

Isaiah 13:1-22

"The Burden Against Babylon"

How do I know that I can trust the Bible? That what I'm being told isn't just the random musings of some well-meaning men? What is it that sets *this book* apart from any other "religious writing" in the world? Because when I'm putting my eternal destiny on the line, "rolling the dice" & going "all in" on this, it's important that I be assured that what I'm being told is true...

I like the way Peter put's it (& I'll quote out of the KJV). It's there in 2nd Pet Ch 1. He says, "For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power & the coming of our Lord J.C. but were *eyewitnesses* of His majesty." He says, "Ladies & Gentlemen, we were there!" He says, "I saw Him glorified, shining before my eyes, being transfigured on that holy mount. I heard the voice of the Father, 'This is My beloved Son...'" In other words, "Guys, we aren't making this stuff up, or following some 'carefully crafted scam', we saw it ourselves!" But he goes on. "*We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place,*"¹

In other words. "Even though I'm a credible eyewitness, it's not *my witness* I'm telling you to put your trust in, it's *God's Word*, the *more sure word* of prophecy. Even more sure than my eyewitness account is the reliability of the Word of God."

Now, how is it that God validates His word? Peter tells us, through the word of prophecy. Being able to tell you, what's going to happen w/absolute accuracy before it ever comes to pass. Be it a few hours, a few days or a few thousand years... We read in Isaiah 44 where God declares, "*I am the First and I am the Last; Besides Me there is no God. And who can proclaim as I do? Then let him declare it and set it in order for Me, Since I appointed the ancient people. And the things that are coming and shall come, Let them show these to them. Do not fear, nor be afraid; Have I not told you from that time, and declared it? You are My witnesses. Is there a God besides Me? Indeed there is no other Rock; I know not one.'*"² & Again, "*For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things that are not yet done,*"³

God places the validity of His word on the reality of His ability to tell you what's coming before it comes. & As I said, sometimes it's near term, sometimes long term.

¹ *The Holy Bible: King James Version*. (2009). (Electronic Edition of the 1900 Authorized Version. [2 Pe 1:19]. Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

² *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Is 44:6-8]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

³ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Is 46:9-10]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

In Isaiah 13, it's both. & This is something else about prophecy that you discover as you study it. It's not uncommon for there to be a near/far, dual kind of fulfillment. – & *Sometimes*, there may be more than one detail in the single Vs of a prophecy that are fulfilled 1,000's of years apart. (Perhaps since God isn't bound by time, He doesn't feel the need to explain the nuances of His timeline to you & me 😊).

For instance, in Isaiah 61 there's a prophecy of the Messiah. & Jesus began His public ministry by reading it & telling them that it was fulfilled in their hearing. But what's interesting is that He reads Vs 1 & the 1st line of Vs 2, but then He rolls the scroll (closes the book) & doesn't finish Vs 2... Why not? Because He'll fulfill that portion (the day of vengeance of our God) at His 2nd coming.

But we see this near/far fulfillment of prophecy here in Isaiah 13. It's a new section in which Isaiah prophesies against the nations. Now, it's appropriate for judgment to *begin* in the house of God. Again, that's what Peter tells us. We have the tendency to think that things should start w/the ungodly, we think that sounds only fair... But God says, "No. Before I deal w/anyone else, I'm putting My own house in order 1st." The question that warrants consideration is, "If judgment *begins* in the house of the Lord, what then becomes of those who don't know the Lord? Who've stood proudly against the Lord & rejected the Lord?" ... So, up to this point we've seen God speaking out *primarily* (though not exclusively) against the sin found in Israel/Judah.

Here in Ch 13 God begins to deal w/the surrounding Gentile nations as well. He begins, w/Babylon. – Look at Vs 1.

Vs 1

Few things we want to point out before getting too far into this here. 1st of all, we note that this was a vision (it would seem) of some kind that Isaiah experienced. He says here that this was something he "saw".

#2 We note that it was the "burden" against Babylon. (Maybe your bible says "oracle" or "message"). I believe once we read through it, you'll agree that the word "burden" is the best translation here. You could replace it w/the word "judgment" if you wanted to. But the word "burden" carries certain connotations/implications. The idea is that it's a heavy word. It wasn't something pleasant, it wasn't the type of message that he enjoyed preaching/proclaiming, delivering.

But we have to be *faithful* to deliver the truth of God's word. Even those aspects that are heavy & weighty. But let me say this...

When we share the consequences of sin, it should come from a place of concern & compassion (a burden) that's clear to the one or one's w/whom we're sharing. Because God's not willing (not wanting) that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked would turn from their ways, trust in J.C. & be saved. But His righteousness, His justice *will be* satisfied. (& *It has been* satisfied in the cross of J.C., but if we're not *in* Christ, haven't given our lives/hearts *to* Christ, then we're on our own.) & It's a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God...

#3 We note that the burden is against Babylon. This is where it gets even more interesting because Babylon (as you Bible students know) represents more than 1 thing in Scripture. Yes, it was a literal historical city, the capital city of the Babylonian Empire (modern day Iraq) located on the Euphrates River.

It's also the place where after the flood the people began to amass & build a tower whose top was in the heavens (Gen 11) in defiance of God. So scripturally, Babylon also symbolizes the world system that man has built in defiance *of* & rebellion *against* God... We find the city of Jerusalem in contrast to Babylon. Jerusalem is the chosen city of God, Babylon is the wicked, rebellious city of man. In fact the city of Babylon is mentioned more than any other city in the entire bible (nearly 300 times) w/the exception of Jerusalem (over 800). The city of God will last forever, the rebellious city of man will ultimately be destroyed.

We also see it in Rev 17:5 used to describe the false religions of the world... So, when God speaks out against Babylon, there are layers of meaning to it. There's the near historical fulfillment, the far prophetic fulfillment as God destroys the rebellious world system of man... & It's all swimming around here in Isaiah 13-14.

One of the things fascinating about this prophecy is that when Isaiah recorded it, Babylon wasn't even a significant player on the world stage. It wasn't an Empire, more of just a single city-state. Remember, Hezekiah invited ambassadors from Babylon to come see his palace & all his treasures... that's about as far as it went in Isaiah's day. In fact, they wouldn't become a world conquering empire under Nebuchadnezzar until some 100 yrs after Isaiah's prophetic career had come to a close.

So, here is Isaiah, over a century before Babylon reaches this place of world power, already prophesying of its fall! – Imagine hearing a prophecy of the fall of New Zealand (not the best example but you get the point).

You know who they are, but they're not really jockeying for position on the world stage of super-powers. That's kind of what's happening here.

But as we'll see, it's not only the literal city that God is pronouncing judgment upon. It's the rebellious world system of man as well. Babylon (& all that it stands for) will one day be destroyed in what the Bible refers to as the Great Tribulation.

Now, why did God speak this word against Babylon in Judah? Meaning, as far as we know it was never published in the Babylonian post. As far as we know, Babylon never even heard these words... Couple reasons. Again, to assure His people that His word is true, that He is in control & that He will judge the wicked nations around them. Israel & Judah weren't being singled out, God will hold every nation accountable before Him.

2^{ndly} He was assuring them that He would take vengeance on those nations that came against them. As we've mentioned before, God can use the ungodly, but that doesn't excuse their ungodliness. God can take the things man means for evil & use them for His good, but man is still held accountable for his evil...

Vs 2-8

Again, everything about this prophecy is really, pretty mind blowing & amazing. God begins to make known the destruction of Babylon *before* the superpower kind of rise of Babylon. & We looked at this principle in Ch 10, so I won't linger on it now, but God is saying that He is going to raise up another group of people to punish/destroy them.

We've spoken of how God will use the wicked for righteous ends. It doesn't in any way justify the *wickedness* of the wicked or the *ungodliness* of the ungodly. But God can take what man means for evil & use it for good. & That's what's in view when He says, "I've commanded My sanctified ones..." & in Vs 4, "the Lord of hosts musters an army for battle." They're *His weapons of indignation (or wrath/judgment)*. Remember? Assyria had no idea God was using them, it wasn't in their heart to honor Him, they didn't even know Him. But God was allowing their path to be successful because it served His purpose.

But already, we're seeing nuances of that near/far fulfillment. Or at least of a similar situation which is yet to occur. He speaks of an army coming from a far country, from the end of heaven... It's beginning to turn the thoughts of our minds to Rev 16 when God will dry up the Euphrates River so that the "way of the kings of the east" might be prepared. He'll draw vast armies from the ends of the earth for one last battle before He ushers in His millennial kingdom.

& In Vs 6, "Wail, for the day of the Lord is at hand!"

If you've studied scripture for much time at all, then you know this phrase, "the day of the Lord" is significant. It doesn't point to a specific 24 hr period. It points to a season, a time period in which God will pour out His wrath upon a Christ rejecting world. Right now, you might say that man is having his "day". But soon, God will have *His* "day". & It will come as destruction from the Almighty.

Fear & distress will be on every side. He says, "Every man's heart will melt & they will be afraid." Jesus, in reference to the great tribulation, which is yet to come, said that amongst other things, there would be, *"men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth,"*⁴

"Pangs & sorrows will take hold of them, pain as a woman in childbirth (no epidural ☺), they will be amazed, faces like flames." Overwhelmed, afraid, shock & awe... (You might write down & read Rev 6-18 if you want a glimpse into that future fulfillment.)

As for the conquering of historical Babylon, you can look to Daniel Ch 5. Believe me, they were shocked as well. Remember that whole, "handwriting on the wall" event? They were (as it says here) "amazed at one another."

Vs 9-16

I'm choosing to focus on the "yet to come" aspects of this prophecy as opposed to the historical fulfillment, but again there are overtones of both in our present passage.

We see the phrase again, "The day of the Lord comes!" It would come for the Babylonian Empire & it's coming for the world system which has rejected J.C. Now, I would remind you that God's wrath isn't predicated upon God's mood... It's predicated upon the principle of justice.

Btw, we see another reason why I believe we (as the church) won't be here when this takes place. We will have been (1 Thess 4:17) "caught up" (or raptured) together w/those who've already gone to be w/the Lord (who've died in Christ) to meet them in the air. & Thus we shall always be w/the Lord. – *But the bible is very clear that this time referred to (some 26 times) as the "day of the Lord" is a time in which (as I mentioned a moment ago & we see it here) God will pour out His wrath. "The day of the Lord comes, cruel w/both wrath & fierce anger..."* But here's the thing for you believer. *"For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him."*⁵

⁴ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Lk 21:26]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁵ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [1 Th 5:9-10]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Jesus bore the wrath of God on your behalf. You haven't been appointed to wrath, but to salvation, life everlasting by His grace through faith. It doesn't even follow simple logic for Jesus to bear God's wrath on our behalf, & then God to pour out His wrath upon us... The wrath of God was satisfied at the cross. In Christ we're not appointed to wrath.

But God's wrath will (notice) lay the land desolate & He will destroy *sinner*s from it. (Those who've rebelled & rejected Christ). The day is coming when God will settle accounts & every sin will be *brought to account* by the just outpouring of His wrath.

Now, as I said, God's justice, His righteousness demands this. But God's heart isn't to destroy sinners, it's to save them. That's why Jesus came. Remember these words? *"As I live,' says the Lord God, 'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways!"*⁶ God gives mankind opportunity to repent, but when they fill up the measure of their sins, His wrath will be poured out.

If Vs 10 sounded familiar, it's because Jesus referred to it regarding the Great Tribulation (that final 7 yr period of time [the 70th week of Daniel we looked at last week], 3 ½ yrs of which will be the outpouring of God's wrath). He said, *"Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken."*⁷ Cataclysmic upheavals & cosmic disturbances will literally be rocking the world. Rev 6:12-13, *"I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood. And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind."*⁸

When historical Babylon fell, they felt like their world was coming apart. When the ultimate fulfillment of this takes place just prior to the return of Christ, the world will be literally falling apart!

"I will punish *the world* for its evil..." You see how this prophecy spills into more than the Empire of Babylon historically? God is speaking globally here... ultimately. He says, "I will make a mortal more rare than fine gold." **When you read Rev 6, you'll find people dying militarily, from chaos & anarchy... & when the 4th seal is broken 25% of humanity is wiped out... Later on another 1/3 is destroyed. Over ½ of humanity will be wiped out well before things are over & more will follow.**

⁶ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Eze 33:11]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁷ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Mt 24:29]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁸ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Re 6:12-13]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

He's basically saying that man will become as an endangered species. Jesus said, *"And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened."*⁹ God will shake the heavens & the earth. Haggai 2:6 & Hebrews 12:26 echo this same thought.

God will remove everything that can be shaken so that only that which can't be shaken will remain. Quick question, where's your foundation lie? Best to be founded upon the Lord J.C. Because like a gazelle that's being hunted, God's judgment is relentless. There will be no escape from the unrelenting, all-consuming judgment of God... (Again, it's what Jesus endured for you & me, the all-consuming judgment of God).

Psalm 137 speaks to how the Babylonians would ravish their enemies & dash the children of those whom they conquered upon the rocks. Vs 15-16 speak to the fact that as they sow, so shall they reap...

Vs 17-22

Babylon would be/will be laid waste. Not just historically, but ultimately eternally... Back in Vs 17, "I will stir up the Medes..." This is another incredible detail. You know how I said that Babylon was over 100 yrs away from being a world dominating empire? The Medes were well beyond that! Again, (horrible illustration but to give you an idea) it would be like God prophesying of the fall of New Zealand by saying, "I will stir up the Danes." Telling people that Denmark will be New Zealand's undoing. You're thinking... You gotta be kidding me! **(Close)**

& This is what drives skeptics of scripture crazy, they say that someone must've written these things after the fact & then someone signed his name to it... Because they can't believe that God would know what was going to happen in advance. How big is your God?

Now, this didn't happen (total devastation/destruction) when the Medes/Persians conquered Babylon. Though historically it did fall into ruin. But ultimately, we recognize that this is pointing to the final destruction of the world system in opposition to God.

What's the take home? I'll say it again. It's a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God. God's righteousness demands justice & God's justice will be satisfied. The price has been paid at the cross. So turn from your sin. Give your life *to* Jesus, live your life *for* Jesus, that God might be glorified in your life...

⁹ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Mt 24:22). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Prayer Points:

God we thank You that You love us. That Your heart is to save us. – We thank You for the richness/clarity/reliability of Your Word. Help us to respond appropriately to Your word, leading lives set apart to You, teach us to walk in the Spirit, not after the flesh, for the glory of Your name.

Judgment's coming, make no mistake. But grace is available today. If you need to turn from your sin, why not do that right here, right now. Humble yourself in the sight of God, & He will lift you up. Call upon the name of the Lord & leave here a new creation.