYLON: This is the beginning of the third part of Isaiah's prophecy to the Remnant and consists of the judgments upon the pagan nations. In this section Isaiah interprets to his readers, those faithful who will heed him, the activity of the Divine government as God deals with the heathen empires and their sin. He especially is led to write of pagan destinies in relation to God's faithful kingdom-people. These prophecies were not for the benefit of the Babylonians but for the people of God. From them they would learn that the hostile power of the world in its most powerful manifestation would finally be brought to ignominious defeat and ruin. No power that sets itself against God, be it as haughty and pretentious as was Babylonia, can prevail. Israel would learn that God does not permit to go unpunished the wickedness of those who have set themselves against the Lord and against His anointed, and who oppose His people.

To see the opponents of God's purposes punished would bring consolation and encouragement to the Jews, for it would teach them how precious their salvation was in God's sight. God is in control of all things. A topsy-turvy world is not really topsy-turvy. Even the darkest moments are in God's providential control and rule.

Isaiah probably wrote this section around 730 B.C. Babylon did not come to world domination until about 606 B.C., some 124 years later, and Babylon was not conquered until 536 B.C., nearly 200 years after Isaiah predicted it. How could Isaiah know it? Plainly, it was by super-natural revelation directly from God. Isaiah states that it was an oracle he "saw" (i.e. in a vision).

The three means of summoning the invaders of Babylon, raising an ensign—lifting up the voice—motioning with the hand, indicate the highest degree of urgency! Israel is bidden to cheer the conquerors of Babylon on.

The supreme note is the authority and government of God. He is directing the campaign against Babylon. The mighty hosts here assembled are not named but they are described as "my

consecrated ones," "my mighty ones" and "my proudly exulting ones," showing they were chosen of God and led by God. The Medes and Persians were a mountain people and Isaiah hears the noise of a mighty host of people armed for war and gathering together for conflict. They came from a far country—"the uttermost parts of heaven." Both Media and Persia were, as far as the Hebrews were concerned, "at the end of heaven" or where heaven and earth meet at the horizon. God is so absolutely the author of this that it is represented as the actual "day of Jehovah." Jehovah is at the head of the attacking army.

v. 6-8 REACTION OF BABYLON: Babylon will not brag and boast on this day of Jehovah as did Nebuchadnezzar upon his housetop (Dan. 4:27). Babylon will scream with terror and howl and mourn, (Cf. Jer. chs. 50-51).

The people of Babylon are pictured as paralyzed with astonishment and fright. This harmonizes with both Jeremiah 50:43; 51:30; and Daniel 5:6. After having caused Cyrus' withdrawal from the walls of Babylon, Belshazzar was surprised by the Persians stealing into the city on a dry river bed whose waters had been physically diverted around the city by the Persian army (see our comments in *Daniel*, College Press, chapter 5). Convulsing agitation and desperate perplexity came upon the Babylonians. Theirs is the deepest anguish for the day of Jehovah has broken upon them.

This is the ultimate destiny of all earthly kingdoms. This will be the reaction of all men and women who have put their trust in this world and its doomed systems.

QUIZ

1. What is the main thrust of this section of Isaiah's prophecy?
2. For whose benefit were these prophecies against the nations?
3. How would the doom of the pagan empires be a source of encouragement?
4. How much is God involved in the downfall of Babylon?
5. What was Babylonia's reaction to be to God's judgment?

b. PURPOSE OF JUDGMENT

TEXT: 13:9-16

- 9 Behold the day of Jehovah cometh, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger; to make the land a desolation, and to destroy the sinners thereof out of it.
- 10 For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light; the sun shall be darkened in its going forth, and the moon shall not cause its light to shine.
- 12 I will make a man more rare than fine gold, even a man than the pure gold of Ophir.
- 13 Therefore I will make the heavens to tremble, and the earth shall be shaken out of its place, in the wrath of Jehovah of hosts, and in the day of his fierce anger.
- 14 And it shall come to pass, that as the chased roe, and as sheep that no man gathereth, they shall turn every man to his own people, and shall flee every man to his own land.
- 15 Every one that is found shall be thrust through: and every one that is taken shall fall by the sword.
- 16 Their infants also shall be dashed in pieces before their eyes; their houses shall be rifled, and their wives ravished.

QUERIES

- a. How would the lights of the heavens cease to shine?
- b. How would the heavens and the earth be "shaken"?
- c. Why all the slaughter of human beings?

PARAPHRASE

Behold! The judgment day of Jehovah upon Babylon is coming. It will be a day of terrifying cruelty when God's wrath and anger is poured out. The land of the Babylonians will be made wasteland and its sinful people will be destroyed. The

suddenness and completeness of the downfall of this world-encompassing empire will be as if the whole universe of planets were destroyed and obliterated. The slaughter of men will be so great there would not be enough rare gold anywhere to buy a man. The downfall of Babylon will be so great it will shake the very foundations of society all over the earth. Long established structures will crumble and fall. The chaotic and helpless condition of the Babylonians will be as pathetic as the hunted deer and scattered sheep without a shepherd. People will flee Babylon like rats leaving a sinking ship. When their enemies pounce upon them they will slaughter every Babylonian they can find. Their enemies will perform atrocities upon their babies, dashing them to death before their eyes, ransacking their homes and raping their wives.

COMMENTS

v. 9-14 **ABOLITION OF BABYLON:** Jehovah, using the secondary means of the Medo-Persian conquest, is going to lay waste the massive and powerful Babylonian empire. Their societal structures, their culture, their name, their very existence is to be obliterated. It will be such an upheaval of the whole structure of society then known it would be as if God had turned off all the light in the world. When a government and culture like that of Babylon, which had such influence all over the world (Cf. Dan. 4:1-27), comes to such a sudden and chaotic end, it would seem as if the whole universe had caved in. The figure of the stars and the sun and the moon being darkened is a favorite figure of prophetic literature (Cf. Joel 2:10; 2:31; 3:15; Amos 8:9; Mīcah 3:6; Matt. 24:29). It is a figure that depicts downfalls of anti-God human structures to such an extent that men turning everywhere and anywhere for light and hope find only darkness and despair. The destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. was such a downfall of Judaism that those who had rejected the Messiah and Christianity were victims of the wrath of God and it appeared to them as if the sun had darkened and the moon turned to

blood, etc. (Cf. our comments in *Minor Prophets* on Joel 2:30-32).

Babylon's destruction will be so complete that a man cannot be found. So many Babylonian men will be killed that one man will be as rare as the finest gold in the world. The trembling of the heavens and the "shaking" of the earth out of its place is another figurative way of describing the complete downfall of this world-encompassing empire. It is our opinion that this is the figure the writer to the Hebrews in the New Testament (Heb. 12:25-29) is applying to the imminent downfall of Judaism in 70 A.D. God was going to "shake" down once and for all the old system of Judaism and the Hebrew Christians should be grateful for receiving a kingdom (the Church) that could not be shaken. Here, God is going to "shake" down the empire of Babylon, and it will be such a cataclysmic event it will be as if the whole earth were being shaken out of its place. All of this, of course, typical of the final judgment day of God when He will judge "Babylon" (Cf. Revelation) and shake down the old heavens and earth and create new ones. The condition of the people of Babylon, once so arrogant, haughty, wicked and complacent, is described as pathetic. They will run helter-skelter in wild-eyed fashion like a deer being hunted or like sheep being scattered.

v. 15-16 ATROCITIES UPON BABYLON: Historians tell us there was great bloodshed, carnage and atrocities of every kind perpetrated when the Medo-Persian coalition assaulted the city of Babylon. People of other nations (Babylon was a very cosmopolitan city) who were visiting fled in every direction to their own country. Those caught were destroyed. In the night of capture, there was a horrible massacre. A party of Persian soldiers burst into the palace and slew Belshazzar in the midst of great confusion and carnage. Young and old alike were impaled upon swords and spears. The city was fired and when morning came Cyrus was undisputed master of Babylon! (Cf. our comments in *Daniel*, ch. 5, College Press).

QUIZ

1. Who did God use to carry out His wrath on Babylon?
2. How thorough was their downfall?
3. What does "shake the heavens and the earth" mean?
4. What kinds of atrocities were committed upon the Babylonians?

c. PROLONGATION OF JUDGMENT

TEXT: 13:17-22

- 17 Behold I will stir up the Medes against them, who shall not regard silver, and as for gold, they shall not delight in it.
- 18 And their bows shall dash the young men in pieces; and they shall have no pity on the fruit of the womb; their eye shall not spare children.
- 19 And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldean's pride, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah.
- 20 It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation; neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there; neither shall shepherds make their flocks to lie down there.
- 21 But wild beasts of the desert shall lie there; and their houses shall be full of doleful creatures; and ostriches shall dwell there, and wild goats shall dance there.
- 22 And wolves shall cry in their castles, and jackals in the pleasant palaces; and her time is near to come, and her days shall not be prolonged.

QUERIES

- a. Who are the Medes?
- b. Why would the Arabian not pitch his tent there?

PARAPHRASE

For I will stir up the Medes against Babylon, and no amount of silver or gold will buy them off. The attacking armies will have no mercy on the young people of Babylon or the babies or the children. And so Babylon, the most glorious of kingdoms, the flower of Chaldean culture, will be as utterly destroyed as Sodom and Gomorrah were when God sent fire from heaven; Babylon will never rise again. Generation after generation will come and go, but the land will never again be lived in. The nomads will not even camp there. The shepherds won't let their sheep stay overnight. The wild animals of the desert will make it their home. The houses will be haunted by howling creatures. Ostriches will live there, and the demons will come there to dance. Hyenas and jackals will den within the palaces. Babylon's days are numbered; her time of doom will soon be here.

COMMENTS

v. 17-22 ABOMINATION UPON BABYLON: The Medes are first mentioned as Japhethites in Gen. 10:2. They are Aryans and first called themselves *Arioi* in Greek language. At first they were a people divided into small village communities each governed by its own chiefs. About 720 B.C. they were united into a kingdom under Deiokes (or Dayaukku). Their capital was Ecbatana. They first formed a coalition with Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians against Assyria (Nineveh). But now they are forming an alliance with the Persians led by Cyrus the Great against Babylon! The Medes populated the area generally known today as Iran and Iraq. The Median empire gradually merged into that of Persia (see our comments in *Daniel*, chs. 5, 7 and 8, College Press).

Babylon was conquered in 538 B.C., having been one of the greatest, if not the greatest, cities of all times. At one time there were more than fifty temples in Babylon. Many of these had walls overlaid with gold with altars overlaid with gold, and golden

statuettes. It was also home of the famous hanging gardens, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Nebuchadnezzar married a woman whose homeland was mountainous. She occasionally got homesick for her homeland so the king of Babylon built her some "mountains" (the hanging gardens) right in the city. The city occupied 200 square miles of land, protected by a double brick wall with moat in between the walls. Its walls were 90 feet thick and 300 feet high, with towers rising much higher all along the walls. The Euphrates River flowed through the center of the city guaranteeing its water supply. There was enough land within its walls to supply the city with food. It had no fear of siege.

The area of ancient Babylon has never been inhabited since its fall. Actually, it was destroyed in increments. Cyrus the Great left the walls and the city of Babylon itself still standing. Later, in 518 B.C. the walls were destroyed. Then Xerxes ruined the temple of Belus. As Seleucia rose, so Babylon declined, and in Strabo's time (63 B.C.—24 A.D.) Babylon was a desert of which he says, "a great desert is the great city." Though the Arabs will pitch their tents at nearly any spot, they are superstitious about Babylon, and though you hire one as a guide, he will not stay there at night. Modern-day travelers and tourists to this area attest to the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy! The ruined city is uninhabited by humans; jackals and many kinds of wild beasts live in the ruins. There are no sheepfolds about the ruins of ancient Babylon!

QUIZ

1. Where did the Medes live?
2. Who was the leader of the Medes and Persians against Babylon?
3. Describe ancient Babylon?
4. Has the prediction of Babylon's demise come to pass?