

## General Comments on Isaiah 13-32

Chapters 13-32 are a series of woe and doom oracles announced upon Israel and Judah, and the surrounding Gentile nations. The text can be grouped as follows:

- Ch. 13-23 Woe and doom on Gentile nations (cf. 13:1-11, 19:1-2)
- Ch. 24-27 The Apocalypse of Isaiah, Isaiah's account of the Day of the Lord (cf. 24:5-6, 25:8-9, 26:20-21)
- Ch. 28-32 Woe and doom upon Ephraim and Judah (cf. 28:7-8, 29:13-14, 30:1)

The doom oracles are composed of typical covenant curse formulas, and Isaiah's comments on the Day of the Lord are similar to those made by Joel, Micah, and the other prophets.

All of the accusations and judgements in these chapters revolve around a central thesis of the people choosing the arm of flesh over the arm of God. This is most clearly the case in the political ties between Egypt and Judah, which develop as a result of Assyrian military activity. Isaiah repeatedly attacks such diplomatic means of protection from Assyria (cf. 30:1-5), but the people ignore him and end up reviling him for it (cf. 30:9-11, 31:1-3). They rely on Egypt, what seems to them to be a reliable military, political, and economic power (cf. 19:5-13). Thus, the underlying social and political context of these chapters is Judah's reliance upon Egypt, the arm of flesh, rather than the arm of the Lord.

Why is this the underlying message? How does it affect Isaiah's ministry? How does it influence Isaiah's writings? Isaiah was very much involved with both Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, when it came to matters of religion and politics. He was spurned by both when it came to matters of foreign policy (although Hezekiah was a religious reformer and much better king than his father Ahaz). Isaiah saw first-hand the mix of politics, religion, power, corruption, and the resulting apostasy. He wanted to keep Judah out of foreign politics and culture altogether (not surprising given Ahaz's alliance with Assyria resulted in him introducing Assyrian idolatry to Judah and profaning the Temple, cf. 2 Ki. 16). While Hezekiah was a religious reformer, Isaiah wanted Judah out of foreign intrigue altogether. He demanded they rely on the Lord alone, the Deliverer and Strength of Israel. He saw what previous political alliances had done to Judah under Ahaz. He knew how weak these diplomatic ties were compared to the Lord's power to deliver, and he tried to convince Hezekiah of this. To Isaiah the historical evidence was overwhelming. However, they spurned him, and the

result is the multitude of curses in these chapters.

The modern reader must understand that Isaiah was prominent not only in religious circles, but also in political circles at that time. As such, his writings touch on many of the complexities of life at Jerusalem at that time. Just as our lives are presently influenced by social, political, and religious forces, so were the lives of the ancient Israelites.

Chapters 13-23 are a series of woes and doom oracles pronounced upon Gentile nations neighboring Israel. Many commentators consider these chapters to be of historical application only. Evidence supporting eschatological interpretations follows with the chapters as they are commented on.

### **General Comments on Isaiah 13**

Note: this chapter appears in 2 Ne. 23

This chapter recounts a series of pronouncements against Babylon by Isaiah and includes a number of direct quotes from the Lord (v.2-3, 11-12, 17-18). While this chapter had something of a historical fulfillment with Cyrus' sack of Babylon, there are eschatological implications.

There is considerable similarity between this chapter and the book of Joel. Similar symbolism and phraseology are employed, the "Day of the Lord" for example. But, there are some notable contrasts. In Joel, the army coming to invade is to punish Israel and after it punishes Israel, it itself is decimated by the Lord. Joel sees all nations gathered to judgement. However, in this chapter by Isaiah, there is no documented attempt to get the inhabitants of Babylon to repent. Babylon is to be annihilated, never to return or be inhabited. By using similar symbolism and phraseology as Joel, Isaiah rhetorically links the events, but contrasts the sparing of the righteous remnant of Israel with the utter annihilation of Babylon. Joel's presentation is more physically literal while Isaiah's reading is more spiritually symbolic.

Also of note is the contrast between Isaiah's Babylon and the Babylon of John's Revelation. John portrays Babylon as a drunken harlot who corrupts all nations of the earth with her abominations. This kind of symbolism suggests an apostate condition, thus implying one who is actively rebelling against the covenant (cp. Hosea 1-4, esp. 4:11-14). Isaiah's presentation of Babylon has no symbolism of a drunken harlot or any implications of an apostate condition. That covenant curses

are invoked in v. 5 and v. 20-22 might imply an apostate condition, but curses such as these are not exclusively applied to rebellious covenant makers (e.g., Sodom and Gomorrah, referenced in v. 19). In other chapters Isaiah does employ the unfaithful wife/apostate whore imagery when describing Israel (cf. ch. 57), but in this chapter that imagery is absent. Instead, Isaiah defines Babylon as "glory of kingdoms" (v. 19). Thus, Isaiah is specifically attacking arm of the flesh nations and kingdoms and their arrogant rulers and haughty tyrants (v. 11). Isaiah's is saying that with the Day of the Lord will come the abolition of arm of the flesh kingdoms and nations. Theocracy will replace it.

### KJV Isai ah 13

1 THE burden of Babylon, which  
Isaiah the son of Amoz did  
see. 2 Lift ye up a banner  
upon the high mountain, exalt  
the voice unto them, shake the  
hand, that they may go into  
the gates of the nobles. 3 I  
have commanded my sanctified  
ones, I have also called my  
mighty ones for mine anger,  
[even] them that rejoice in my  
highness. 4 The noise of a  
multitude in the mountains,  
like as of a great people; a  
tumultuous noise of the  
kingdoms of nations gathered  
together: the LORD of hosts  
mustereth the host of the  
battle. 5 They come from a far  
country, from the end of  
heaven, [even] the LORD, and  
the weapons of his  
indignation, to destroy the  
whole land.

6 Howl ye; for the day of the  
LORD [is] at hand; it shall  
come as a destruction from the  
Almighty. 7 Therefore shall  
all hands be faint, and every  
man's heart shall melt: 8 And  
they shall be afraid: pangs  
and sorrows shall take hold of  
them; they shall be in pain as  
a woman that travaileth: they  
shall be amazed one at  
another; their faces [shall be  
as] flames. 9 Behold, the day  
of the LORD cometh, cruel both  
with wrath and fierce anger,  
to lay the land desolate: and  
he shall destroy the sinners  
thereof out of it. 10 For the

### JPS Isaiah 13

The "Babylon" Pronouncement, a prophecy of Isaiah son of Amoz.

<sup>2</sup>"Raise a standard upon a bare hill,  
Cry aloud to them;  
Wave a hand, and let them enter  
The gates of the nobles!

<sup>3</sup>I have summoned My purified guests  
To execute My wrath;  
Behold, I have called My stalwarts,  
My proudly exultant ones."

<sup>4</sup>Hark! a tumult on the mountains—  
As of a mighty force;  
Hark! an uproar of kingdoms,  
Nations assembling!  
The LORD of Hosts is mustering  
A host for war.

<sup>5</sup>They come from a distant land,  
From the end of the sky—  
The LORD with the weapons of His wrath—  
To ravage all the earth!

<sup>6</sup>Howl!  
For the day of the LORD is near;  
It shall come like havoc from Shaddai.

<sup>7</sup>Therefore all hands shall grow limp,  
And all men's hearts shall sink;

<sup>8</sup>And, overcome by terror,  
They shall be seized by pangs and throes,  
Writhe like a woman in travail.  
They shall gaze at each other in horror,  
Their faces livid with fright.

<sup>9</sup>Lo! The day of the LORD is coming  
With pitiless fury and wrath,

stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light: the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine. 11 And I will punish the world for [their] evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; and I will cause the arrogancy of the proud to cease, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible. 12 I will make a man more precious than fine gold; even a man than the golden wedge of Ophir. 13 Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth shall remove out of her place, in the wrath of the LORD of hosts, and in the day of his fierce anger. 14 And it shall be as the chased roe, and as a sheep that no man taketh up: they shall every man turn to his own people, and flee every one into his own land. 15 Every one that is found shall be thrust through; and every one that is joined [unto them] shall fall by the sword. 16 Their children also shall be dashed to pieces before their eyes; their houses shall be spoiled, and their wives ravished. 17 Behold, I will stir up the Medes against them, which shall not regard silver; and [as for] gold, they shall not delight in it. 18 [Their] bows also shall dash the young men to 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 Chaldees' excellency, 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 the shepherds make their fold there. 21 But wild beasts of the desert shall lie there; and their houses shall be full of doleful creatures; and owls

To make the earth a desolation,  
To wipe out the sinners upon it.  
<sup>10</sup>The stars and constellations of heaven  
Shall not give off their light;  
The sun shall be dark when it rises,  
And the moon shall diffuse no glow.

<sup>11</sup>“And I will requite to the world its evil,  
And to the wicked their iniquity;  
I will put an end to the pride of the arrogant  
And humble the haughtiness of tyrants.  
<sup>12</sup>I will make people scarcer than fine gold,  
And men than gold of Ophir.”

<sup>13</sup>Therefore shall heaven be shaken,  
And earth leap out of its place,  
At the fury of the LORD of Hosts  
On the day of His burning wrath.  
<sup>14</sup>Then like gazelles that are chased,  
And like sheep that no man gathers,  
Each man shall turn back to his people,  
They shall flee every one to his land.  
<sup>15</sup>All who remain shall be pierced through,  
All who are caught  
Shall fall by the sword.  
<sup>16</sup>And their babes shall be dashed to pieces in their sight,  
Their homes shall be plundered,  
And their wives shall be raped.

<sup>17</sup>“Behold,  
I stir up the Medes against them,  
Who do not value silver  
Or delight in gold.  
<sup>18</sup>Their bows shall shatter the young;  
They shall show no pity to infants,  
They shall not spare the children.”

<sup>19</sup>And Babylon, glory of kingdoms,  
Proud splendor of the Chaldeans,  
Shall become like Sodom and Gomorrah  
Overturned by God.

<sup>20</sup>Nevermore shall it be settled  
Nor dwelt in through all the ages.  
No Arab shall pitch his tent there,  
No shepherds make flocks lie down there.

<sup>21</sup>But beasts shall lie down there,  
And the houses be filled with owls;  
There shall ostriches make their home,  
And there shall satyrs dance.

<sup>22</sup>And jackals shall abide in its castles  
And dragons in the palaces of pleasure.  
Her hour is close at hand;

shall dwell there, and satyrs  
shall dance there. 22 And the  
wild beasts of the islands  
shall cry in their desolate  
houses, and dragons in [their]  
pleasant palaces: and her time  
[is] near to come, and her  
days shall not be prolonged.

Her days will not be long.

### Specific Comments on Isaiah 13

#### 1 THE burden of Babylon, which Isaiah the son of Amoz did see.

v1 An introductory header identifying subject and author.

2 Lift ye up a banner upon the high mountain, exalt the voice  
unto them, shake the hand, that they may go into the gates of the  
nobles. 3 I have commanded my sanctified ones, I have also called  
my mighty ones for mine anger, [even] them that rejoice in my  
highness. 4 The noise of a multitude in the mountains, like as of  
a great people; a tumultuous noise of the kingdoms of nations  
gathered together: the LORD of hosts mustereth the host of the  
battle. 5 They come from a far country, from the end of heaven,  
[even] the LORD, and the weapons of his indignation, to destroy  
the whole land.

v2-16 While these verses are included in the "burden of  
Babylon", they can be read as a general statement regarding the  
Day of the Lord. All nations of the earth will be smitten on the  
Day of the Lord, all wickedness will be destroyed. The language  
of these verses identifies no nation in specific, it only  
differentiates between the righteous and the sinners. It is not  
until v. 17-22 that specific nations are identified. As such,  
these verses can be read as a reference to the figurative  
spiritual Babylon, cf. Rev. 14:8, Rev. 17:5.

v2-5 The Lord musters (v. 2) a great army (v. 4) to destroy  
everything (v. 5). Compare 5:25-30.

v2-3 The BofM differs from the KJV:

KJV

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Lift ye up a banner  
upon the high mountain,  
exalt the voice unto them,  
shake the hand,  
that they may go into  
the gates of the nobles.  
I have commanded my sanctified ones,  
I have also called my mighty ones

BofM

---

Lift ye up a banner  
upon the high mountain,  
exalt the voice unto them,  
shake the hand,  
That they may go into  
the gates of the nobles.  
I have commanded my sanctified ones,  
I have also called my mighty ones,

for mine anger,  
even them that rejoice  
in my highness.

for mine anger is not upon  
them that rejoice  
in my highness.

Interpretation of these verses is problematic. The JPS and KJV provide the image of the Lord's purified ones coming to participate in the battle where the Lord's wrath is meted out upon Babylon. The problem with this interpretation is v. 4-5 identifies the invaders as foreign nations from far countries, thus they cannot be Israel. The JPS footnote attempts to reconcile this passage with the invading armies being foreigners by cross reference with Zeph. 1:7-8 which identifies the Day of the Lord as a "sacrificial feast". Thus, the foreign invaders would be symbolically called the "purified guests" as they are attending the sacrifice. But, in Zepheniah the guests are not identified, it simply denotes they are to be purified. So, it fails to identify who the "sanctified ones" are and fails to implicate them in the impending slaughter.

The BofM rendering provides a more palatable reading where those who are called are those upon whom the Lord's anger does not reside. This reading follows well with the BofM addition on v. 22. Thus, the impending foreign invasion is to destroy Babylon and not the Lord's sanctified ones. Them that are stalwart (KJV:mighty, JPS:stalwart) and sanctified are those whom the Lord's anger is not upon. That they will attend this "sacrificial feast" is without question. The role they play in the feast is the question. Consider the NT parables surrounding wedding feasts.

v4-5 A typical covenant curse definition of the invading army come and destroy Babylon. The description of the army follows closely that provided in Deut. 28:49. There is also a good example of a synthetical parallel in v. 4 where tumult/uproar and mountains/kingdoms are equated. Note Jeremiah calls Babylon a mountain, cf. Jer. 51:24.

v4 Compare 66:6 for a similar statement.

**6 Howl ye; for the day of the LORD [is] at hand; it shall come as a destruction from the Almighty. 7 Therefore shall all hands be faint, and every man's heart shall melt: 8 And they shall be afraid: pangs and sorrows shall take hold of them; they shall be in pain as a woman that travaileth: they shall be amazed one at another; their faces [shall be as] flames.**

**9 Behold, the day of the LORD cometh, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate: and he shall 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 his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine. 11 And I will punish the world for [their] evil,**

and the wicked for their iniquity; and I will cause the arrogance of the proud to cease, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible.

12 I will make a man more precious than fine gold; even a man than the golden wedge of Ophir. 13 Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth shall remove out of her place, in the wrath of the LORD of hosts, and in the day of his fierce anger. 14 And it shall be as the chased roe, and as a sheep that no man taketh up: they shall every man turn to his own people, and flee every one into his own land. 15 Every one that is found shall be thrust through; and every one that is joined [unto them] shall fall by the sword. 16 Their children also shall be dashed to pieces before their eyes; their houses shall be spoiled, and their wives ravished.

v6-16 The Day of the Lord will be so terrible all people will be struck with fear (v. 6-8). On this Day the earth will be cleansed of sin and pride (v. 9-11). The result will be massive depopulation (v. 12-15), not only among men, but among women and children as well (v. 16).

v6-8 The Day of the Lord is so terrible its victims are paralyzed by fear. The imagery also provides something of a confrontational setting where at the presence of the Lord's anger and might the weakness of men and their machinations will be revealed. The men who rely on arm of flesh defenses will have their strength sapped.

A more spiritual interpretation on this passage would be something akin to the wicked being confronted by the Lord at Judgement and them cowering in fear at His presence. Compare 40:28-31 where the power of the Lord is contrasted with the power of man.

v8 The first three lines are omitted in the BofM account. However, the meaning stays the same.

v9-10 The Day of the Lord is a day when the Lord utterly destroys wickedness from the face of the earth. The destruction will be so great and complete that all the face of the earth will be bathed in darkness, cp. 3 Ne. 8:22-23, Joel 2:10, Ezek. 32:7-8. Contrast this more physical description with the spiritual description found in 34:4.

This might also be an attack on astrological worship (cp. 47:9-13), because on the Day of the Lord the other "gods" (i.e., the stars and planets) they worshiped will disappear.

v11-12 This passage implies that the vast majority of the people at the time of the Day of the Lord will be in a terrible condition of wickedness, and as a result there will be few

remaining after that Day. In particular men are said to be made very rare, probably implying great slaughter of males due to warfare.

v13 This verse provides an interesting contrast between the Lord's fury and that of the king of Babylon. In 14:16 the king of Babylon is described as one who made the earth and kingdoms tremble. But, in this verse the Lord's wrath will have effect in both heaven and earth. Isaiah provides a comparison of the two powers with the Lord's power being both temporal and eternal. For the effect the Lord will have on the heavens, see 34:4.

v14-16 The effect the invading army will have upon those of Babylon. They will be struck and scattered like running gazelles or shepherdless sheep rather than bind together into a substantial defending army. Those who do not flee are utterly destroyed by the invaders, none will be spared, cp. 10:7.

v15 The BofM differs from the KJV:

KJV	BofM
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Every one that is found shall be thrust through; and every one that is joined unto them shall fall by the sword.	Every one that is proud shall be thrust through; yea, and every one that is joined to the wicked shall fall by the sword.

The BofM rendering is considerably more clear as it is the proud and wicked who are to be destroyed.

v16 This verse indicates the slaughter is not limited to the men of war, the soldiers actively engaged in combat. The slaughter sweeps the entire land: men, women, and children.

**17 Behold, I will stir up the Medes against them, which shall not regard silver; and [as for] gold, they shall not delight in it. 18 [Their] bows also shall dash the young men to 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 Chaldees' excellency, 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 the shepherds make their fold there. 21 But wild beasts of the desert shall lie there; and their houses shall be full of doleful creatures; and owls shall dwell there, and satyrs shall dance there. 22 And the wild beasts of the islands shall cry in their desolate houses, and dragons in [their] pleasant palaces: and her time [is] near to come, and her**



## **days shall not be prolonged.**

v17-22 The Lord summons an army who's only interest is to destroy. They have no interest in plunder (v. 17) or conquest, only destruction (v. 18). The result is Babylon is utterly expunged from the earth (v. 19), never to be reinhabited (v. 20-22).

v17-18 The nation of Media was northeast and above Babylon (i.e., geographically higher in elevation), so the image presented here is that they will descend (being physically above your opponent has implications of military superiority, particularly when using projectile weapons as is indicated in v. 18) upon Babylon and destroy them in an absolutely merciless fashion. That they are described as not being interested in gold or silver indicates their intent is not to plunder and captivate for spoils of war, but instead to annihilate the population. For v. 18 compare Deut. 28:50.

Usage of Media as a nation of invaders argues for the typological, not literal, interpretation of Isaiah's presentations of such nations. In the immediately preceding chapters Assyria was identified as the invading nation, not Media. Thus, attempts to associate these ancient nations with contemporary counterparts is problematic.

v19-22 Babylon replaces ancient Sodom and Gomorrah as the annihilated city. This strophe recounts another series of covenant curses (cp. Lev. 26:22, Lev. 26:34-35, Lev. 26:43). While the descriptions here are similar to those in Lev. 26, it should be noted there are some significant differences. In Lev. 26, the Lord states the series of punishments are meted out upon Israel in an effort to get her to repent. But, in this case they are meted out so as to utterly destroy Babylon so she will never again be inhabited. This indicates the importance of the Abrahamic Covenant, as without the covenant there is no requirement the Lord spare the more righteous so as to preserve a remnant.

These verses contain similar language to that which appears in ch. 34. This again, as did v. 13, rhetorically links this chapter with the events described in ch. 34.

v22 The BofM account appends the following to the end of the verse: "For I will destroy her speedily; yea, for I will merciful unto my people, but the wicked shall perish." Otherwise the verse is identical to the KJV. Clearly, the Day of the Lord is intended to expunge the wicked from the earth, not expunge all

people from the earth. The Lord's people are those who are spared.

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