



The Burden of Babylon

by Ronald L. Dart

When I study the prophets, I'm looking for God. I'm not looking for an outline of what's going to happen tomorrow. I'm not looking for an outline of the events of the next few years as laid out in Bible prophecy. What I want to know is: What does God have to say, what does it mean, and how might it affect my life? Because God doesn't change. If God *came down* on an ancient people because they behaved a certain way, I figure if I behave the same way that same God is liable to come down on *me*. God doesn't speak to man very often, and when he does it pays to listen very carefully. And just because the events were long ago doesn't mean you and I can afford to ignore them.

Now, I can throw out all the old clichés about “history repeating itself” and “learning the lessons of history”. But in truth it goes down to this one, simple fact: Human nature doesn't change and neither does God. If God has responded to human actions in the past, he is likely to respond *the same way* in the future; which is why he said this to Isaiah:

Isaiah 41

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²¹ Produce your case, says the LORD; bring forth your strong reasons, says the King of Jacob.

²² Let them bring them forth, and show us what shall happen: let them show the former things, what they were, that we may consider them, and know the latter end of them; or declare to us things to come.

You want to know what's coming? Take a look at what has been. Take a look at the past. Understand how God has acted in human history. And be assured of this, O man, he'll do it again. King Solomon said (chapter 3, verse 14 of the Book of Ecclesiastes):

Ecclesiastes 3

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¹⁴ I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that men will revere him.

¹⁵ Whatever is has already been,
and what will be has been before;
and God will call the past to account.

And so I listen to see what God has done. And more important, I listen to see *why he did it*. And I asked myself: Why did God have all these old prophets write this stuff down, and why did he preserve it for us in the latter days.

I would guess that most people who have watched the Iraq War on television have *completely missed* the Biblical allusions of what is going on there. They may have some vague idea that the name “Nebuchadnezzar” has some significance or “Hammurabi”. They may not realize that Saddam Hussein

fancied himself a kind of new king of Babylon; for Iraq sits in Mesopotamia, the old kingdom of Babylon. The ruins of Babylon are there, and Saddam even names his divisions after old Babylonian names. At one time, Saddam had in mind the rebuilding of the old city of Babylon. He had a plan. (I don't know what ever happened to it.) It was going to be a kind of tourist attraction. He must have encountered a distraction somewhere along the way to rebuilding Babylon. He should have paid attention to the old prophecies about Babylon. One of them, in Isaiah 13, verse 19, says this:

Isaiah 13

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¹⁹ And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees' excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah.

And apparently all that was left of Sodom and Gomorrah was smoking ground. He says:

Isaiah 13

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²⁰ It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelled in from generation to generation: neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there; neither shall the shepherds make their fold there.

²¹ 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.

²² And the wild beasts of the islands shall cry in their desolate houses, and dragons in their pleasant palaces: and her time is near to come, and her days shall not be prolonged.

Really marvelous poetry and very descriptive. It almost sounds like Babylon being a cage full of demonic spirits. It's all that's going to be left of the thing.

Well, all that Isaiah prophesied happened to Babylon. It has never been rebuilt. It's out there. People go to visit it as an archaeological site—a site of ancient civilizations, but it's never been rebuilt. Long ago, Babylon was a *great empire*. Israel was in decline at the time that Babylon was rising. According to Jeremiah, Israel was no longer fit to govern herself so God brought her under Babylonian hegemony. Israel had so much crime, so much corruption; her courts were unreliable; there so much violence in the city that finally God says, "Enough, already. If you can't govern yourselves, I'll put you under the government of Babylon." So he told the Israelites, "Don't rebel against Babylon, even when you're in exile there. Settle down, build houses, make homes, have families. Because God is going to do you *good* in Babylon, and the day will come when he will take you home" [Jeremiah 29]. But great Babylon, who had punished Israel, would be punished *in her own time*.

Before all this happened, God gave Isaiah a vision. He called it "the burden of Babylon". And when one reads it, it is *uncanny* how it echoes down through the ages and even seems to have overtones of the last days. And in fact—when you understand that Iraq is geographically the area of old Babylon, when you understand that the ruins of the ancient civilization of Babylon are right there not very far from Baghdad, when you understand all of this, and then you read this prophecy concerning Babylon—it's uncanny: the echoes that you hear of the past, now in the present.

Now, you shouldn't attempt to read these old prophets as history, not even as history written in advance. It's important to know the history surrounding them, but they are about much more than history. They are poetry. They are rich in imagery and symbolism. And the prophecies, although about times near to come to the prophet, also were about times that reach *way down* into our own generation today.

Isaiah 13

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¹ The burden of Babylon, which Isaiah the son of Amoz did see.

You'll find it in Isaiah, the 13th chapter. Isaiah was, I presume, in vision. But then he writes in poetic fashion:

Isaiah 13

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² Lift you up a banner on the high mountain, exalt the voice to them, shake the hand, that they may go into the gates of the nobles.

“Stand up there, shout, and shake your fist”, he says. “Get this word out.”

Isaiah 13

AKJV

³ I have commanded my sanctified ones, I have also called my mighty ones for my anger, even them that rejoice in my highness.

⁴ The noise of a multitude in the mountains, like as of a great people; a tumultuous noise of the kingdoms of nations gathered together: the LORD of hosts musters the host of the battle.

Wow, it's really something, you know? The whole imagery is one of: Here's Babylon sitting down there in lower Mesopotamia, alongside the Euphrates River. And somehow, off in the north, the *noise of battle* assembles as God pulls people together to come down and fight against Babylon.

Isaiah 13

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⁵ They come from a far country, from the end of heaven, even the LORD, and the weapons of his indignation, to destroy the whole land.

⁶ Howl you; for the day of the LORD is at hand; it shall come as a destruction from the Almighty.

Kind of hair-raising, isn't it? When you think about this, he's talking about *God* now is coming—*his* army, *his* battle, *his* weapons are coming—and we're going to wipe this whole area out.

Isaiah 13

AKJV

⁶ Howl you; for the day of the LORD is at hand; [...]

Now, “the day of the LORD” is one of those benchmarks in prophecy. The phrase occurs 25 times in the Bible. It begins in Isaiah; it shows up again in Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Zephaniah, Zechariah, and Malachi. It's *everywhere*. It even appears five times in the New Testament. Paul, for example, is still looking ahead to the day of the Lord when he wrote to the Thessalonians—chapter 5, verse 1:

1 Thessalonians 5

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¹ But of the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I write unto you.

² For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night.

The imagery there and the choice of words he uses makes it pretty clear he's talking about what Jesus was talking about when he talked about the return of the Son of man coming as a thief in the night [Matthew 24]. He's looking ahead to the return of Christ. Peter, also—in Second Peter, chapter 3, verse 10:

2 Peter 3

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¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.

So any time I find the phrase “the day of the Lord” in the Bible, I sit up and take notice. It may be that there’s more than one time that can be called (at least in type or typology) the day of the Lord; but even if so, it may have reflections all the way down to the day of the Lord at the end. And this one...this one really rings a bit of the end-time day of the Lord. Isaiah continues:

Isaiah 13

AKJV

⁷ Therefore shall all hands be faint, and every man’s heart shall melt:

⁸ And they shall be afraid: pangs and sorrows shall take hold of them; they shall be in pain as a woman that travails: they shall be amazed one at another; their faces shall be [red] as flames.

You know, when you think about warfare in ancient times, and you realize what these people did to one another, the expectation of a siege and a battle *would* cause a man’s heart to melt. And then he says:

Isaiah 13

AKJV

⁹ Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate: and he shall destroy the sinners thereof out of it.

Now remember, this is the burden of *Babylon*. Right now, this army coming down out of the noise—this army that God has brought down here, this army that is the sword in his hand—is coming right down into what today we would call Iraq. It is a time of fierce anger and the land is going to be laid desolate.

Isaiah 13

AKJV

¹⁰ For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light: the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine.

¹¹ And I will punish the world [probably meaning “land”] for their evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; and I will cause the arrogance of the proud to cease, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible.

It sounds a lot like the last days, when you understand what the Bible talks about of the last days. It also tends to sound a little bit about the days that many men have been going through in *new* Babylon (otherwise known as Baghdad). There’s another scripture, though—when you think about some of the things that he talked about in this section—that compares with it. It’s in the Olivet Prophecy of Jesus; you’ll find it in Matthew, chapter 24. Here Jesus says:

Matthew 24

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²⁷ For as the lightning comes out of the east, and shines even to the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

We know what we’re talking about, don’t we?—the return of Christ.

Matthew 24

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²⁸ For wherever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together.

²⁹ Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken:

³⁰ And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

So look at this: We're not only talking about the benchmark, "the day of Lord", even the imagery is the same—even the descriptive events that are to take place look ahead to the return of Christ. Then there's this passage in Revelation, chapter six. John said, verse 12:

Revelation 6

AKJV

¹² And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal [*There were seven of them in Revelation.*], and, see, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood;

¹³ And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, even as a fig tree casts her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind.

You can sort of imagine...and they have machines that do this on pecan trees down here in Texas. They grab the tree by its trunk, and shake it, and all the pecans come plopping down to the ground. Now, the imagery he's giving us here is of a meteor shower; with these things falling out of the sky like figs falling out of a tree. But the *effect* will be rather different. He said:

Revelation 6

AKJV

¹⁴ And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.

¹⁵ And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every slave, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains;

They all went into caves. Rich and poor now are equal. Nobody's above anybody else; we're all hiding and fleeing for our lives. And they cried...

Revelation 6

AKJV

¹⁶ [...] to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb:

¹⁷ For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?

Well, I know that we like to think of "gentle Jesus, meek and mild", I know we like to think of a savior who is kind and loving (and Jesus certainly is); but on the other hand the Bible seems to say that when he comes back, when he returns to this earth to destroy those that destroy the earth, he is not going to be particularly gentle. He will be riding a horse (which in the Bible is a sign of a tank of war; it's an instrument of war) and he will have a sword coming out of his mouth with which he will slay the wicked

[Revelation 19]. Yes, that's the same Jesus who was born and placed in a manger in Bethlehem who will do this.

And this “day of the Lord” we’re reading about in Isaiah: Now we’ve had it amplified to realize it is *the day of God’s wrath*. God can become *filled* with anger. And, you know (and I don’t want to put too fine a point on it but), when we come back to Babylon, and we come back to the *land* of Babylon—to Mesopotamia, to the land between the rivers Euphrates and Tigris, to what is today Iraq—there is *plenty there* to arouse the *fury* of God; not only in the adversary that they have played to Israel—historically (all the way back to the time when Babylon took Israel captive and dragged them out of their land and settled them over on the Euphrates), to later generations when Babylon has been at odds with Israel (that is, when the Iraqis have been at odds with Israel). But then the way they have treated *their own people*, that we are now learning what they have done... No, when we look at that the day of God’s wrath doesn’t seem too far-fetched, at all. Isaiah 13:12:

Isaiah 13

AKJV

¹² I will make a man more precious than fine gold; even a man than the golden wedge of Ophir.

What he means by that is men are going to be rare.

Isaiah 13

AKJV

¹³ 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.

Hey folks, get used to it: *God has anger*. He can have wrath; he can become *furious*. It’s better to be aware of this God than to keep on wondering about the God of your imagination, which never gets mad. *This* God does.

Isaiah 13

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¹⁴ And it shall be as the hunted gazelle, and as a sheep that no man gathers up: every man shall return to his own people, and flee everyone into his own land.

It’s picking allegories out of the time in which they lived—in which everybody was familiar about a complete and utter disaster.

Isaiah 13

AKJV

¹⁵ Every one that is found shall be thrust through; and every one that is joined to them shall fall by the sword.

¹⁶ Their children also shall be dashed to pieces before their eyes; their houses shall be spoiled, and their wives ravished.

Nobody’s going to care about civilian casualties when *these* people come rolling down on your country. Who were these people? Well, historically they were the Medes. All this stuff really happened to the Babylonians. In verse 17, he says:

Isaiah 13

AKJV

¹⁷ Behold, I will stir up the Medes against them, which shall not regard silver; and as for gold,

they shall not delight in it.

They couldn't give a fig about anything you can offer them to buy them off.

Isaiah 13

AKJV

¹⁸ Their bows also shall dash the young men to pieces; and they shall have no pity on the fruit of the womb; their eyes shall not spare children.

¹⁹ And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees' excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. [*As we just read a little earlier.*]

All this happened in history. For ancient Babylon, the day to the Lord was heralded by an invasion from the North—the Medes. And then this brings us back, as I said, to where we were when I started out the program about what was going to happen to Babylon. It would never be inhabited. Nobody would live in it from generation to generation. The Arabian would not pitch his tent there. The shepherds would not make their folds there. It would be a *desolate* place *from now on*. And then that takes us (naturally) to chapter 14, verse 1, and the connection between what he's doing in Babylon and what's going on in Israel. He says:

Isaiah 14

AKJV

¹ For the LORD will have mercy on Jacob, and will yet choose Israel, and set them in their own land: and the strangers shall be joined with them, and they shall join to the house of Jacob.

² And the people shall take them, and bring them to their place: and the house of Israel shall possess them in the land of the LORD for servants and handmaids: and they shall take them captives, whose captives they were; and they shall rule over their oppressors.

Israel *did* return from Babylon. I don't think it was ever said that they took Babylonians captive or they ruled over Babylon. Not in those days. But according to the prophets, there's to be *more than one* return of Israel. In fact, we have witnessed a *second* return of Israel to that land in our own time—from the Balfour Declaration forward, when Israel was given a homeland and the Jews began doing everything they possibly could do to get back to Israel. It's said that in those days...

Isaiah 14

AKJV

³ [...] the LORD shall give you rest from your sorrow, and from your fear, and from the hard bondage wherein you were made to serve,

⁴ That [*when this has happened*] you shall take up this proverb against the king of Babylon, [...]

And at this point it gets really interesting.

Isaiah 14

AKJV

⁴ [...] How has the oppressor ceased! the golden city ceased!

The “golden city” is Babylon. Isaiah 14, verse 5:

Isaiah 14

AKJV

⁵ The LORD has broken the staff of the wicked, and the scepter of the rulers.

⁶ He who smote the people in wrath with a continual stroke, he that ruled the nations in anger, is persecuted, and none hinders.

It's just *rolling* right across him and he can't even stop it.

Now, don't get me wrong. I don't think that Saddam is the prophesied "king of Babylon", even of the end time; but he was just unlucky enough to exalt himself into the *position* of a king of Babylon, in the same *place* as the king of Babylon, and to do the *same sort of evil deeds* as the king of Babylon. He *did* smite the people with a continual stroke. He *did* rule the nations in anger. And now it has been *his* turn.

Isaiah 14

AKJV

⁷ The whole earth is at rest, and is quiet: they break forth into singing.

⁸ Yes, the fir trees rejoice at you, and the cedars of Lebanon, saying, Since you are laid down, no feller is come up against us.

Now again, please don't take it that I'm prophesying that peace is going to break out all over the Middle East right now; but actually in *those* days, when the king of Babylon was brought down it *did* usher in a period of quiet, finally, across these places because he had become a *very violent* king.

Also, the people to whom this prophecy was given (and Isaiah himself, obviously) believed that *behind* the kings that they could see there were spiritual forces that they cannot see. And I'll have to say, reading the Bible I believe they were right. And so they're talking now not so much always about the kings of Babylon that you can see; they're talking about the spiritual forces *behind* them, and they say:

Isaiah 14

AKJV

⁹ Hell from beneath is moved for you to meet you at your coming: [...]

"Those people that have gone down there before *you* got there are there waiting for you."

Isaiah 14

AKJV

⁹ [...] it stirs up the dead for you, even all the chief ones of the earth; it has raised up from their thrones all the kings of the nations.

¹⁰ All they shall speak and say to you, Are you also become weak as we? are you become like to us?

¹¹ Your pomp is brought down to the grave, and the noise of your viols [*instruments*]: the worm is spread under you, and the worms cover you.

That's an appealing image for Saddam Hussein at this time—to think about it being that way for him. And that, of course, is the way God gave Israel a proverb to say about the old original king of Babylon and his fall and how he went down.

Now, if Saddam Hussein had known what had happened to the king of Babylon, I wonder if he would have aspired to his throne. Verse 16:

Isaiah 14

AKJV

¹⁶ They that see you shall narrowly look on you, and consider you, saying, Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms;

¹⁷ That made the world as a wilderness, and destroyed the cities thereof; that opened not the house of his prisoners [*That kept all these people locked up*]

¹⁸ All the kings of the nations, even all of them, lie in glory, every one in his own house.

“They all have tombs, but not you.”

Isaiah 14

AKJV

¹⁹ But you are cast out of your grave like an abominable branch, and as the raiment of those that are slain, thrust through with a sword, that go down to the stones of the pit; as a carcass trodden under feet.

²⁰ You shall not be joined with them in burial, because you have destroyed your land, and slain your people: the seed of evildoers shall never be renowned. [*Your children are not going to be renowned.*]

²¹ Prepare slaughter for his children for the iniquity of their fathers; that they do not rise, nor possess the land, nor fill the face of the world with cities. [*They're not going to do this.*]

Now, I'm not suggesting that this is a prophecy of Saddam Hussein and Uday and Qusay, his sons. I suppose it could happen to anyone who exalts himself in Babylon. God allowed Babylon of old to afflict Israel, and then punished them for it later. And you know, it's almost as though history has repeated itself again. God says:

Isaiah 14

AKJV

²² For I will rise up against them, said the LORD of hosts, and cut off from Babylon the name, and remnant, and son, and nephew, said the LORD.

All the relatives. They're all going to be dead.

Isaiah 14

AKJV

²³ I will also make it a possession for the bittern, and pools of water: and I will sweep it with the besom [*broom*] of destruction, said the LORD of hosts.

²⁴ The LORD of hosts has sworn, saying, Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand:

And frankly, the way this whole thing fell in Babylon, it really kind of looks like it was all God's doing in the first place.

But now there's one more prophecy I want to give you before I leave this thing; it's right at the end of this chapter, and it's connected to it, and it's kind of strange. It's Isaiah 14, and beginning in verse 29 (remembering that Philistines are Palestinians):

Isaiah 14

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- 29 Do not rejoice, all you Philistines,
that the rod that struck you is broken;
from the root of that snake will spring up a viper,
its fruit will be a darting, venomous serpent.
- 30 The poorest of the poor will find pasture,
and the needy will lie down in safety.
But your root I will destroy by famine;
it will slay your survivors.
- 31 Wail, O gate! Howl, O city!
Melt away, all you Philistines!
A cloud of smoke comes from the north,
and there is not a straggler in its ranks.
- 32 What answer shall be given
to the envoys of that nation?
“The LORD has established Zion,
and in her his afflicted people will find refuge.”

It would be a terrible mistake to use this prophecy as any kind of justification for violence against the Palestinians in our day, but we should keep it in mind, because God always keeps Zion in mind. He has something in mind for Jerusalem at the end.

Until next time, I'm Ronald Dart.

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