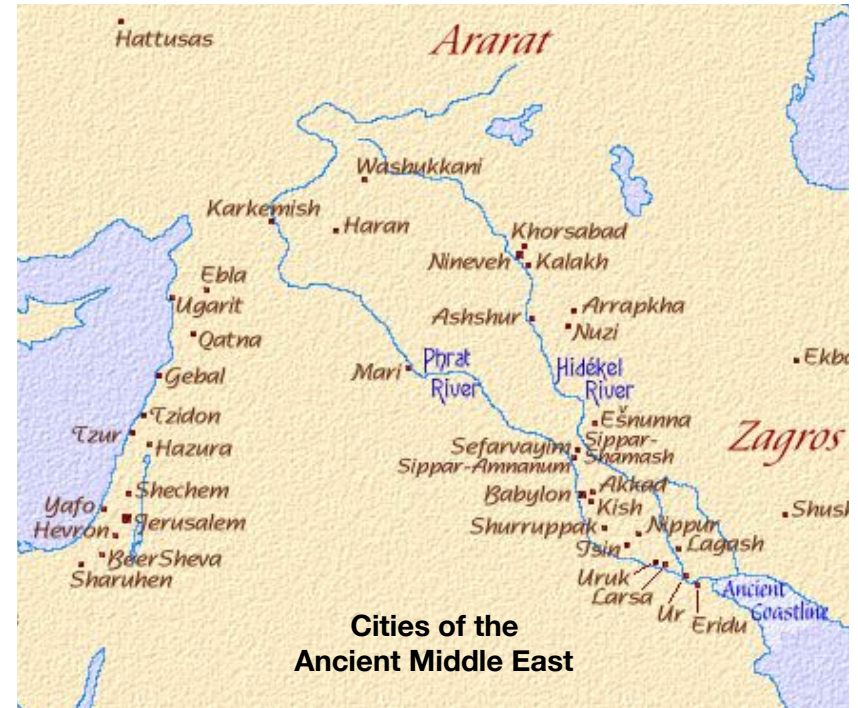


# Isaiah 13

## Pronouncement of Judgment on Babylon

A major break occurs between chapters 12 and 13, but not as major as some interpreters have suggested. In chapters 13-23 Isaiah reiterates some of the same themes he voiced earlier: **God uses various means to punish sin, and will judge those nations who are arrogant against His covenant people.** These messages against nine sinful Gentile nations or cities around Judah were probably not written for them to read. The messages were probably to be read by God’s covenant people to show that God actually will judge Israel’s enemies. This would reassure Judah that God will establish His kingdom.



English Standard (ESV)	Passion Notes	Passion Translation (TPT)
<p>Isaiah 13:1 The oracle concerning Babylon which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw.</p> <p>2 On a bare hill raise a signal; cry aloud to them; wave the hand for them to enter the gates of the nobles. 3 I myself have commanded my consecrated ones, and have summoned my mighty men to execute my anger, my proudly exulting ones.</p> <p>4 The sound of a tumult is on the mountains as of a great multitude! The sound of an uproar of kingdoms, of nations gathering together! The LORD of hosts is mustering a host for battle.</p> <p>5 They come from a distant land, from the end of the heavens, the LORD and the weapons of his indignation, to destroy the whole land.</p>	<p><b>a</b> 13:1 This begins a new section of Isaiah (13–23) that contains ten prophecies against ten nations. Babylon (related to Babel) means “confusion” and points to the political and religious confusion and disorder among the nations. This prophecy against Babylon was spoken by Isaiah at least 174 years before Babylon fell in 536 BC. The Greek historian Herodotus described the city of Babylon as fifteen miles wide on each side with walls that were more than eighty-five feet thick and 350 feet high. It had one hundred gates to the city and was the commercial center of the East. In the book of Revelation, Babylon becomes a metaphor for the world’s political and religious system. See Isa. 46–47; Rev. 18.</p> <p><b>b</b> 13:3 These are God’s armies consecrated by him to carry out his judgment on Babylon. God is mustering his army from among the Medes to invade Babylon (v. 17; 21:2).”</p> <p><b>c</b> 13:5 Or possibly “horizon.” See Joel 2:1–10; 2 Thess. 1:7–10; Jude 14–15. The heavenly sons and daughters of God are also consecrated, mighty ones, and warriors who rejoice in his triumph.</p> <p><b>d</b> 13:5 Or “all the earth.”</p>	<p>Isaiah 13:1 This is the prophecy against Babylon <b>a</b> that God revealed to Isaiah, son of Amoz:</p> <p>2 “Raise high a signal flag on a barren hilltop! Shout out! Beckon my armies to invade the gates of the nobles, <sup>3</sup> for I have given orders to my consecrated ones. I have summoned my mighty heroes, those who rejoice in my triumph, that they may execute my anger.” <b>b</b></p> <p>4 Listen! A thunderous noise is heard on the mountain, like that of a massive multitude. Listen! Kingdoms are in an uproar; nations are assembling together. The almighty Lord Yahweh is mustering an army for war.</p> <p>5 They are coming from a faraway land, from the end of the heavens. <b>c</b> Here comes Yahweh with his instruments of judgment, ready to ravage the entire land. <b>d</b></p>

English Standard (ESV)	Passion Translation (TPT)	Passion Translation (TPT)
<p><sup>6</sup> Wail, for the day of the LORD is near; as destruction from the Almighty it will come! <sup>7</sup> Therefore all hands will be feeble, and every human heart will melt. <sup>8</sup> They will be dismayed: pangs and agony will seize them; they will be in anguish like a woman in labor. They will look aghast at one another; their faces will be aflame.</p> <p><sup>9</sup> Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the land a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it. <sup>10</sup> For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light. <sup>11</sup> I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will put an end to the pomp of the arrogant, and lay low the pompous pride of the ruthless. <sup>12</sup> I will make people more rare than fine gold, and mankind than the gold of Ophir. <sup>13</sup> Therefore I will make the heavens tremble, and the earth will be shaken out of its place, at the wrath of the LORD of hosts in the day of his fierce anger. <sup>14</sup> And like a hunted gazelle, or like sheep with none to gather them, each will turn to his own people, and each will flee to his own land. <sup>15</sup> Whoever is found will be thrust through, and whoever is caught will fall by the sword. <sup>16</sup> Their infants will be dashed in pieces before their eyes; their houses will be plundered and their wives ravished.</p> <p><sup>17</sup> Behold, I am stirring up the Medes against them, who have no regard for silver and do not delight in gold. <sup>18</sup> Their bows will slaughter the young men; they will have no mercy on the fruit of the womb; their eyes will not pity children. <sup>19</sup> And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the splendor and pomp of the Chaldeans, will be like Sodom and Gomorrah when God overthrew them. <sup>20</sup> It will never be inhabited or lived in for all generations; no Arab will pitch his tent there; no shepherds will make their flocks lie down there. <sup>21</sup> But wild animals will lie down there, and their houses will be full of howling creatures; there ostriches will dwell, and there wild goats will dance. <sup>22</sup> Hyenas will cry in its towers, and jackals in the pleasant palaces; its time is close at hand and its days will not be prolonged.</p>	<p><b>e</b> 13:10 Or “Orion.” See Amos 5:8; Joel 2:31; Matt. 24:29; Acts 2:20; Heb. 12:26–29. Stars may also be a metaphor for ministries (Jude 13) and constellations a metaphor for fellowships (networks, denominations).</p> <p><b>f</b> 13:11 Or “tyrants.”</p> <p><b>g</b> 13:12 A region of the southern coast of Arabia.</p> <p><b>h</b> 13:16 See Ps. 137:9.</p> <p><b>i</b> 13:16 See Zech. 14:2.</p> <p><b>j</b> 13:17 The Medes were people who lived on the Zagros Mountains, in present-day central Iran.</p> <p><b>k</b> 13:18 Or “With their bows they will strike down the young (men).”</p> <p><b>l</b> 13:21 Or “wild dogs” or “hyenas.”</p> <p><b>m</b> 13:21 Or “ostriches” or “skunks.”</p> <p><b>n</b> 13:21 Or “satyrs.” See Koehler and Baumgartner’s <i>Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros</i>, Leiden, 1958, 926, and <i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> by Brown, Driver, and Briggs, 1980, 972.</p>	<p><sup>6</sup> Wail, for the day of the Lord Yahweh is near! It will come with the destructive power of Shaddai. <sup>7</sup> For this reason, every hand will go limp and every heart will melt. <sup>8</sup> All the Babylonians will be seized with panic and pain. Anguish will grip them like a woman in labor. They will look at one another with astonishment, and their faces will be flames of fire!</p> <p><sup>9</sup> Behold! The day of the Lord is coming with pitiless fury and fierce anger. The land will be made desolate, destroying the sinners who inhabit it. <sup>10</sup> For the stars of the heavens and their constellations <b>e</b> will not give their light. The rising sun will be obscured, and the moon won’t shine. <sup>11</sup> “I will bring punishment to the world for its evil and the wicked for their sins. I will shatter the arrogance of the proud, and will humble the pride of the high and mighty. <b>f</b> <sup>12</sup> I will make a person scarcer than fine gold and people rarer than a wedge of gold from Ophir. <b>g</b> <sup>13</sup> Therefore, I will make the heavens shudder and the earth shake from its foundation because of the wrath of the Lord, Commander of Angel Armies, in the day of his fierce anger. <sup>14</sup> Like a hunted gazelle, each will return to his own people, and like sheep with no one to gather them, each will flee to his native land. <sup>15</sup> Captured ones will be slain, and those who are caught will die by the sword. <sup>16</sup> Their infants will be dashed to pieces before their very eyes. <b>h</b> Their houses will be looted and their wives raped. <b>i</b></p> <p><sup>17</sup> Behold! I am stirring up the Medes <b>j</b> against them, who neither value silver nor delight in gold. <sup>18</sup> They will slaughter the young men, <b>k</b> and show no pity on infants nor compassion on children. <sup>19</sup> God will overthrow Babylon, the jewel of kingdoms, the splendor and pride of the Babylonians, exactly as he did to Sodom and Gomorrah. <sup>20</sup> Babylon will never rise again, nor will it be inhabited for many generations. Bedouins will not even pitch their tents there, and shepherds will refuse to rest their flocks there. <sup>21</sup> Wild animals will roam there, and their vacant houses will be overrun by eerie creatures <b>l</b> nothing but owls <b>m</b> and goat-shaped demons <b>n</b> dancing! <sup>22</sup> Hyenas will howl in her houses, and jackals will make their dens in her palaces. Babylon’s time is up, and her days are numbered!</p>

## BIBLE KNOWLEDGE COMMENTARY ~ John A. Martin

### - Introduction (13:1)

- 13:1. This section (13:1-14:27) is ascribed to Isaiah son of Amoz (cf. 1:1). This is significant in view of the fact that it is clearly prophecy spoken before the fall of Babylon. This is important for many believe that Isaiah 40-66 could not have been written by Isaiah son of Amoz because he could not have prophesied about something yet future. The passage in 13:1-14:27 shows that Isaiah's writing about events before they happened was possible.

This section is an oracle, sometimes translated "burden," as it comes from the verb meaning "to be lifted or carried." It was a weighty or burdensome kind of message to deliver. It is a common term in the prophetic writings (13:1; 14:28; 15:1; 17:1; 19:1; 21:1, 11, 13; 22:1; 23:1; 30:6; Jer. 23:33-34, 36, 38; Ezek. 12:10; Nahum 1:1; Hab. 1:1; Zech. 9:1 [see comments there]; 12:1; Mal. 1:1). Isaiah's oracle concerns Babylon. Babylon deserved God's wrath, for that city had long been a rallying point of anti-God activity. From its very beginning (Gen. 11:1-9) it had been characterized by rebellion against God. Over the centuries, as various dynasties ruled over that city, it was viewed as a place of hatred against the God of Israel. Even in the Tribulation it will be a center of hatred against God (Rev. 17-18).

### - God's army against Babylon (13:2-18)

#### • The forming of God's army.

- 13:2-5. The army referred to in these verses is clearly God's because He said He summoned His warriors to carry out His wrath against Babylon; that is, they would do His bidding. This army was a great multitude. ... like an amassing of entire nations. Coming for war they would assemble from faraway lands, from the ends of the heavens. This is not a specific geographical description as much as a way of saying that his great army would include soldiers from many places. Though Isaiah was writing about the military strife in his day, a similar mustering of vast armies will occur just before the millennial kingdom (Rev. 16:12-16).

#### • The Nearness of the Day of the Lord.

- 13:6-13. The day of the LORD refers to the time of the Lord's judgment on the wicked world and/or deliverance of His people. (See comments on "the day of the LORD" under "Major Interpretive Problems," in the Introduction to Joel.) In Isaiah's day that judgment was coming because of the tremendous political turmoil of the next several decades that would culminate with the fall of Babylon to the Assyrians in 689 B.C. That political turmoil was similar to the judgment which will come on the whole world just before God establishes His millennial kingdom on the earth. This judgment from the Almighty would cause people to be in extreme distress, in pain like a woman's labor pains (cf. Isa. 21:3; 26:17; Jer. 4:31; 6:24; 13:21; 22:23; 30:6; 48:41; 49:22, 24; 50:43; Micah 4:9-10). The day of the Lord, expressing His anger (Isa. 13:3, 13) against sin, will destroy ... sinners (v. 9) and punish the world for its evil and its proud attitude toward God (v. 11; cf. v. 19; 10:6, 12-13). The statements in 13:10 about the heavenly bodies (stars. ... sun ... moon) no longer functioning may figuratively describe the total turnaround of the political structure of the Near East. The same would be true of the heavens trembling and the earth shaking (v. 13), figures of speech suggesting all-encompassing destruction. Again, all this is similar to the final judgment to come on the world. On the luminaries not shining, see 34:4; Ezekiel 32:7; Joel 2:10, 30-31; 3:15; Zechariah 14:6-7; Matthew 24:29; and on the final shaking [Vol. 1, p. 1060] of the

earth see Isaiah 24:18; Joel 2:10; 3:16; Haggai 2:6-7, 21-22. Because so many will die in battle, people will be scarcer than the rare and valuable gold of Ophir, a town probably located on the southwestern coast of Arabia (cf. Job 22:24; 28:16).

- **The Army's Unrelenting Attack.**

- 13:14-18. In the day of the Lord, described in verses 6-13, the army formed by God (vv. 1-5) would attack unrelentingly. The people attacked would be utterly powerless to stop the invasion. They would be like antelope and sheep, defenseless creatures that are easy prey for hunters. People within the Assyrian Empire from other countries would try to escape the coming destruction (they will flee to their native lands). Terrible things would happen, including death by the sword (v. 15), infanticide, plundering, and rape (v. 16). The destruction would be unrelenting in that the invaders would not be dissuaded by money (v. 17) and they will have no mercy on babies (cf. v. 16) or children (v. 18).

The statement I will stir up against them the Medes (v. 17) has caused much discussion among Bible students. Many interpreters, because of the mention of the fall of Babylon (v. 19), assume that Isaiah was (in vv. 17-18) prophesying Babylon's fall in 539 (cf. Dan. 5:30-31) to the Medes and Persians. However, that view has some difficulties. In the Medo-Persian takeover in 539 there was very little change in the city; it was not destroyed so it continued on much as it had been. But Isaiah 13:19-22 speaks of the destruction of Babylon. Also the word "them," against whom the Medes were stirred up (v. 17), were the Assyrians (referred to in vv. 14-16), not the Babylonians. It seems better, then, to understand this section as dealing with events pertaining to the Assyrians' sack of Babylon in December 689 B.C. As Seth Erlandsson has noted, "The histories of the Medes, Elamites, and Babylonians converge around the year 700 in the struggle against the Assyrian world power and ... Babylon assumes a particularly central position in that great historical drama from the latter years of the 8th century down to the fall of Babylon in 689" (The Burden of Babylon: A Study of Isaiah 13:2-14:23. Lund, Sweden: C.W.K. Glerrup, 1970, pp. 91-2).

- **God's soon-coming destruction of Babylon (13:19-22)**

- 13:19-22. The recipient of this destruction is Babylon the city, not the entire empire. Because of her pride (cf. v. 11) and godless idolatry Babylon would be overthrown by God. The overthrow, as already stated, was done by the Assyrians, God's instrument of wrath under King Sennacherib. Just as God overthrew the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:24-25), so He would overthrow the wicked city of Babylon. The destruction would be extensive, which was true of Sennacherib's sack of the city. Isaiah's description of the devastation of Babylon—no inhabitants for generations and no tents or flocks, but instead jackals ... owls ... wild goats, and hyenas—is typical of the way ancient Near Eastern cultures described the desolate condition of demolished cities (Erlandsson, The Burden of Babylon, p. 118). The Hebrew in Isaiah 13:20a can be translated, "She will not be inhabited for a long time and she will not be lived in for generation after generation." A few years after this destruction, Babylon was rebuilt by Sennacherib's son Esarhaddon (681-669 B.C.). All this preceded the rise of the Neo-Babylonian Empire in 626 and its fall to Medo-Persia in 539. Ultimately Babylon will again be rebuilt and then destroyed by God a final time (Rev. 18; cf. comments on Jer. 50:1-51:58). Isaiah was convinced that the destruction he wrote about would come quickly (her time is at hand). It came in 689 B.C. (see comments on Isa. 14:3-4a).

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. This section is an oracle or “burden.” It comes from the verb meaning “to be lifted or carried.” This was a heavy burden for Isaiah to carry. Little does he know that there are numerous heavy burdens that would be revealed to him immediately following this one. What exactly was the the “weight” that was attached to this prophetic oracle in chapter 13?
2. Has the Lord ever had you deliver a “heavy” word to someone? To your co-worker, children, or spouse? How did you respond to the weightiness of the word? When delivering a heavy word from the Lord, what are some of the things you may want to consider?
3. If you got a burdensome word from the Lord, how would you go about processing it? What precautions might you take to insure the word you got would not get hijacked by the enemy before its time?
4. Recall some of the weighty words that have been delivered to the body of Christ in the past 10 years or so. How has your life been changed since you heard these words and integrated them into *your* life? How have these types of words impacted *your* spiritual growth?