

"How have you fallen from heaven, O star of the morning, son of the dawn! You have been cut down to the earth, you who have weakened the nations!" (Isaiah 14:12)

Remember last week's lesson on Isaiah 13! When we began our study of the first of 11 chapters (13-23) which group together prophecies concerning the judgment of nations surrounding Israel who opposed the Lord God Almighty, the Holy One of Israel! Beginning with Babylon, which was not yet the powerful empire it would become, as Isaiah was writing about it, but ever since the time of the Tower of Babel (in Genesis 11) had already become a symbol of a world system in defiance of God! And would be pictured as such from Genesis to Revelation, and throughout the ages to come! And so, in Isaiah 13, Isaiah sees Babylon in "double-judgment" jeopardy! First, in a "far-off" judgment in the "day of Lord" (in verses 2-16) when the Lord of hosts would "muster" an army for battle, "make the heavens tremble and the earth shake," and bring about the final fall of the "great city, Babylon"-- after which Christ will return to judge the world and set up His millennial kingdom (as recorded in Revelation 18-22, and elsewhere in Scripture)! Then (in true Isaiah form) Isaiah (in verses 17-22) prophesies how, in the near-term "day of man" (as J. Vernon McGee calls it), God would "stir up" the Medes (and Persians) to cause the fall of the ancient city Babylon, "as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah"! This latter prophecy would be fulfilled in 539 B.C. (100 or so years after the passing of Isaiah) and "foreshadow" (and add credence and "authenticate," for those requiring it!) all the prophecies concerning the eschatological events to come!

Setting the scene for last night's lesson on Isaiah 14, where Isaiah continues his prophecy concerning God's judgment on Babylon, looking forward to the day when the "house of Jacob" would (again) be "resettled" in their own land and given "rest from their pain and turmoil and harsh service in which they had been enslaved"--when they would "take up a taunt against the king of Babylon"--which (as Motyer points out) is "not an exercise in jeering or mocking" but a "poetic song to bring to light the inner truth about Babylon's proud ruler" which is depicted in verses 4-21!

The first "strophe" (or "movement") in this "poetic" song (in verses 3-8) reflects how the whole earth--even the inanimate cypress trees and cedars of Lebanon"--will rejoice in the peace that will result in that day with the passing of the "king of Babylon"--when the king's reign of terror is over! (Sounds like something still to come!)

The scene then shifts (in the second movement, in verses 9-11) to an imaginative visit to Sheol where there is a bizarre sense of "joy" among the inhabitants because this great monarch now shares the same humiliating fate of them all and is no long superior to them! (Proving that "misery loves company!") The clear implication is that there is a consciousness, and an "awareness," after this life of what's happening in the world! That the dead are really alive--"soul to speak"! And that "in the Bible, death is never a termination, or the end, but a change of place and of state with continuity of personal identity"! Souls separated from bodies (covered with maggots and worms) awaiting a resurrection--and a future! (Interestingly, Motyer notes that "it's in the light of verses like these that other passages in the Bible, like II Corinthians 4:16-5:5 come into their own"! Check it out!)

Then verses 12-15, which raise more questions about who the "king of Babylon" spoken about here really is! A picture of a mighty monarch whose pride brought him to destruction! Could it be referring to Belshazzar who succeeded Nebuchadnezzar as king of Babylon? Who Daniel says (in Daniel 5) "exalted himself against the Lord of heaven" and, while drinking wine from the sacred vessels taken from the temple in Jerusalem, saw the "hand-writing on the wall" announcing that God had "numbered his days," and that he was "weighed in the balances and found wanting"! (That same night, Daniel writes, the Chaldean king was slain, and his kingdom was given over to the Medes and Persians!)

Or is the king referred to in this passage the "antichrist"? Or the "dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil, Satan (according to Revelation 20:2)? Certainly, fits the character and persona of Lucifer (whose name means "morning star!") More definitively, Jesus, in Luke 10:18, used this very passage to describe the fall of Satan (or Lucifer). And so, if not speaking specifically of him in Isaiah 14:12, it certainly applies to the pride which led to his fall!

The next "movement" (in verses 16-21) speaks of the reaction of people (possibly people in the coming Tribulation) who will "gaze and ponder" at this one (the Antichrist?) who would "make the earth tremble...turn it into a wilderness... and be stripped of his royal robe...and thrown into the abyss"!

And that ends the poetic song of Isaiah 14 that one day will be sung!

With God's response to it all in verses 22-24! Where He declares that He "will cut off from Babylon name and remnant, descendant and posterity...make it a possession of the hedgehog (and old world insect-eating mammal) and sweep it with the broom of destruction"--into oblivion!

All of which makes this passage sound much more than a simple reference to the fall of the king of ancient Babylon! But about great--and very frightful day (for those not trusting God) yet to come!

But Isaiah's not done! And he turns his focus back again to Assyria--to the "near-term" future, when he prophesies that the Assyrian threat (being waged at the time of his writing) would be "trampled" in the Lord's own land" (i.e., in Judah, just outside the walls of Jerusalem)! This would actually happen as a "near-time fulfillment" (as recorded in Isaiah 35) --for those still alive to witness--when God would strike 185,000 Assyrian soldiers who would be surrounding Jerusalem with a deadly disease, and Sennacherib, the king of Assyria (who "taunted Jerusalem!) and his remaining forces would make their way back to Assyria, where Sennacherib would be assassinated, by his one sons; and the Assyrians would never be a threat to God's people again! Just as the Lord "planned"!

And, finally, judgment on Philistia (in verses 29-32) --"in the year that King Ahaz died"!

Interesting that the death of Ahaz is associated with the timing of efforts by the Philistines to send messengers to Jerusalem to try to make an alliance with them against Assyria! This might have worked with Ahaz, who earlier had tried to make an alliance with Assyria to protect Judah

against Syria and the northern kingdom of Israel--rather than trusting in the God of Israel for protection! Not so with Hezekiah who succeeded Ahaz and sought godly counsel from Isaiah (and got an answer to his question)!

So, "how then would one (Hezekiah) answer the messengers of Philistia? That the Lord has founded Zion, and the afflicted of His people would seek refuge in the God of Israel?"

Take-aways from this lesson?

There are many! Among them:

- That "pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall!" (Proverbs 16:18)
- That God is control of the rise and fall of nations, as He works out His divine purpose(s)!
- That the faithlessness of people doesn't dilute the faithfulness of God! (Molyer)
- That He wants to give "rest" to the weary! (Matthew 11:28)
- That death is not the end of our lives!
- That He "numbers" our days!
- And that He's our "mighty fortress, a bulwark never failing..."! (Sing it!)

Merry Christmas, men!

Lowell