

God and the Nations

“Wherever We Flee For Help...”

Simon Harris

Text: Isa. 13-23

Introduction:

- I. *A man’s heart plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps.* (Pr. 16:9)
 - A. These words of Solomon certainly sum up the oracles of God given through Isaiah to Israel and the nations surrounding her.
 - B. Even a rudimentary study of these oracles reveals the simple message that God is in control.
- II. One cannot read these chapters without also gaining a deeper understanding of just how much God hates pride. It is a sin that God cannot stomach in any of its many manifestations.
- III. Human pride and the sovereignty of God are diametrically opposed to one another and one must give way to the other. Through these oracles we are left with no doubt that when all of history is played out that God will stand supreme and man’s pride will be reduced to rubble.
- IV. In the center of this battle we find the people of God.
 - A. How will they fare as the world crumbles?
 - B. What should they be doing as God wages war on the nations?
 - C. What part will they play in God’s plans for the future?
- V. Ultimately, these oracles were written so that God’s people might learn to trust in Him and Him alone.
 - A. As we study these lessons today, I am much more concerned about the content and the principles revealed to us than in the actual fulfillment of the oracles themselves.
 - B. Without a doubt there is strength and understanding to gain in the actual fulfillment, but it does not outweigh the wisdom gained by concerning ourselves with the principles that are often overlooked in favor of dwelling on the occasion of the prophesy itself.

Body:

I. The Structure and Purpose of the Oracles

- A. The recurrence of the Hebrew word *massa*’, translated “oracle” or “burden”, prescribes the boundaries of this section of Isaiah.
 1. “An oracle (*massa*’) means a ‘lifting up (of the voice)’, a declaration.” (Motyer, 136)
 2. “An oracle (or burden) is a heavy message of divine judgment.” (Constable, 65)
 3. *Massa*’ occurs ten times (13:1; 14:28; 15:1; 17:1; 19:1; 21:1, 11, 13; 22:1; 23:1)
- B. Thus, there are ten oracles in chapters 13-23.
 1. Against Babylon (13:1-14:27)
 2. Against Philistia (14:28-32)
 3. Against Moab (15:1-16:14)
 4. Against Damascus/Ephraim (17:1-18:7)

5. Against Egypt (19:1-20:6)
6. Against the Wilderness of the Sea (21:1-10)
7. Against Dumah (21:11-12)
8. Against Arabia (21:13-17)
9. Against the Valley of Vision (22:1-25)
10. Against Tyre (23:1-18)

C. Mingled among these ten oracles are four other judgments/pronouncements that most commentators consider to be “interim fulfillments.”

1. These interim fulfillments are events that would happen before the oracles themselves were fulfilled, thus giving proof that the oracles would come true.
2. The interim fulfillments are:
 - a. Assyria’s destruction (14:24-27)
 - b. Woe to Ethiopia, or Cush (18:1-7)
 - c. Sign of Isaiah’s nakedness (20:1-6)
 - d. Judgment against Shebna and Eliakim (22:15-25)

D. Motyer sees the ten oracles breaking down into two series of five wherein the first series reveals the principles God uses to judge the nations and the second series “projects those principles into the future moving from concrete historical names to more enigmatic allusions.” (Constable, 64)

1. Note: He also sees chapters 24-27 fitting this same pattern, but that was *way too much* material for me to try and cover!

Babylon (13:1-14:27) <i>Political Overthrow</i>	The Desert by the Sea [Babylon] (21:1-10) <i>Religious Overthrow</i>	The City of Emptiness (24:1-20) <i>Broken laws (5)</i> <i>Broken gates (12)</i>
Philistia (14:28-32) <i>A Davidic king will yet reign in Zion</i>	Silence [Edom] (21:11-12) <i>Indefinite continuance of things as they are</i>	Zion’s King (24:21-23) <i>‘After many days’</i>
Moab (15:1-16:14) <i>Moab in need, but through pride refuses shelter in Zion</i>	Evening [Arabia] (21:13-17) <i>Desert tribes in need; no ultimate refuge in mutual security</i>	The Great Banquet (25:1-12) <i>All nations feasted in Zion save Moab, excluded by pride</i>
Damascus/Ephraim (17:1-18:7) <i>Strong cities forsaken (9)</i> <i>The forgotten rock (10)</i>	The Valley of Vision [Jerusalem] (22:1-25) <i>The city torn down (10)</i>	The City of God (26:1-20) <i>The strong city (1)</i> <i>The everlasting rock (4)</i>
Egypt (19:1-20:6) <i>Co-equal membership: Egypt, Assyria and Israel</i>	Tyre (23:1-18) <i>Holiness to the Lord (18)</i>	The Final Gathering (27:1-13) <i>The harvest from Egypt and Assyria (12-13)</i>

(Motyer, 133)

-
- E. The above table reveals some interesting details about the oracles:
1. Each series begins with Babylon, and Israel is the subject of the fourth.
 2. Not only is Israel in the middle of the nations structurally, but also geographically.
 - a. In the first list Babylon is to Israel's north, Philistia to the west, Moab to the east, and Egypt to the south.
 - b. In the second list Babylon is to the north, Edom to the south, Arabia to the east, and Tyre to the west.
 3. The selection of these nations suggests that Israel occupies the central place in God's plans, and the surrounding nations are vulnerable. (Motyer, 133)
 4. Each series ends with a wealthy, Godless nation turning to the Lord.
- F. There also appears to be a thematic organization of the oracles beginning with the pronouncement of judgment leading to a turning to the Lord.
1. In the first series Babylon is utterly destroyed (13:19-22), Philistia is assured that Zion will be a place of refuge (14:32), Moab is encouraged to seek the security found only under Israel's true King (16:3-5), Israel is told to remember God, their Savior and the Rock of their salvation (17:10), and Egypt is brought to its knees that it might fear the Lord and that they, too, might be His people (19:16-25).
 2. In the second series God crushes all the Babylonian idols into the ground (21:9), Edom asks God's watchman for guidance (21:11), the Arabians look for aid but cannot find it among men (21:13-17), Judah is called upon to repent of its self-sufficient pride and look to their Maker (22:11-13); Tyre is laid waste so that they will/might learn to use their profit to aid the Lord and His people (23:18).
- G. The structure of the oracles serves to drive home the overall theme of the section, that Israel could not trust any of its neighbors against the Assyrian threat. They must turn to God alone.
1. Ahaz had failed to learn this lesson in chapters 6-12 and Hezekiah will be tempted to follow the same course in chapters 36-39.
 2. This theme is stated at the end of the first series, "*Surely such is our expectation, wherever we flee for help to be delivered from the king of Assyria; and how shall we escape?*" (20:6)
 3. The oracles are certainly not only intended for the Israelites of Isaiah's day, but they have a message for us as well. We too must learn not to trust in men, any men, but put our faith, hope, and trust in the Lord God of hosts.

II. Summary of the Oracles

A. Against Babylon (13:1-14:27)

1. From the very outset of the first oracle there is no room for doubt that God is in control of the earth and the destiny of its nations.
 - a. God musters His army. (13:4)
 - b. Destruction comes from the Almighty. (13:6)
 - c. Over and again God says, "I have..." or "I will..." (13:3, 11, 12, 13, 17; 14:22, 23)

2. God is going to destroy the whole land (13:5) and no one will be able to stand against Him (13:7-8)
3. Destruction is coming because of the “arrogance of the proud” and the “haughtiness of the terrible.” (13:11)
4. People will scatter like frightened gazelles and sheep in that day as they seek security. (13:14)
5. God is going to stir up the Medes against Babylon.
 - a. The Medes were known as ferocious fighters who loved war merely for the sake of fighting.
 - b. “They valued silver and gold less than military conquest; they could not be bought off but mercilessly slew every enemy.” (Constable, 67)
6. The great city of Babylon with all its culture and its glory will be utterly destroyed forever, only to be inhabited by wild animals. (13:19-22)
 - a. In the late 700s B.C., Babylon was the showcase of the ancient world.
 - b. It was culturally and economically superior to Assyria.
7. Babylon’s destruction was for the sake of Jacob (14:1-2)
 - a. Speaking of Judah’s return from captivity before they were ever taken.
 - b. Even in judgment God cares for His people.
8. Not only is Babylon destroyed, but also its king would be brought to the lowest pits of Sheol. (14:4-21)
 - a. “It is a biting parody of a lament. Instead of expressing grief over the death of the tyrant, it expresses both delight and satisfaction.” (Oswalt Application, 208)
 - b. The king serves to illustrate the very arrogance God is punishing. He tried to make himself like God, but failed to even enjoy the glory of other kings. (14:13, 18-19)
 - c. In the end the king has no throne, no tomb, no progeny, and no cities.
 - d. Some see this as a taunt song against Satan, but I believe that is stretching the passage beyond its intended purpose.
9. God again returns to the message of total destruction of Babylon. (14:22-23)
10. The first “interim fulfillment” is spoken as proof of God’s plans. (14:24-27)
 - a. God wants to demonstrate that when He makes plans they come to pass.
 - b. God will break the Assyrian yoke off His people and they will know that He is in control and that Babylon will be destroyed.
 - c. This may be a reference to Isaiah 37:36-38 when the angel of the Lord killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers when Sennacherib attacked Jerusalem.
11. The message of the oracle is obvious: why trust in a nation that will be so utterly destroyed by the Lord of hosts?

B. Against Philistia (14:28-32)

1. The oracle against Philistia came in the year that king Ahaz of Judah died, but what significance (if any) this might have on the meaning of the oracles is unclear.
 - a. Some believe that the Philistines are rejoicing over the death of Ahaz because of the oppression of the Davidic kings.
 - b. Others see this as Philistia seeking an alliance with the “new” king, Hezekiah.
2. Regardless of the significance of Ahaz’s death, the message to the Philistines is clear: things are not going to get better for them, only worse.
 - a. The rod that struck them will give birth to a viper and its offspring will be a fiery serpent. (29)
 - b. The cities of Philistia might as well start crying because their destruction is coming soon. (31)
3. Isaiah’s message to Israel is to trust in the Lord who will keep Zion safe in the face of the same threat. They have no need to seek Philistia’s help, or to fear what Philistia fears because the Lord is in Zion.

C. Against Moab (15:1-16-14)

1. Not only is Moab close geographically to Judah, but they also share family ties.
 - a. Moab was one of the sons born out of the incestuous relations between Lot and his daughters. (Gen. 19:37)
 - b. Ruth, one of David’s ancestors, was a Moabitess. (Ruth 4:13-22)
2. Moab’s destruction comes quickly and is widespread.
 - a. City after city falls, including the two main cities of Ar and Kir that seem to fall overnight.
 - b. There appears to be a southerly movement of destruction indicating an army advancing from the north.
3. Moab has no place to turn. Their gods do not answer (2), and their army will not fight (4).
4. “[God] grieves over the plight of the fugitives (5), the stricken environment (6), the futile efforts to salvage something from the overthrow (7-8) and over what is yet to come (9).” (Motyer, 150)
5. Moab looks to her enemy for help wandering as a bird thrown from the nest. (16:1-2)
6. Security is available for Moab in Zion because “*the extortioner is at an end, devastation ceases, the oppressors are consumed out of the land.*” (16:4)
 - a. A merciful, faithful, just, and righteous Davidic king will judge there. (5)
 - b. Obviously, a promise of the Messiah and His rule being for all peoples including the Moabites.
7. Moab’s pride keeps them from accepting the mercy of God. (6)
 - a. Maybe like many today they were seeking a Savior, but not a King.
 - b. God cannot comfort the proud, only the humble can be lifted up!
8. Because of Moab’s pride the good things they had would be taken away:

- a. Raisin cakes [They were well known for this delicacy] (7)
 - b. Gladness and joy of the harvest (10)
9. Isaiah tells us that this will happen within three years, as counted by a hired man.
- a. A hired man would count the days until this contract was fulfilled.
 - b. The idea is that it would come to pass in precisely three years.
10. The message of this oracle is two-fold:
- a. Judah cannot look to Moab for help because very soon they would be utterly destroyed, and Moab should look to Judah for safety.
 - b. Moab will have an opportunity to share in the joys of the Messianic kingdom.

D. Against Damascus/Ephraim (17:1-18:7)

1. Damascus was the capital city of Syria (or Aram) and Ephraim was a name often used to describe the Northern Kingdom of Israel [Ephraim being its largest tribe].
 - a. These two nations had formed an alliance against Assyria, so with their common political and military goals came a common judgment.
 - b. How humiliating for the people of God to be linked with a pagan nation!
2. The oracle begins with a pronouncement against Syria but moves quickly to concentrate on Israel.
 - a. The remnant of Syria will be as the glory of the children of Israel. (17:3)
 - b. The glory of Jacob will wane and grow lean. (4)
 - c. Not only do these verses link Syria and Israel in a common judgment, but they also shift the focus onto Israel.
3. When God is through with Israel they will be like the fields of a farmer who tries to leave as little as possible for the gleaners. (4-6)
 - a. God will leave a remnant of His people in Israel.
 - b. “The concept of the remnant is double-edged: hardly anything of the nation will remain, though there *will* be something left.” (Oswalt Application, 231)
4. The remnant God leaves will look to their Maker and respect the Holy One of Israel. They will not look to the wooden images and incense altars they had made. (7-8)
5. Verse 9 is apparently hard to translate, but the best idea seems to be that Israel lived in cities that had been abandoned by the Canaanites, now Israel would in turn abandon them as God pronounced judgment on them.
6. This judgment is coming upon Israel because they had forgotten God, their Savior, and forsaken the Rock of their stronghold. (10a)
 - a. It was through God’s mighty hand they conquered the land in the first place, and it was by His protection they had remained in the land this long.
 - b. Why would they not just turn to Him instead of turning to alliances?
7. God tells them that even though they had bought good plants and set them out with great care, there would be no harvest, only a heap of ruin. (10b-11)
 - a. Some see this as an allusion to the foreign alliance with Syria.

- b. Others say it is a description of “a pagan custom designed to secure the favor of local gods. Rather than trusting in their saving God the Israelites had planted little seedlings of faith in idols.” (Constable, 74)
 - c. The simplest explanation may be that God was saying that nothing the Israelites tried would be successful because they were not trusting in Him.
8. Security cannot be found in the fortress of walled cities. It is only found in the fortress of God, who is able to push back the rushing nations with a word of rebuke just like the wind pushes chaff or tumbleweed. (12-14)
 9. God’s judgment will come swiftly. There will be trouble in the evening, but by morning it is all over! (14)
 10. Chapter 18 is an interim fulfillment showing how the nations are subject to God, illustrating the truth revealed in 17:12-14.
 - a. It is addressed to the “*land shadowed with buzzing wings, which is beyond the rivers of Ethiopia.*” (1)
 - 1) This is the nation of Cush [Nubia] that was known for its papyrus boats whose sails looked like whirring wings of insects.
 - 2) “Buzzing wings” may also refer to the Tutsi fly, or to the buzzing of diplomatic activity.
 - b. It would seem that Cush has sent ambassadors to Judah seeking an alliance against Assyria and they are sent back with a message to beware of the true Ruler of the world. (3-4)
 - 1) God is at work, but in contrast to the ambassadors, He is calm and restful knowing there is no stopping the work of His hand.
 - a) He is like the sunrise or the dew that comes with neither fanfare nor pageantry, but cannot be stopped. (4)
 - b) He will cut off Cush like a vine of sour grapes, meaning that it will come sooner than expected. They have no control over their own destiny. (5-6)
 - 2) Instead of giving tribute to Cush for protection, Judah needs to understand that someday Cush will bring gifts to the Lord of hosts on Mt. Zion. (7)
 11. The message of the oracle clearly is that if Israel was going to act like a pagan nation then it would be treated like one. There was no security to be found among the nations, only in the God who controls the destiny of nations.

E. **Against Egypt** (19:1-20:6)

1. The oracle against Egypt announces the total collapse of everything in which the Egyptians trusted (19:1-15) and their eventual turning to God (16-25) which is illustrated by the most unusual interim fulfillment in the section (ch. 20)
2. God would come in judgment against Egypt, toppling its idols and melting the hearts of its people. (1)
3. His judgment would result in social collapse. (2-4)
 - a. Very fragile bonds of unity held Egyptian society together.

-
- b. “Kingdom periods, during which the Pharaoh was worshipped as god, were interspersed with long periods when the 42 city-states ruled themselves and the people worshipped innumerable gods.” (Constable, 76)
4. God would strike the Nile and cause widespread economic failure. (5-10)
 - a. Egypt’s economy depended almost entirely on the Nile River. “Dry up the Nile and sooner or later the whole Egyptian economy will grind to a halt.” (Grogan)
 - b. Egyptians referred to their land as “the gift of the Nile.”
 - c. Without the Nile there would be no papyrus, no fishing, and no flax for making linen, in short, there would be no industry.
 5. God’s judgment would demonstrate the true lack of wisdom in Egypt. (11-15)
 - a. The Egyptians were known for their wisdom and took great pride in it.
 - b. How could they be so wise if they hadn’t seen the coming judgment of God? (12)
 - c. God had confounded their wisdom because they sought idols and spirits rather than Him. (14)
 6. When God removed all that Egypt trusted, they would then turn to Him. (16-25)
 - a. It would begin with fear of the Lord and the very mention of Judah. (15-16)
 - b. Five cities would then begin speaking the language of Canaan and they would swear allegiance to the Lord of hosts.
 - 1) Five may be symbolic of an incomplete number. Five is less than seven which is symbolic of perfection.
 - 2) Five may be a reference to Joshua’s decisive victory over the five cities of the Northern Coalition (Josh. 10) that marked the victory for conquest of the whole land.
 - 3) Five may simply show that the conversion started small.
 - c. There would be an altar and pillar of witness in the land of Egypt, marking it as territory that belonged to God. (19-20)
 - d. God would begin to treat Egypt as His people. (20-25)
 - 1) The Egyptians would cry out to the Lord and He would send them a Savior and a Mighty One. (20)
 - a) God had done the same for the Israelites time and again in Judges.
 - b) There seems to be a Messianic flavor to this promise.
 - 2) God would chastise them and heal them to make them stronger. (22)
 - 3) He would make them equal with Israel and Assyria. (23-25)
 - a) This prophecy had to just blow the Israelites away!
 - b) Their worst enemies, from opposite sides of the world, would be joined together with them by a highway and they would all worship God together.
-

-
- c) God even calls them by names that had previously been reserved to Israel alone: “Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel My inheritance.” (25)
 - d) In truth Israel would fulfill the role God had always intended them to have as a blessing to all nations.
 - 7. The message of this remarkable oracle is why would Israel trust in a nation that cannot protect itself from total ruin and would ultimately be turning to the very God Israel was refusing to follow?
 - 8. Chapter 20 is a most unusual interim fulfillment illustrating that the world powers of Isaiah’s day were subject to God as he had proclaimed in 19:23-25.
 - a. In the year that Tartan [or the supreme commander] came to Ashdod... (1)
 - 1) Ashdod had rebelled against Sargon with the promise of support from Egypt that never came.
 - 2) The rebellion continued for about three years until it was put down when Sargon sent his second in command to reduce Ashdod to an Assyrian province.
 - b. During these years Isaiah, at the command of God, went around “naked and barefoot.” (2)
 - 1) It is likely that he wore a loincloth.
 - 2) Wearing a loincloth would leave the buttocks bared. (Oswalt Application, 244)
 - c. Isaiah’s observers surely must have thought he was acting out the fate of Ashdod, but at the end of three years he announced that his strange behavior had stood for the Egyptians and the Cushites. They would be taken into captivity.
 - d. The message of this “acted oracle” was the message of all the oracles: *“Surely such is our expectation, wherever we flee for help to be delivered from the king of Assyria; and how shall we escape?”* (6)
- F. Against the Wilderness of the Sea (21:1-10)**
- 1. This oracle is the beginning of the second series of oracles. They are more cryptic and negative.
 - 2. The “Wilderness of the Sea” is an enigmatic reference to Babylon.
 - a. This was the name of a marshy plain filled with lakes southeast of Babylon that was the home territory of Merodach-Baladan. (39:1)
 - b. It is also interesting that Wilderness [Desert] of the Sea is a contradiction of terms, but also invokes images of nature that are untamed and encroaching.
 - c. The context of verse 9 indicates Babylon as the subject of the oracle.
 - 3. Destruction was coming to Babylon as quickly as a windstorm rose out of the Negev. (1)
 - 4. Babylon would be destroyed by Elam [Persia] and Media. (2)
 - 5. The vision of destruction caused physical and emotion shock in Isaiah. (3-4)
 - a. Some see this as compassion for Babylonians.
-

- b. Others see it as sympathy for the Israelite captives for whom Babylon will be both a prison and a home.
- 6. Exactly who is feasting in verse 5 is unclear.
 - a. Is it a feast in a Babylonian Palace, or a feast for the Babylonian ambassadors in Judah, or is it a feast by and for the Judeans?
 - b. I really don't know which makes the most sense, but I do understand that the people who were feasting were caught unawares by the coming destruction of Babylon.
- 7. Isaiah sets a watchman to be on the lookout for horsemen in pairs with a train of donkeys and camels. (6-7)
 - a. NASB is better in verse 7 than KJV or NKJV.
 - b. "According to the Greek historian Xenophon, this is how the Persian army marched." (Constable, 81)
- 8. The watchman is patient and diligent in his duty and finally brings word to Isaiah that he saw the sign he had been looking for and he reports the news of Babylon's fall. (8-9)
 - a. In the first Babylon oracle destruction came to the city and its government. In this oracle it is the idols of Babylon that are crushed into the ground.
 - b. John uses similar terminology in Revelation 18:2.
- 9. Isaiah closes by comparing Judah to a threshed crop [remnant symbolism] because of the oppression they suffered (10).
- 10. Again, the message is clear: Judah cannot trust Babylon to help them because the God of Israel has doomed it.

G. **Against Dumah** (21:11-12)

- 1. Dumah means "silence" and is a word play on Edom.
 - a. "The questioner came from Seir, i.e. Edom (Gn. 32:3) (Motyer, 177)
 - b. Dumah also seems to be an appropriate title since the oracle is silent concerning Edom's ultimate fate.
- 2. The Edomite asks if things will change for the better like the night giving way to daylight. (11)
- 3. The watchman replies that morning will come, but the night will return. (12)
 - a. This would indicate that things would get better for a short time, but oppression would shortly return.
 - b. In the broader context, this shows how the Gentiles really had no understanding of the significance of the times and events surrounding them.
- 4. The watchman also tells the Edomite to "Return! Come back!"
 - a. Could be advice to patiently wait for what was coming.
 - b. May also be a call to repent "as the divine call: 'Seek, repent, come'." (Kidner, 670)

5. This oracle contrasts Israel's understanding of world events with that of the Gentile nations. Why would God's people look to these nations for help when they didn't have a clue about what was really happening in the world?

H. **Against Arabia** (21:13-17)

1. The words for "Arabia" and for "evening" have the same consonants and there is a possible word play intended by Isaiah.
2. The Dedanites, an Arabian tribe, have been caught up in the ravages of war and have fled to the oasis in Tema where the inhabitants of the land have been called upon to feed and water them. (13-15)
 - a. Even this distant land southeast of Edom was not safe from Assyria's threat.
 - b. These people have nowhere to turn but each other, and even they will not be able to provide protection for one another.
3. The Arabians are ultimately suffering because God had determined it against them and for that reason within one year their glory would fall. (16-17)
4. This oracle shows that the world cannot solve its own problems. There is no place to turn for security but the Lord.

I. **Against the Valley of Vision** (22:1-25)

1. "Valley of Vision" is a reference to Jerusalem.
 - a. This again is a contradiction of terms. The valley is not the place to go to get a long view of things.
 - b. This could also be a reference to all the prophetic visions that came out of Jerusalem.
 - c. I prefer seeing it as a combination of both ideas. Isaiah uses sarcasm to rebuke the Judeans for their lack of vision when so much had been revealed to them.
 - d. "In this valley there was a notable lack of vision among God's people when it came to seeing things from His perspective." (Constable, 84)
2. Isaiah sees the people of Jerusalem up on their housetops celebrating some short-lived victory, ignoring what is to come upon them very soon. (1-2a)
3. They are oblivious to their coming defeat, starvation, and captivity. (2b-3)
4. Isaiah refuses to join in the celebration because he knows what is coming. (4)
5. A day of judgment from God is on the horizon. (5-7)
 - a. Elam and Kir will be the instruments of God's punishment.
 - b. The valley that was full of celebration (2) will be filled "with chariots, infantry, and horsemen" (6, NASB).
6. God has removed the protection of Judah because they trusted in themselves instead of looking to Him. (8-11)
 - a. In the "Valley of Vision" they "*looked*...to the armor...*saw*...the damage to the city...but you *did not look* to its Maker" (Emphasis mine)
 - b. God knew about Jerusalem's vulnerabilities when He chose it, and with His protection they had nothing to fear, without it they had no hope!

-
7. Isaiah further explains why he was so upset over Jerusalem's celebration. They were actually celebrating their hopelessness when God had called for repentance. (12-13)
 - a. They had accepted that they were unable to save themselves so they decided to go out with a bang.
 - b. They were eating the oxen and the sheep instead of offering them to God.
 8. This was a sin God could not forgive. (14)
 - a. There is no hope for men who refuse to repent.
 - b. They had resigned themselves to death, and that is exactly what they'd get.
 9. The judgment on Shebna is an interim fulfillment illustrating Jerusalem's attitude as a whole in the arrogance of one man. (15-25)
 - a. Shebna was a man who loved the "perks" of office and was more concerned about making a lasting name for himself than he was for the welfare of God's people.
 - 1) Shebna was building a wonderful tomb for himself that would show future generations how great he was. (16)
 - 2) He was a "mighty man" (17) who loved his "glorious chariot" (18) and the symbols of his office (21-22).
 - b. All that Shebna loved was going to be taken from him and all his plans would come to naught.
 - 1) He would never be buried in his tomb, because God was going to roll him up like a ball and toss him to a far country. (17)
 - 2) His office and all its "perks" were to be given to another man. (19-22)
 - c. God was giving Shebna's office to Eliakim, whom He called "My Servant." (20)
 - 1) He would look after God's people as a father.
 - 2) He would have authority only the king could override. (22)
 - 3) He would be the "peg" that kept Jerusalem secure.
 - d. Unfortunately, even Eliakim would fail. (24-25)
 - 1) The pressure of his office and especially his family would be too much for him to bear and he would crack under the strain.
 - 2) "No human can bear what is meant to be rolled onto the Lord. Even the best person will break under those circumstances." (Oswalt Application, 265)
 - e. Again, Isaiah assures us that these are the words spoken by God. (25b)
 10. This oracle clearly proclaims that even God's people are not immune to His wrath when they look to themselves for security and not to the Lord of hosts.

J. Against Tyre (23:1-18)

1. It is fitting that the second series of oracles began with Babylon, the great land power of the ancient world and ends with Tyre, the great sea power of the day.
 - a. "Babylon gained her power through warfare whereas Tyre gained hers peacefully." (Constable, 87)

-
- b. Babylon was interested in power and conquest, but Tyre was only interested in money.
 2. News travels all over the world about Tyre's collapse, bringing a variety of responses.
 - a. Wailing on the ships of Tarshish (1)
 - b. Warning in Sidon (2-4)
 - c. Agony in Egypt (5)
 - d. Wailing among the inhabitants of the coastland (6)
 - e. Anarchy in Tarshish [a Tyrian colony] (10)
 - f. Even the sea itself is personified and reacts with terrible grief to the loss of her seaman. (4)
 3. This destruction is part of God's plan to "dishonor the pride of all glory." (8-9)
 - a. Tyre set up colonies that were so powerful they had their own kings appointed by Tyre and were accountable to them. (8)
 - b. "Tyre's merchants had become so wealthy that they were no longer considered business men but rather were a part of the nobility." (Oswalt Application, 273)
 4. God would use His power over the creation and over the nations to humble Tyre (11-12), and they only had to look at what Assyria had done to the Chaldeans to know that Tyre's fate was in His hand (13).
 5. Tyre would experience a brief revival in the future when she would return to her seductive ways, but this time it would be different. Instead of hoarding her treasures they would be used for the Lord and His people. (17-18)
 - a. Again, the reader is amazed that the nation that influenced Israel to worship Baal and seduced her with the promise of riches now turns to the Lord.
 - b. God's ultimate plan for the Gentiles (seen in Tyre, Cush, Egypt and Assyria) is to bring them in line with His central purpose for Israel: to serve Him.
 6. The second series of oracles ends just as did the first: why trust in a nation that is doomed by Israel's God and will ultimately submit to Him?

III. The Lessons of the Oracles

A. God is in control.

1. This is such a recurring theme in the Scriptures because man apparently has such a hard time learning it and accepting it. It certainly is one of the central themes of the oracles against the nations.
2. From the very outset we see God's sovereignty (Isa. 13)
 - a. He musters His army. (3)
 - b. He destroys the land with the weapons of His indignation. (5)
 - c. He punishes the world for its evil. (11)
 - d. Over and again He tells us what he will do. (13:11-22)
3. The Lord's just thinks about something and it comes to pass. (14:24-27)
 - a. Whatever He proposes to do, it happens. (24)

- b. No one can stand against the Lord's plans. (27)
- 4. He speaks and it is so. (16:13-14; 21:16-17)
- 5. The nations may rage like the "rushing of many waters" but God rebukes them with a word and they are chased away like chaff or tumbleweed. (17:13)
- 6. The ultimate control of the fate of nations rests with God, not social, economic, or political conditions. (19:1-15)
 - a. False gods crumble before Him. (1)
 - b. Social stability is at His command. (2-4)
 - c. We are dependent upon Him for our livelihood. (5-10)
 - d. True wisdom and power are only found in Him. (11-15)
- 7. God also controls the destiny of individuals. (22:15-25)
 - a. He can overthrow our plans as easily as tossing a ball. (18)
 - b. He can raise us to heights we could never achieve without Him. (22)
- 8. It doesn't matter how strong we seem, how rich we may be, how "connected" we are, or how long we've been doing it; God can bring us down. (23:8-12)

B. God's people can put their trust in no one other than the Almighty Sovereign of the world.

- 1. This really is the overall theme of the oracles.
- 2. It is not that we *shouldn't* trust in other things. It is that we *cannot* trust in other things because they all fail to deliver what they promise.
- 3. Alliances with the world's super powers cannot be trusted. (Ch. 13, 19, 23)
- 4. We cannot look to our closest neighbor for security. (14:28:32; Ch. 15-16, 17, 23)
- 5. Peoples from far away lands cannot protect us. (Ch. 18)
- 6. Even the best of men cannot be expected to provide what God alone can give. (22:24-25)
- 7. The hardest of all lessons to learn, we cannot even trust ourselves to provide safety and security. (13:15-16; 17:10-11; 22:8-11)

C. God hates pride.

- 1. "Isaiah never grew tired of saying God was absolutely opposed to human pride in every form." (Grogan)
- 2. Pride comes in so many shades that it is easy for us to be blinded by our own arrogance. This section of Isaiah puts them on display and reminds us again and again just how vile they all are to God.
 - a. Babylon's pride in its military and culture. (Ch. 13-14, 21)
 - b. Moab's arrogant nature, desiring deliverance but refusing to submit. (16:6)
 - c. Damascus and Ephriam's reliance on their fortifications. (17:1-3)
 - d. Egypt's trust in their multitude of gods, their strong economy, and their famous wisdom. (19:1-15)

- e. Judah's feeling of self-sufficiency and their determination to find solutions to their own problems without God. (22:8-11)
 - f. Tyre's pride in wealth and vast enterprise. (Ch. 23)
3. Judgment is coming to "halt the arrogance of the proud" and "lay low the haughtiness of the terrible." (13:11)
 4. When man glories in the work of his own hands it is destroyed. (13:19; 16:6-10; 17:1-3; 19:1-15; 22:15-22; 23:7-9)
 5. Pride keeps us from receiving God's favor. (16:4-7; 22:8-11, 14)
 6. Pride will condemn us to the "lowest depths of the pit." (14:12-15)

D. The best of human effort is not enough to solve the human problem.

1. This is a principle that really combines God's sovereignty and His abhorrence of pride.
2. This truth is first illustrated in the Moabites inability to find security even though they have scattered everywhere looking for it. (15:2, 8-9; 16:1-7)
3. Ephraim tried buying the best plants and gave them extra care only to reap a harvest of ruins. (17:10-11)
4. The Cushites are buzzing around looking for a solution while God calmly sits back and carries out His plan. (18:1-7)
5. Egypt's wise men never saw the judgment of God coming. (19:11-13)
6. Jerusalem had made its best stand by storing weapons, strengthening the walls, and securing the supplies, only to be starved, overrun, and carried away. (22:1-11)

E. God always holds out a promise for a better future to those who will serve Him

1. It seems as if God cannot bring Himself to punish man without giving hope at the same time.
2. In the midst of the oracle on Babylon's destruction God says that it is for the sake of His people and their future He is punishing evil. (14:1-2)
3. The oracle against Philistia ends with a promise of refuge in Zion. (14:32)
4. Moab is invited to escape oppression in the "tabernacle of David" where a Judge rules in loving-kindness and truth, seeking justice and hastens righteousness. (16:4-5)
5. In the scathing rebuke of Israel, linked to the pagan nation of Syria, God promises that a remnant will remain who will look to their Maker and respect the Holy One of Israel. (17:6-8)
6. Even the Cushites are seen bringing gifts to the Lord of hosts. (18:7)
7. Eliakim must have been seen as a breath of fresh air compared to Shebna's administration. (22:20-25)
8. The section ends with a message of hope for the "great religious seducer" of Israel. (23:17-18)
 - a. Even the nation that influenced Israel to worship Baal will find a place in the kingdom of God.
 - b. Instead of hindering God's children they will aid them in their service to God.

-
- F. There are also several lessons to be learned about **the judgment of God**.
1. Judgments in time **foreshadow final judgment**
 - a. “Every local judgment is meant to stir in human beings a recognition of final accountability.” (Grogan)
 2. Judgment will be **just**. God tells the nations why they are being punished. (13:11; 14:13, 17, 20; 16:6, 17:10; 22:12-14; 23:9)
 3. Judgment is **inescapable**.
 - a. The Moabites fled from city to city only to be captured by lions. (15:9)
 - b. Damascus and Ephraim could not hide behind walled cities. (17:1-3)
 - c. Egypt couldn’t count on anything they thought made them strong. (19:1-15)
 - d. Tiny nations and far away tribes were not overlooked. (Ch. 18; 21:11-17)
 - e. God’s own people were not exempt. (Ch. 22)
 4. Judgment will be **impartial**. (Ch. 17 & 22)
 5. Judgment is **a purging**, leaving Him a remnant of true worshippers. (17:7-8; 19:18)
 6. Judgment **glorifies God**.
 - a. It is true in every one of the oracles that in the end God is shown to be righteous and just and the only true and living God.
 - b. It is especially true in the oracles where Gentiles turn to God. (Ch. 18, 19, & 23)
- G. Lastly, **we must learn to stand in awe of the God we serve**.
1. He is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent.
 2. There is no power He doesn’t control.
 3. All of world history is for the good of His people.
 4. Without Him there is no hope of protection, but there is real, everlasting security in the refuge of His kingdom.

Conclusion:

- I. While it might be easy to look at these oracles as obscure prophecies about nations long forgotten, to do so would be foolish at the least and sinful at the worst.
- II. The principles laid out before us by the prophet are the principles God uses to govern the destinies of nations, peoples, and individuals even today.
- III. The lessons are meant to show us that God is our only hope of safety in a world ruled by pride and arrogance, where man continues to struggle for the power that God alone wields.

Simon Harris
 5202 Karen Court
 Floyds Knobs, IN 47119
 simonh@insightbb.com

Selected Bibliography

- Constable, Thomas L. "Notes on Isaiah; 2004 Edition" 2004. *Expository Notes*. 2004
<<http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf>> (November 29, 2004)
- Gorgan, Geoffrey W. "Isaiah." In *Isaiah-Ezekiel*. Vol. 6 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 12 vols. Edited by Frank E. Gaebelein and Richard P. Polcyn. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986.
- Kidner, F. Derek. "Isaiah." In *The New Bible Commentary 21st Century Edition*. Edited by G.J. Wenham, J.A. Motyer, D.A Carson, & R.T. France. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1994
- Motyer, J. Alec. *The prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary*. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1993
- Oswalt, John N. *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1-39*. The New International Commentary of the Old Testament series. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986
- _____. *The NIV Application Commentary Series: Isaiah*, Edited by Terry Muck. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2003