

"For the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies burned up and dissolved, and the earth and its works that are done in it will be exposed!" (II Peter 3:10)

Remember last week's lesson, on Isaiah 11-12, where Isaiah looked beyond the dark days of the divided kingdom of Israel, the threat of the Assyrians, the coming Babylonian captivity, and all the grief and hardships that were on the horizon for Israel, to the coming of "a shoot that would spring from the stem of Jesse," on whom the Spirit of God would rest, who would rule as king with righteousness and justice, to whom the nations of the world would turn, and a "remnant of His people restored"--gathered from "the four corners of the earth"! Isaiah envisioning the coming of the promised Messiah, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who would be sent from the Father and sit on the throne of David forever! Thus, fulfilling the covenants God made with Abraham and David! A prophesy which looked even beyond the first advent of Christ to His second coming and the glorious "millennial kingdom" to come, when "the lion would lie down with the lamb and the whole world would be "full of the knowledge of the Lord"! All of which would cause His people "on that day" to sing the "song of the redeemed"--giving thanks to God for His salvation, and the "excellent things He has done," making them known "among the peoples," and "crying aloud with joy" to the Holy One of Israel!

Setting the scene for Isaiah 13 (and the "burdened prophet" of God)!

Isaiah 13 begins with the first of 10 "oracles" concerning the nations surrounding Israel who opposed God (in chapters 13-23). The oracles (sometimes called "burdens") carrying a "weighty announcement," or what Motyer calls "a declaration" of coming judgment on the nations! Beginning with Babylon! Even though it was Assyria that was the big threat to the kingdom of Judah at the time of Isaiah's writing! (Babylon would not, in fact, become a powerful empire and "come into its own" until a hundred or more years after Isaiah's time!) But as Constable notes, "behind Assyria Isaiah saw "the Spirit of Babel"! Isaiah was obviously aware of the Genesis 11 account of the Tower of Babel and how it would come to symbolize (as it has throughout all the Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation) the world system man has built in defiance of God!

Walvoord has observed (as Mark Wever pointed out last night) how "much confusion exists in scholarly interpretations of the prophecies of Babylon because of the varied references (throughout Scripture) to the city of Babylon as Babylon, to the empire of Babylon, and to the religions of Babylon as Babylon--and that each of these areas has its own line of prophecy and fulfillment!"

And so, what is Isaiah's prophecy (oracle) dealing with "concerning Babylon" all about in Isaiah 13?

Turns out that Isaiah, in this chapter, is looking to a "double fulfillment" of his prophecy of judgment on Babylon, with the "far-off" judgment described first (in verses 2-16) and the "near-term" judgment (in verses 17-22) described second! Harry Ironside wrote that "the doom that fell (or will fall!) upon Babylon of old (in verses 17-22) was (or is!) an illustration of the terrible fate that awaits the godless Gentile powers who will be taken in red-handed rebellion against the Lord and His Anointed in the last days"!

J. Vernon McGee describes it as "punishment of Babylon in the 'day of the Lord'--in the Great Tribulation" (in verses 2-16) verses "destruction of Babylon in the 'day of man'--in ancient history fulfilled" (in verses 17-22).

Note, in verses 2-5, the reference to the Lord of host's summons to "muster" armies for battle against Babylon from "the farthest horizons," as His "instruments of Indignation" and, in verse 6-16, to His references to "the day of the Lord coming as destruction from the Almighty"--with "every man's heart melting... writhing like a woman in labor...and the stars of heaven....and the sun and the moon not shedding their light"!

The apostle Paul, in I Thessalonians 5:1-3, refers to the "day of the Lord" as "to the times and the epochs...when the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night...when destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape!"

Jesus, in Matthew 24, also spoke of this day coming, "...when the powers of the heavens will be shaken"! And John writes, in Revelation 18:1-3 how he saw "an angel coming down from heaven, having great authority...crying out with a mighty voice, 'Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit...for the nations have drunk of the wine of the passion of her immorality...and the merchants of the earth have become rich by the wealth of her sensuality"! Obviously, still to come!

But then Isaiah, not known for following a chronological sequence in his writing, comes back, in verses 17-22, to prophecy the more "near-term" fall of Babylon to the Medes (and Persians), which would take place in 539 B.C. (100 or so years after the passing of Isaiah)!

Verse 17 notes that it is the Lord who "is going to stir up the Medes against Babylon! And (in verse 19) how Babylon, "the beauty of the kingdoms," would "be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah"! Wow! (Can't help but think of Daniel, carried off (by God!) as a refugee in Babylon, who would testify to King Nebuchadnezzar that "there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries and has made known to him (Nebuchadnezzar!) what will take place in the latter days--how He will put an end to all the kingdoms to come and set up a kingdom that will endure forever"!)

Constable notes how "each soon-coming judgment on a particular segment of humanity (nation) foreshadows the great eschatological judgment that will fall on the whole human race in the still-to come day of the Lord"!

Acts 17:26 says that "He (God) made from one man every nation of mankind to live on the face of the earth, having determined their appointed time and the boundaries of their habitation, that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being!"

Motyer writes that "the same principles that operated in that climatic day of history operate throughout time! And He reminds us that "history is all about His-story"!

Isn't it great to know that we have a sovereign God, with the future in His hand--and that the best is yet to come! Like the song says: "There's a great day coming, a great day coming, there's a great day coming by and by...Are you ready for that day to come?"

Have a great day, men!

Lowell