

Session 15

Isaiah 13:1-14:32 | Oracles Against Babylon and Philistia

Isaiah Oracle by Oracle / Dr. Randy White

An Introductory Note:

Isaiah 13:1-23:18 gathers oracles against Babylon, Philistia, Moab, Damascus/Ephraim, Cush, Egypt, the wilderness/Dumah/Arabia, Jerusalem, and Tyre, showing that the LORD rules not only Judah but all nations and commercial powers. Much of the material has a near historical horizon, addressing real geopolitical judgments that would fall on identifiable peoples and cities through Assyrian, Babylonian, Median, and regional upheavals. At the same time, several passages exceed their immediate setting through day-of-the-LORD language, cosmic imagery, worldwide judgment, Israel's final rest, and the humbling of Gentile pride, giving the section a far prophetic horizon as well. The whole segment is therefore a collection of near judgments that also preview the ultimate collapse of human power before the LORD's final ordering of Israel and the nations.

Oracle Against Babylon (13:1-14:27)

The day of the LORD against Babylon (13:1-22)

The burden of Babylon and the mustered army of judgment (13:1-5)

- **Summary:** Isaiah receives the burden concerning Babylon, and the LORD commands a banner to be lifted on a high mountain so an army may enter the gates of the nobles.
 - The judgment is not presented as a random political collapse; the LORD Himself says, **"I have commanded my sanctified ones"** and **"I have also called my mighty ones for mine anger"** (v. 3).
 - Isaiah hears the noise of a great multitude and of kingdoms gathered together, because **"the LORD of hosts mustereth the host of the battle"** (v. 4).
 - The army comes **"from a far country, from the end of heaven"** as the weapons of the LORD's indignation, appointed **"to destroy the whole land"** (v. 5).
 - **"Sanctified ones"** and **"mighty ones"** are the human instruments set apart by God for

His judgment, not necessarily morally holy men.

- In Scripture, to be sanctified can mean being consecrated or appointed for a divine purpose. Jeremiah 51:27-28 uses the same judgment setting against Babylon: **“prepare the nations against her”** and **“prepare against her the nations with the kings of the Medes.”**
- Isaiah 44:28-45:1 later names Cyrus as the LORD’s shepherd and anointed, even though Cyrus is a Gentile ruler. This shows that God can set apart a pagan ruler for His covenant purpose without implying that the ruler knows or worships Him savingly.
- The **“mighty ones”** are mighty warriors summoned for the LORD’s anger. Joel 3:11 and Zephaniah 1:14 use similar language for warriors gathered into the day of the LORD, showing that military strength can be pressed into service under God’s sovereign judgment.
- **The coming army** has a near historical identity, but the wording also opens into a wider day-of-the-LORD pattern.
 - Near term, the army is best identified with the Medes and their allies, because Isaiah 13:17 explicitly says, **“Behold, I will stir up the Medes against them.”** Jeremiah 51:11, 27-28 also connects Babylon’s fall with the kings of the Medes.
 - The **“kingdoms of nations gathered together”** (v. 4) fits the coalition character of Babylon’s fall, especially the Medo-Persian power raised up from the east and north under God’s decree.
 - At the same time, the language exceeds a merely local event: **“the day of the LORD”** (v. 6), cosmic shaking (13:10, 13), and worldwide humbling (13:11) make Babylon’s historical fall a preview of final judgment on proud world power.
 - Therefore this is both near term and

typological/eschatological: the Medes are the immediate instrument, while Babylon becomes the pattern of the LORD’s final overthrow of arrogant Gentile empire.

The day of the LORD and the terror of Babylon’s fall (13:6-16)

- Babylon’s local fall becomes clearly a *type* of the **day of the LORD** (v. 6).
- Verses 7-16 describe the day of the LORD in graphic terms:
 - **Helpless terror:** hands become faint, hearts melt, and men are seized with pain like a woman in travail (vv. 7-8).
 - This same collapse of courage appears in Jeremiah 50:43, where Babylon’s king hears the report and **“anguish took hold of him, and pangs as of a woman in travail.”**
 - It also appears in Nahum 2:10, where Nineveh’s judgment leaves hearts melting, knees smiting together, and faces gathering blackness.
 - **Cruel wrath and fierce anger:** the day comes with **“wrath and fierce anger”** to lay the land desolate (v. 9).
 - Zephaniah 1:14-18 describes the day of the LORD as a day of wrath, trouble, distress, wasteness, desolation, darkness, and alarm.
 - Revelation 6:16-17 likewise speaks of the wrath of the Lamb and asks who can stand in **“the great day of his wrath.”**
 - **Judgment on sinners:** the LORD destroys sinners out of the land and punishes the world for evil (vv. 9, 11).
 - Isaiah 24:5-6 says the earth is defiled by its inhabitants, so the curse devours the earth and few men are left.
 - 2 Peter 3:7 says the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire against **“the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.”**

- **Cosmic darkening:** the stars, constellations, sun, and moon withhold their light (v. 10).
 - Joel 2:10, 31 says the sun, moon, and stars are darkened before the great and terrible day of the LORD.
 - Matthew 24:29 and Revelation 6:12-13 use the same cosmic language in connection with end-time judgment.
- **Humbling of pride:** the LORD says He will end the arrogance of the proud and lay low the haughtiness of the terrible (v. 11).
 - Isaiah 2:12-17 says the day of the LORD will be upon everything proud and lofty, and the LORD alone will be exalted.
 - Daniel 4:37 states the same principle in Babylon's own history: those who walk in pride God is able to abase.
- **Human life made rare:** people become more precious than fine gold because judgment leaves so few survivors (v. 12).
 - Isaiah 24:6 similarly says few men are left after worldwide judgment.
 - Zechariah 13:8-9 gives another prophetic pattern of severe reduction followed by a refined remnant.
- **Shaking of heaven and earth:** the LORD shakes the heavens, and the earth is moved out of her place (v. 13).
 - The wording is strong: “**shake**” carries the idea of quaking or trembling, and the earth being moved “**out of her place**” may point beyond a local earthquake to cosmic disturbance under the Creator's direct rule.
 - This fits the astronomical signs in verse 10, where stars, sun, and moon withhold their light; the day of the LORD unsettles the created order itself, not merely Babylon's politics.
 - Isaiah 24:19-20 describes the earth as broken, dissolved, moved exceedingly, and reeling “**like a drunkard,**” suggesting the same kind of worldwide upheaval.
- Revelation 6:12-14 likewise joins a great earthquake, darkened sun, bloodlike moon, falling stars, the departing heaven, and every mountain and island moved out of place.
- Haggai 2:6-7 and Hebrews 12:26-27 use this shaking language for the LORD's removal of what can be shaken so that what cannot be shaken may remain.
- **Flight and scattering:** the judged city/land becomes like a chased roe or scattered sheep, and each man turns back to his own people and land (v. 14).
 - This is not the earth being moved again, as in verse 13, but the human panic and scattering that follows the LORD's cosmic and historical judgment.
 - Jeremiah 50:16 and 51:9 describe foreigners and fugitives fleeing Babylon's judgment and returning to their own lands.
 - Revelation 18:4 calls God's people to come out of Babylon so they do not share in her sins and plagues.
- **Violent overthrow:** those caught in the judgment are pierced, children are dashed, houses spoiled, and wives ravished (vv. 15-16).
 - Psalm 137:8-9 remembers Babylon's own cruelty and pronounces recompense upon her.
 - Zechariah 14:2 uses similar language for the horrors surrounding Jerusalem before the LORD's final intervention.
- **Book recommendation:** *The Harmony of the Prophetic Word* by Arno C. Gaebelin is helpful for tracing how prophecies about the day of the LORD harmonize across Scripture, as seen even in this short segment. Available here.

The Medes raised against Babylon (13:17-22)

- **The Medes named before Persia:** in Isaiah's day the Medes were the more prominent power, while Persia was not yet the head of the empire.
 - Isaiah 13:17 therefore names **“the Medes”** as the people God would stir up against Babylon.
 - Later, under Cyrus, Persia rose to dominance and the empire became Medo-Persian in its historical form.
 - Daniel reflects this later order: Babylon falls to the Medo-Persian realm (Dan. 5:28, 31), and the ram in Daniel 8:3, 20 has two horns, with the higher horn coming up last, picturing Persia's later superiority over Media.
- **The Medo-Persian conquest was real, but not the total end described here:** the

Medes and Persians took Babylon historically, but the city was not immediately destroyed like Sodom and Gomorrah (v. 19), nor did it instantly become permanently uninhabited (v. 20).

- Isaiah 13:17-18 fits the near historical instrument: God raised the Medo-Persian power against Babylon.
- Yet verses 19-22 press beyond the initial conquest, because Babylon continued as an inhabited and administratively useful city after its fall.
- This suggests a near/far pattern: the historical fall to Medo-Persia begins the fulfillment, while the final desolation of Babylon awaits the fuller day-of-the-LORD judgment.
- Revelation 17-18 uses Babylon as the final religious, commercial, and imperial world system brought down suddenly and completely by God.

Israel's restoration and taunt against Babylon's king (14:1-23)

Israel's restoration and rule over former oppressors (14:1-3)

- The victory and rest described here do not fully fit the return from Babylon under Cyrus and the later Persian rulers.
- Even in Hasmonean days, Israel's independence did not include taking captives from those who had formerly held them captive (v. 2).
- This belongs finally to the day of the LORD, not to the return under Ezra and Nehemiah.

The proverb against the king of Babylon: the oppressor broken (14:4-11)

- **The king of Babylon in Isaiah's day:** Babylon was not yet the final world empire it would become under Nebuchadnezzar; in Isaiah's lifetime it was often under Assyrian

pressure or control.

- Significant Babylonian rulers in this period include Merodach-baladan, who rebelled against Assyria and later sent envoys to Hezekiah (Isa. 39:1; 2 Kings 20:12).
- Because the oracle looks beyond Isaiah's immediate moment to Babylon's later imperial pride and fall, the **“king of Babylon”** is larger than one local ruler in Isaiah's own day.
- **A future ruler may also be in view typologically:** verse 4 begins a taunt against Babylon's king, but the language of 14:12-17 rises beyond an ordinary monarch's political downfall.
 - Historically, the taunt fits the proud Babylonian oppressor whose power is broken and whose pomp is brought down to Sheol (vv. 4-11).

- Prophetically, Babylon becomes a pattern of final anti-God world power, so the king can foreshadow a final ruler such as the Antichrist (Dan. 7:8, 20-25; 2 Thess. 2:3-4; Rev. 13:1-8), or even Satan, as verses 12-17 will display.
- The safest reading keeps both levels together: a real Babylonian king is addressed, while the Spirit uses Babylon's kingly pride to preview the ultimate ruler and system that God will cast down.

Lucifer fallen from heaven: pride brought down to hell (14:12-17)

- **The immediate referent is the king of Babylon:** verse 4 introduces the taunt as a proverb against the king of Babylon, so the passage should not be detached from its historical and prophetic context.
 - The downfall language exposes kingly pride, oppression, and the collapse of imperial glory.
 - The passage is first about Babylon's ruler, but not only about one ordinary ancient monarch.
- **“Lucifer” is descriptive before it is traditional:** the Hebrew term behind **“Lucifer”** carries the idea of shining or boasting, and **“son of the morning”** is poetic morning-star language.
 - The Septuagint and Vulgate treated the term as light-bearing/morning-star language, not originally as a personal name.
 - The use of **Lucifer** as a proper name for Satan developed through later theological and literary tradition, not from an explicit biblical naming formula.
- **A merely historical reading is too small for the passage:** the poem contains cosmic, universal, and supernatural elements that strain beyond a simple political obituary.
 - The whole earth rests (v. 7), Sheol is stirred to meet the fallen ruler (vv. 9-11), and the ruler speaks of ascending into heaven, exalting his throne above the stars of God, and being like the Most High (vv. 13-14).
- **This kind of pride reaches beyond normal royal arrogance and evokes heavenly rebellion.**
- **The passage works by prophetic layering:** Isaiah can address a historical king while also presenting a typological and eschatological pattern.
 - Babylon repeatedly functions in Scripture as the symbol of organized rebellion against God, from Babel (Gen. 11) to final Babylon (Rev. 17-18).
 - The king of Babylon therefore becomes a type of ultimate prideful rebellion, with Satan himself standing behind the same pride and fall, and with a final political expression in the Antichrist/Beast.
- **The safest conclusion:** Isaiah 14 does not explicitly establish **Lucifer** as Satan's personal name, but the passage does expose both the historical king of Babylon and the satanic pride behind him.
 - Read literally, the taunt is against Babylon's king.
 - Read canonically and prophetically, it also reaches to Satan's rebellion and to the final world ruler and system that God will bring down.
- **The five “I will” statements reveal the heart of the rebellion** (vv. 13-14).
 - The speaker wants to ascend into heaven, exalt his throne above the stars of God, sit on the mount of the congregation in the sides of the north, ascend above the clouds, and be like the Most High.
 - This is more than ambition for earthly rule; it is an attempt to seize divine place, divine authority, and divine worship.
- **Dake's position:** Finis Dake takes this as a direct description of Lucifer/Satan's original rebellion.

- Dake reads “**the sides of the north**” as more than poetic language; he connects it with Psalm 48:2, where Mount Zion, the city of the great King, is also said to be “**on the sides of the north.**”
- From this he argues that God’s throne is in a literal place in the far north of the universe, and that Satan desired to ascend to that actual location and usurp God’s throne.
- He also appeals to Job 26:7, where God stretches “**out the north over the empty place,**” and Ezekiel 1:4, where the divine whirlwind comes “**out of the north.**”
- In this reading, Satan’s sin was not merely pride in general, but a concrete attempt to invade the seat of God’s heavenly government.
- **The Mount Zaphon view:** many modern interpreters understand “**the mount of assembly in the far north**” as an allusion to Mount Zaphon, the Canaanite/Ugaritic mountain of divine assembly.
 - On this view, Isaiah uses pagan cosmic geography ironically: the proud king claims the highest divine seat imagined by the nations, but the LORD throws him down to Sheol.
 - This does not have to deny the Satanic layer; it can show how Babylon’s kingly pride, pagan divine-king ideology, and Satan’s own rebellion all share the same pattern of self-exaltation.
- The point is public disgrace: the one who exalted himself above all others is not even granted the burial dignity ordinarily given to earthly monarchs.
- This fits the taunt’s reversal: Babylon’s king sought a throne above the stars, but he is brought down beneath the feet of men.
- **Historically, his dynasty is cut off because of violent oppression** (vv. 20-21).
 - He is not joined with the kings in burial because he destroyed his land and slew his people.
 - His children are marked for slaughter “**for the iniquity of their fathers,**” so that they do not rise, possess the land, and fill the world with cities.
 - This is not merely personal humiliation; it is the end of a proud royal house and the prevention of Babylon’s renewed imperial expansion.
- **Historically, Babylon itself is brought under total divine judgment** (vv. 22-23).
 - The LORD of hosts says He will cut off from Babylon name, remnant, son, and nephew.
 - The city becomes the possession of bitterns, pools of water, and is swept with the besom of destruction.
 - As in Isaiah 13:19-22, this was not exhausted in the initial Medo-Persian capture of Babylon, but points to the complete desolation of Babylon as the LORD’s settled purpose.
- **Prophetically, the passage reaches beyond one dead monarch to the final collapse of satanic world power.**
 - The king’s shameful end continues the fall described in verses 12-17: the proud one who wanted heaven is thrust down, exposed, and denied lasting dominion.
 - Satan desires exaltation, imitation of God, and rule over the kingdoms of this world, but Scripture presents his end as public defeat, not royal honor (Rev. 12:7-12;

Babylon’s king denied honor, seed, and remembrance (14:18-23)

- **Historically, the king of Babylon is denied the royal honor normally given to kings** (vv. 18-19).
 - Other kings lie in glory, each in his own house or tomb, but this ruler is cast out like an abominable branch and like a corpse trampled underfoot.

20:1-3, 10).

- Babylon's name, seed, and remnant being cut off anticipates the final removal of the whole Babylonian system: no surviving dynasty, no continuing city, no renewed empire, and no lasting memorial before

God.

- Revelation 18 develops the same pattern when final Babylon boasts in queenly security but is brought down suddenly by the judgment of God.

The LORD's purpose against Assyria and all nations (14:24-27)

- **The LORD swears that His counsel will stand** (v. 24).
 - The fall of empires is not accidental; what the LORD has purposed will come to pass.
 - This anchors the Babylon oracle in divine sovereignty rather than in shifting international politics.
- **Assyria is the immediate historical example of that purpose** (v. 25).
 - The LORD says He will break the Assyrian in His land and tread him under foot upon His mountains.
 - This fits Judah's near historical deliverance from Assyria, especially the destruction of Sennacherib's army in Isaiah 37:36-38.
- Assyria's yoke is removed from Israel, showing that the LORD can break the present oppressor just as surely as He will later judge Babylon.
- **The local judgment becomes a universal principle** (vv. 26-27).
 - The LORD's purpose is described as His counsel "**upon the whole earth**" and His hand stretched out "**upon all the nations.**"
 - Assyria, Babylon, and the other nations are all subject to the same divine rule.
 - Since the LORD of hosts has purposed it, no one can disannul it; since His hand is stretched out, no one can turn it back.

Oracle Against Philistia (14:28-32)

- **The oracle is dated to the year King Ahaz died** (v. 28).
 - Ahaz was king of Judah, father of Hezekiah, and the ruler who had appealed to Assyria for help against Syria and Israel (2 Kings 16:7-9).
 - Scripture gives only a brief notice of his death: he slept with his fathers, was buried in the city of David, and Hezekiah his son reigned in his stead (2 Kings 16:20).
 - Chronicles adds a negative detail: Ahaz was buried in Jerusalem, but not brought into the sepulchres of the kings of Israel (2 Chron. 28:27).
 - The date is commonly placed around 715 B.C., though exact dating varies slightly
- because of co-regency questions.
- Hezekiah follows Ahaz, and the change of kings may have encouraged Philistine hopes that Judah's political situation was shifting.
- The meaning of "**Palestina**" in the KJV.
 - The KJV uses "**Palestina**" three times: Exodus 15:14; Isaiah 14:29; Isaiah 14:31. It also uses "**Palestine**" once in Joel 3:4.
 - These are older English forms for the land of the Philistines, corresponding to **Philistia** in many modern translations.
 - The KJV also renders the same Hebrew word as "**Philistia**" in Psalm 60:8, Psalm 87:4, and Psalm 108:9.
 - Isaiah 14:29 and 14:31 are clearly addressed to Philistia/Palestina because the oracle

- concerns the Philistine people and their cities.
- The Philistines, in Isaiah’s day, still existed in city-states such as Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron, and Gath, though they were under pressure from larger imperial powers.
 - The KJV’s variation between “**Philistia**” and “**Palestina**” reflects older English translation choices, not a change in subject from Philistia to Israel.
 - **Verses 30-32 carry a messianic note through Zion’s final security.**
 - The poor and needy are promised feeding, safety, and refuge, while Philistia’s root and remnant are destroyed.
 - In the immediate setting, this contrasts Judah’s afflicted remnant with the doomed Philistine cities.
 - But the answer to the nations in verse 32 is larger than Hezekiah alone: “**The LORD hath founded Zion, and the poor of his people shall trust in it.**”
 - Zion’s security rests on the LORD’s own foundation, which ultimately points to the Messiah’s reign from Zion and the final protection of His afflicted people.
 - The nations may ask what confidence Judah has, but the answer is not military strength; it is the LORD’s established purpose for Zion.