

Isaiah Chapters 13-14 - John Karmelich

Title: How long-dead empires affect our future!

Beginning in this chapter and lasting for 10 Chapters, Isaiah will focus on nations surrounding Israel as well as the one's that will conquer them in the relatively near future to Isaiah. It's as if God's telling the Israelites, "I realize all too well you are the chosen people. I realize you're going to suffer for failing to be a witness to me. While you're listening to Me, let me share what'll happen to the other nations in the neighborhood!" For us living over 2,500 years later, these chapters focus on long dead empires as well as other places in the Middle East! These two chapters teach us how long-gone empires will affect our future. Let me continue:

As I preach regularly, bible predictions usually work in patterns. That just means the prediction comes true in a relatively short time after the prophet spoke to validate him (or her) as a prophet. Then there's a longer-term fulfillment that we need to be aware of as it affects our future! Realize Isaiah is stating a bunch of things that affect our witness for Jesus, let alone understanding God's eternal "game plan"!

With that little speech out of my system, let me share one of my favorite nicknames for the Bible based on a Charles Dickens novel line: "A tale of two cities" The 2 most prominent Bible cities are Jerusalem and Babylon. Both the origins and destinies of each of them is discussed in the Bible. These 2 chapters focus on Babylon. That "long-dead" city is 60 miles south of Bagdad. It was not touched in the United States war with Iraq as it was irrelevant to that war. A quick Babylon history lesson would help here: It was first mentioned in Genesis 11. Babylon was the location of first organized rebellion against God. I need everyone to realize, when Isaiah wrote, it was just a city in the Assyrian Empire. A century later it was the center of a large empire! Babylon (in Iraq) got conquered by the Persians (Iran), two centuries after Isaiah lived but it wasn't destroyed. Centuries later, Alexander the Great conquered Persia and he lived there till his death! My point is Babylon as a city long outlived that empire! Today it's just ruins, but people live nearby! Since rebellion against God began there, I suspect it may also end there!

The bible has 6 chapters on Babylon one should read together: these two in Isaiah, Jeremiah 50-51 and Revelation 17-18. Some argue those Revelation chapters speak of Rome or some other great power. I believe Babylon itself will rise again (or a location close to it)! Then God will start the big Revelation show (as I call it) to end all rebellion against Him!

My key point is when we study the destruction of the Babylonian Empire (as well the Assyrian and the towns in Israel controlled by the Philistines), the issue is NOT ancient history. It's about understanding God's future "game plan" and what we need to be doing about His plan as it'll happen whether we want to experience it or not. Even if it is not till the distant future, knowing what He's planned for the world, affects greatly why we're called to be His witnesses today in the world around us!

OK then, enough of that, time to go over these two chapters! Isaiah states this text (Chapters 13-14, ok most of 14) is about Babylon. For most of history, being part of a ruling city is far more important than a country. For example, both the Assyrian Empire (which was big in Isaiah's day and took over most of Israel (not Jerusalem), plus the Babylonian Empire (didn't exist till about 100 years later) were 2 places in what is today Iraq. Both cities existed in Isaiah's day, but only Assyria had a big empire then. Isaiah will spend a chapter and a half discussing the fall of that empire. It literally ended about 200 years after Isaiah's day but that's not the key point. As I stated, the city of Babylon existed for many centuries after

that empire ended and is in effect a ghost town to this day. Saddam Hussein did rebuild a few buildings when he lived some years back, but essentially, nothing more. It's significant in that the first organized rebellion against God was in Babel (same place) and I suspect it'll be significant again when God has a His big "wrap up party" of this life as we know it before Jesus returns to rule the world! In Chapter 13, the text mentions the Medes (Kurds today) will be the nation that conquers the Babylonians along with the Persians (Iran). The point is that God gets "last word" in any organized rebellion against all that He stands for! So why make a big deal about this, when other empires conquered Israel (Greeks, Romans, Turkish Empire)? God said through Isaiah (and other prophets) that the land of Israel is their land! All those empires have come and gone! Israel is the only nation in world history to become an independent nation again after being conquered and scattered!

Chapter 13 says "no Arab will pitch their tent there". To this day, Arabs in that area, won't pitch their tents there (say to do archaeological digs!) The text here states Babylon will be destroyed like Sodom and Gomorrah. The point is it's been a ghost town for well over 2,000 years! Will God raise it up one day for final judgment? I suspect yes, but we'll have to watch history play out!

That leads to Chapter 14. Verse 1 and 2 is the reminder that Israel to return to their land. Only a small number (about 50,000) went back after the Persians conquered Babylon! The "great return" began with Israel becoming a national again roughly 2,500 years later and exists today. My point is to realize God knows history before it's written, and we can trust the Bible to be historically accurate! Here is where I would argue it gets interesting: It's not enough for the Bible to simply say Babylon was and may again be defeated. The fascinating part is it says, "hell will be excited to welcome you". Keep in mind Satan will not rule in hell but will be its top prisoner! I don't see people being tortured in hell being excited if a new arrival comes! The issue is a lot of those in hell suffered due to being conquered by the Babylon or the Assyrians. It's a colorful way of saying, "You thought you were so much better than me? You're now here suffering the same horrible fate!" Another colorful reference here is trees that would be used to make war weapons are happy as now they can exist as trees since Babylon the Empire fell and there is no demand for trees to build a siege against Israel!

Just when you thought it couldn't get stranger, Isaiah focuses on Satan himself. Again, a reminder he is going to be the chief prisoner. God created him to be the top angel. God gave Satan free will and that's why Satan chose to rebel because being "top dog under God wasn't as desirable as being God!" In fact, in Luke 10:18, Jesus says He saw Satan "fall like lightening", which most likely refers to the fact Satan was removed from being top angel and took a third of the angels with him. I've argued Satan's strategy is to rule on earth as long as possible (started with Adam falling). The longer he can keep people from serving God or having people not be a witness for Him, the longer Satan will rule. He always was that great power behind ruling empires where leaders claimed to be a god! The underlying point is it won't go on that way forever, as eventually God will put His "foot down" to say enough is enough and that is when Jesus will rule! Only God the Father knows when that is.

Finally, the last part of Chapter 14 focuses on two other entities. The Assyrians and the Philistines. It's because both ruled over parts of Israel in Isaiah's day. Both were a "pain in Israel's side" at the time of Isaiah. The Philistines were there for centuries and the Assyrians conquered the North Israel Kingdom. The Babylonians destroyed both of them so God's telling the Israelites of Isaiah's time yes, you will be punished for disobedience, but so will those entities who conquer the land of Israel as it is My (God's) land, and I gave it unconditionally to the Israelites. The text also hints in its references to the Assyrian Empire that a future eternal judgment is involved.

OK John, this is all interesting ancient history and we as Christians believe God is God and He knows history in advance. Why is all this ancient history relevant to what I'm dealing with at this moment? I simply want us to keep in mind: God knows all things and whatever problems we're dealing with now will at the worst last one lifetime! Being a good witness for God means we are always "on the clock" for Him! Knowing evil people and the powerful forces behind that evil will come to an end one day is a great reminder that we're on the winning team and God will guide each of our lives to glorify Him if we're willing to let Him guide us!

With that said, hope you like this study. I wrote a more detailed one some years back. If you want to read that, click on one of the links below. It is still a joy to study this stuff and again I'm grateful for you reading this. The rest of this email is links to questions you may have. If you're new here, you're always welcome to e-mail me. Thanks again for reading this!

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