

Isaiah and the Nations

by A.B. Simpson

Isaiah's prophecies emphasize the judgment of the surrounding nations, serving as a warning to all nations that rely on their own strength rather than God's power and sovereignty.

Scripture: Isaiah 7:1, Isaiah 8:4, Isaiah 10:5-16, Isaiah 13:13-22, Isaiah 14:4-6, Isaiah 15:1, Isaiah 19, Isaiah 21:11-13, Isaiah 23, Isaiah 28:1-4

Topics: "God's Sovereignty", "Reliance on God"

Description

A.B. Simpson emphasizes the significance of understanding Isaiah's prophecies in the context of the surrounding nations that influenced Israel's history. He explains how Judah and Israel were caught between the powerful empires of Egypt and Assyria, leading to political alliances that Isaiah warned against, urging reliance on God instead. The sermon details Isaiah's visions concerning the impending judgments on nations like Syria, Assyria, Babylon, Moab, Ethiopia, Egypt, Edom, Arabia, and Tyre, highlighting their eventual downfall and the futility of earthly alliances. Simpson illustrates that these prophecies serve as a reminder of God's sovereignty and the consequences of turning away from Him. Ultimately, the message calls for faithfulness to God amidst worldly temptations and the assurance of His protection.

Transcript

We cannot properly understand the visions of Isaiah without having a clear conception of the neighboring nations which filled so large a place in contemporary history, and so frequently form the subject of the prophets' messages. Palestine was situated midway between the two great empires of the world. On the west was Egypt with her tributary states in Africa, generally described under the name of Ethiopia. On the east was Assyria, which was superseded and succeeded later by Babylon. These two mighty empires lived in constant jealousy and conflict, and in the marching and counter-marching of their mighty armies the intervening states of Western Asia became the constant battle ground of the world. These states clustered close to the Mediterranean coast. Chief among them were Judah and Israel. The one with its capital at Jerusalem, shut away to a considerable extent by its inaccessible situation among the hills, was more likely to escape the notice of these passing armies. The other, Israel with its beautiful capital Samaria in the most fertile part of the valley of Northern Palestine, lay in the very path of these contending armies. Further north were the three powerful kingdoms of Syria, Hamath and Tyre, the great maritime kingdom of antiquity. Around the southern frontier of Judah were Edom, Moab and Arabia. These midway states, exposed as they were to one or the other of the great contending parties, were under the constant

temptation of joining forces either with Egypt or Assyria for their own protection. Sometimes their joint action took the form of a mutual alliance between each other against the common foe. The politics of Judah and Israel, therefore, circulated about the question of these alliances. The shrewd politicians of Hezekiah's court were always plotting for some convention, either with Egypt, Assyria or the smaller states. In opposition to this we constantly find Isaiah protesting against all entangling alliances and appealing to the people to remember that God is their national King and able to protect them, Himself, without their leaning upon the broken reed of earthly powers. All these states, he tells them, are themselves to be involved before long in national ruin and their fate will only drag God's people down with them.

We find the early portion of Isaiah's prophecies occupied, therefore, with a series of visions relating to these surrounding nations.

I. SYRIA

In Isaiah 7: 1, an alliance between Israel and Syria was made against Jerusalem, and King Ahaz was greatly alarmed. This was the occasion for Isaiah's first vision and message regarding Syria in chapter 8: 4. In this message the prophet declares that before the child, which had just been born to him, "shall have knowledge to cry, my father and my mother, the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria shall be taken away before the king of Assyria." The vision is renewed in Isaiah 17: 1-11, and a fuller description is given of the fall of Damascus and the extinction of Syria. "The burden of Damascus. Behold, Damascus is taken away from being a city, and it shall be a ruinous heap. And the fortress also shall cease from Ephraim, and the kingdom from Damascus, and from the rest of Syria." All this came to pass under Shalmaneser in the same invasion in which the Ten Tribes were carried away captive and the kingdom of Israel destroyed.

2. ASSYRIA (Is. 10: 5-16.)

This is a sublime passage in which Assyria is represented as a proud, vainglorious power which imagines that its victories are through its own strength and through the favor of its idol gods; while it is merely a rod and an axe in the hand of God, used to chasten His people and then broken and thrown away. So Assyria was to be broken too. Again in Isaiah 14: 25 the vision is continued, "I will break the Assyrian in my land, and upon my mountains tread him under foot: then shall his yoke depart from off them, and his burden depart from off their shoulders."

3. BABYLON

Babylon is the next of these world powers to come in for judgment.

The remarkable feature about the prophet's vision of Babylon is that as yet the mighty Babylonian monarchy had not risen, Babylon being only a province of Assyria. Nearly two centuries were yet to elapse before the destruction of this mighty city, and yet the prophet describes in the minutest details the ruin which came through Cyrus. The ages which followed have only proved how exact was the prophetic picture of Isaiah 13: 13-22, Isaiah 14: 4-6 and Isaiah 34: 9-15.

"Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth shall remove out of her place, in the wrath of the Lord of hosts, and in the day of his fierce anger. And it shall be as the chased roe, and as a sheep that no man takes up: they shall every man turn to his own people, and flee everyone into his own land. Everyone that

is found shall be thrust through: And every one that is joined unto them shall fall by the sword. Their children also shall be dashed to pieces before their eyes: their houses shall be spoiled, and their wives ravished. Behold, I will stir up the Medes against them, which shall not regard silver; and as for gold, they shall not delight in it. Their bows also shall dash the young men to pieces; and they shall have no pity on the fruit of the womb; their eye shall not spare children. And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees' excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation: neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there; neither shall the shepherds make their fold there. But wild beasts of the desert shall lie there; and their houses shall be full of doleful creatures; and owls shall dwell there, and satyrs shall dance there. And the wild beasts of the islands shall cry in their desolate houses, and dragons in their pleasant places: and her time is near to come, and her days shall not be prolonged."

"You shall take up this proverb against the king of Babylon, and say, how has the oppressor ceased, the golden city ceased? The Lord has broken the staff of the wicked, and the scepter of the rulers. He who smote the people in wrath with a continual stroke, he that ruled the nations in anger, is persecuted, and none hinders."

"And the streams thereof shall be turned into pitch, and the dust thereof into brimstone, and the land thereof shall become burning pitch. It shall not be quenched night or day; the smoke thereof shall go up forever: from generation to generation it shall lie waste; none shall pass through it forever and ever. But the cormorant and the bittern shall possess it; the owl also and the raven shall dwell in it; and he shall stretch out upon it the line of confusion, and the stones of emptiness. They shall call the nobles thereof to the kingdom, but none shall be there, and all her princes shall be nothing. And thorns shall come up in her palaces, nettles and brambles in the fortresses thereof: and it shall be an habitation of dragons, and a court for owls. The wild beast of the desert shall also meet with the wild beasts of the island, and the satyr shall cry to his fellow; the screech owl also shall rest there, and find for herself a place of rest. There shall the great owl make her nest, and lay, and hatch, and gather under her shadow: there shall the vultures also be gathered everyone with her mate."

4. MOAB

Moab was really a kindred race to Judah and Israel, being descended from Lot through his wicked daughters. Moab was always jealous of Israel and richly deserved the judgment which at last came upon her. Balak, the king of Moab, tried his best to destroy Israel as they passed through the wilderness, and afterwards succeeded through Balaam in bringing them into unholy relations with the daughters of Moab and thus falling under the divine judgment. In the later history of Judah, Moab proved itself a treacherous foe by standing guard at the fords of the river and refusing to let the fugitives from the destruction of Jerusalem escape. The two chapters, Isaiah 15 and 16, contain "the burden of Moab" and pronounce punishment and ruin upon the people and their cities.

5. ETHIOPIA

The eighteenth chapter of Isaiah contains "the burden of Ethiopia." "The land shadowing with wings, which is beyond the rivers of Ethiopia." How perfectly this describes that great Eastern Soudan, whose bird-life is fluttering ever upon the air, and whose people have indeed been "scattered and peeled, a nation meted out and trodden under foot." But from this people there is yet to be brought a "present unto the Lord of hosts, to the place of the name of the Lord of hosts, the mount Zion." All this is to come in due time

through the gospel of the grace of God, which is at length beginning to reach this oppressed people.

6. EGYPT (Is. 19: 1-25.)

Generally speaking, this prediction is intended to show to the people of Isaiah's time the utter vanity of trusting in the Egyptian alliance, because Egypt herself is to be led away captive by the king of Assyria. "And the Lord said, like as My servant Isaiah has walked naked and barefoot three years, for a sign and wonder upon Egypt and upon Ethiopia; so shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptians prisoners, and the Ethiopians captives, young and old, naked and barefoot." (Isa. 20: 3, 4.) Thus the confidence of those who had looked for safety to an Egyptian alliance is to be confounded and put to shame. There are some mysterious and remarkable references in the nineteenth chapter which have been variously interpreted. The nineteenth verse has been supposed by many to refer to the extraordinary galleries in the great pyramid of Egypt, which are considered by some to be a symbolical picture of the ages and of the plan of redemption. The twenty-second verse, "the Lord shall smite Egypt and heal it," has been wondrously fulfilled, and the closing verse is, no doubt, prophetic of millennial times when Israel's blessings, as the queen of nations, shall also reach and overflow to Egypt and Assyria.

7. EDOM (Is. 21: 11-13.)

Edom was a sort of cousin to Israel, but, like many other secondhand relations, was more unfriendly than even Israel's enemies. "He called to me out of Seir, Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night? The watchman said, The morning comes, and also the night: if you will enquire, enquire you, return, come." Edom's watchmen are represented as crying unto the prophetic watchman, "What of the night?" and the answer comes, "The morning comes and also the night." For Israel it was to be morning, but for Edom night. How dark the night of Edom history tells us and travelers today can only find the ruins of that greatness which has forever passed away.

8. ARABIA

The vision of Edom is followed by that of Arabia. (Is. 21: 13-17.) Even the scattered tribes of the desert were to share in the awful tide of carnage and war, which the Assyrian was to bring over the whole of western Asia. The glory of Kedar should fail and the traveling companies of Dedanim be scattered abroad.

9. TYRE (Is. 23:1-18.)

The mighty city of commerce and world-wide riches was to be smitten too. "The burden of Tyre. Howl, you ships of Tarshish; for it is laid waste, so that there is no house, no entering in: from the land of Chittim it is revealed to them. Be still, you inhabitants of the isle; you whom the merchants of Zidon, that pass over the sea, have replenished. And by great waters the seed of Sihor, the harvest of the river, is her revenue; and she is a mart of nations. Be you ashamed, O Zidon: for the sea has spoken, even the strength of the sea, saying, I travail not, nor bring forth children, neither do I nourish up young men, nor bring up virgins."

"He stretched out his hand over the sea, he shook the kingdoms; the Lord has given a commandment against the merchant city, to destroy the strongholds thereof. And he said, you shall no more rejoice, O you oppressed virgin, daughter of Zidon; arise, pass over to Chittim; there also shall you have no rest. And it shall come to pass in that day, that Tyre shall be forgotten seventy years, according to the days of one king: after the end of seventy years shall Tyre sing as an harlot. And it shall come to pass after the end of seventy years, that the Lord will visit Tyre, and she shall turn to her hire, and shall commit fornication with

all the kingdoms of the world upon the face of the earth. And her merchandise and her hire shall be holiness to the Lord: it shall not be treasured nor laid up; for her merchandise shall be for them that dwell before the Lord, to eat sufficiently, and for durable clothing." For seventy years Tyre was to be broken and then restored and the day was to come when even her selfish and godless trade should be consecrated to the service of the Lord. This represents, no doubt, the general idea of the consecration of wealth and becomes a type for our own times. Oh, that it might be true today, in this age of commercial selfishness and corruption, that our "merchandise" and our "hire shall be holiness unto the Lord."

The Northern Kingdom of the Ten Tribes also comes in for its message of judgment. "Woe to the crown of pride, to the drunkards of Ephraim, whose glorious beauty is a fading flower, which are on the head of the fat valleys of them that are overcome with wine! Behold, the Lord has a mighty and strong one, which, as a tempest of hail and a destroying storm, as a flood of mighty waters overflowing, shall cast down to the earth with the hand. The crown of pride, the drunkards of Ephraim shall be trodden under feet. And the glorious beauty, which is on the head of the fat valley, shall be a fading flower, and as the hasty fruit before the summer; which, when he that looks upon it sees; while it is yet in his hand he eats it up." (Is. 28: 1-4.) What a picture of earthliness, drunkenness and the prostitution of natural beauty and blessing to selfishness and sin! What a message to this age of luxury and culture! How fearfully all this was at length fulfilled in the fall of Samaria and the ruin of the kingdom of Israel and how surely the same moral conditions are to bring the same judgment to every godless and sinful people.

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