
ISAIAH 17-23

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INTRODUCTION

After establishing the Lord's case against Israel and laying out a vision for a future full of blessings in chapters 1-12, Isaiah turned to Israel's neighbors, declaring the Lord's judgments on them for their own sins. Later prophets made similar pronouncements—see Jeremiah 46-51 and Ezekiel 25-32. (Even though not part of this lesson, I'll include some notes on chapters 13-16, for completeness.)

These chapters show that Isaiah spoke to a Gentile audience as well. His calls to repentance and prophecies of coming judgment were not limited to Judah and Israel, but extended to many nations surrounding his own land. But these chapters also serve as proof of Isaiah's messages in the earlier chapters. They show that God's power and glory is greater than the nations of the earth and that he can deliver Israel from its oppressors. How can Israel look to other nations for support when they have great promises from the Holy One of Israel?

Chapters 13-14 were quoted by Nephi in his large quotation of Isaiah in 2 Nephi. This material was likely included by Nephi because it speaks of Babylon, which was ahead of Isaiah's time, but in Nephi's, Babylon was the major world power and ultimate threat to Judah. Thus Isaiah's messages about Babylon—which Nephi now knew to be true—were both confirmatory of his prophetic gift and relevant to his messages to his people about being a remnant that had been preserved from destruction.

The order of the chapters might seem random at first—they are not at all chronological—but it has a pattern that aligns with the rest of Isaiah's messages and chapters, organized according to themes.

In this lesson, which covers the last part of the section that is chapters 13-23, Isaiah prophesies against

Israel's neighbors (except for chapter 22). Thus a more detailed outline is:

1. Babylon (13:1 – 14:27)
2. Philistia (14:28-32)
3. Moab (15:1 – 16:14)
4. Syria and Israel (17)
5. Beyond Ethiopia (18)
6. Egypt (19 – 20)
7. Babylon again (21:1-10)
8. Edom and Arabia (21:11-17)
9. Jerusalem (22)
10. Tyre (23)

Listing Babylon first addresses both the culture that would be the greater threat to Judah's existence in the near term, but also sets up Babylon as the type of the world and Satan's plans that makes the messages timeless. In 612, Nineveh fell to the Babylonians, ushering in a 100 years of the Neo-Babylonian kingdom. But reading Isaiah, it would be easy to ask how the Lord can use as his servant such evil empires, like Assyria and Babylon? Habakkuk had the same question (Habakkuk 1); how can the Holy One who has "purer eyes than to behold evil" (Habakkuk 1:13) allow evil to have power over the covenant people? The answer in his book is to trust God: "But the Lord is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him" (Habakkuk 2:20). The Babylonians will also be judged and destroyed in the end, he declared (Habakkuk 2:5-8).

Isaiah's answer, like Habakkuk's later one, is that as the Babylonians defeated the Assyrians before them, they will be defeated in the future by the Medes. The Lord can use them for his purposes or judge them, as he sees fit. This theme comes back in the latter half of the book of Isaiah.

The other nations listed in the book are there as a reminder of God's universal sovereignty. He alone is in charge of the fate of all nations and all people, not all their gods of gold, silver, metal, or wood. This ties back to the core message of chapters 7-12: Jerusalem and her people need to trust the Lord and no one else and not rely on other nations and powers to save them. Only Yahweh can and will do that.

You can up all these chapters in with two words: sin and punishment. Isaiah deals in contradictions: the heavens and the earth; now and later; judgment and salvation; sin and punishment. Isaiah's message is that sin has consequences that the Lord will exact on his recalcitrant children, in Israel, Judah, Syria, Egypt, Assyria, Moab, and Babylon. So the message is to us today. Our sins may not be exactly those of the people Isaiah taught but they have the similar consequences. Unless we exercise the faith (hearing and seeing), repentance (turning around), baptism (washing and cleansing), receive the gift of the Holy Ghost (the spirit), and endure to the end, we are eternally at risk, just like the ancient peoples of the Old Testament.

Remember the worth of souls is great in the sight of God; For, behold, the Lord your Redeemer suffered death in the flesh; wherefore he suffered the pain of all men, that all men might repent and come unto him. And he hath risen again from the dead, that he might bring all men unto him, on conditions of repentance. And how great is his joy in the soul that repenteth! Wherefore, you are called to cry repentance unto this people. And if it so be that you should labor all your days in crying repentance unto this people, and bring, save it be one soul unto me, how great shall be your joy with him in the kingdom of my Father! And now, if your joy will be great with one soul that you have brought unto me into the kingdom of my Father, how great will be your joy if you should bring many souls unto me!... And as many as repent and are baptized in my name, which is Jesus Christ, and endure to the end, the same shall be saved" (D&C 18:10-16, 22).

BABYLON (13:1 – 14:27)

Babylon is the ultimate metaphor for evil in the scriptures. In Isaiah's day, Babylon was a former powerful kingdom defeated by the Assyrians; it was thus a weak vassal state at that time. But even with minimal political power, it was still the cultural capital of the ancient Near East. Many thoughts, practices, and activities came from Babylon and spread to the region around it. That large degree of influence, especially when it was wicked in the eyes of the prophets, led to Babylon's reputation that persists even to our day as we sing about coming out of Babylon and Babylon the great falling.

In John's Revelation, Babylon is the epitome of sin, the persecutor of the righteous, the embodiment of Satan's power (Revelation 14:8; 16:19; 17:5; 18:2, 10, 21). Likewise, in modern revelation, Babylon is the symbol of worldliness and defiance of God's laws and the place for Saints to flee (D&C 1:16; 35:11; 64:24; 86:3; 133:5, 7, 14). In Isaiah, Babylon takes on both of these characterizations—the symbol of sin and defiance but also the place to flee when the Lord calls his people to rally to his ensign.

One interesting possibility in the early part of chapter 13 is that as Assyria was a tool in the Lord's

hand to chasten Israel and Judah (chapters 7-8), so Babylon will later be the same kind of tool against a wicked Judah. Thus the first part of chapter 13 could be the Lord calling his army to come *from* Babylon to attack Judah. But like Assyria, the Lord judges Babylon for her evils and in the end she is also destroyed, even though she was the Lord's army for a time.

THE LORD CALLS FORTH HIS HOSTS (13:1-5)

13:1 *The burden of Babylon.* "A *burden* is a prophecy of doom or judgment against a people. The Hebrew root (*masa'*) literally means 'lifting' or 'a lifting up,' perhaps indicating that the prophecy or judgment is lifted up by the voice of the prophet against the people" (Parry, *Understanding*, 130). It should be noted that a *masa'* is not always a prophecy of doom but can just be a lifting up of a message to that people, which allows for the first part of this chapter to be a call to Babylon's army to do the Lord's will against Judah in verses 1-16 but who then are judged by the Lord in verses 17 and beyond.

13:2 **Lift ye up a banner.** “Lift” here is the same root term as ‘burden’ in verse 1. The Lord holds up the ensign to call the righteous to escape the punishment coming to Babylon. Here the banner is lifted “upon the high mountain,” representing the temple.

13:3 **my sanctified ones.** Could also be translated ‘saints’; “my holy ones” (NIV); “my sacred warriors” (NJB).

13:4 **a multitude in the mountains.** A large gathering of people to the temples of the Lord.

JUDGMENT: THE DAY OF THE LORD (13:6-10)

13:6 **Howl ye.** The wicked will howl and wail at the Second Coming because it is a day of judgment. Their hands and hearts will fail and they will feel pain and sorrow.

13:10 **not give their light.** The stars, sun, and moon all hide their light, ashamed of the wickedness before them. This could also have reference to the false gods that so many worshipped in that day and who were associated with the heavenly objects. In that case, they would be ashamed or fail in the presence of the Lord.

In verses 6-13, the story quickly moves to a destruction that is more than war—it is cosmic in nature, “the day of the Lord” (13:8). The land is desolate; the sinners destroyed; the stars and the sun are darkened; the heavens shake and the earth moves; and the wicked and arrogant are punished for their sins. This is the last days, the power that the Lord will exercise at his Second Coming.

JUDGMENT ON BABYLON: THE WICKED PUNISHED (13:11-22)

13:11 **I will punish the world for their evil.** Babylon is portrayed as being punished for her great sins, which is all a type of the Second Coming.

13:12 **a man more precious than fine gold.** “I will make man scarcer than pure gold” (NIV).

13:13 **I will shake the heavens.** The last days will see great earthquakes that will shake heaven and earth, so fierce will be God’s wrath.

13:16 **children also shall be dashed to pieces.** The scene is gruesome—people stabbed and cut down,

children thrown the ground to be killed, women raped, houses plundered and destroyed—a scene easily imagined when an invading army attacks the town of a powerful enemy.

13:17 **I will stir up the Medes.** In Isaiah’s day, the Medes were a people living in the mountains of what is today northern Iran, renowned for their horses. One Mede, Cyaxares, made alliance with Babylon and together they were responsible for the conquest of Assyria. It was also the Medes that allied with Cyrus and conquered Babylon by blocking the mighty Euphrates River and slipping in under the city walls when the river dried up.

13:19-20 **Babylon, the glory of kingdoms . . . shall never be inhabited.** No one in Isaiah’s day could imagine that a city like Babylon would ever fall and be left desolate for hundreds of year, but that is just what the prophet said—and just what happened. It was a great city of power and culture, well-protected with huge walls and gates. Predicting its fall would wound as foolish then as predicting the complete desolation of London, Paris, or New York City.

In other words, this had to be considered outrageous in Isaiah’s day, even in Nephi’s day, even in Jesus’ day. Babylon may have been brought down and humbled over the years, but it remained a great center of trade, study, and culture for hundreds of years after the New Testament was written. But during the Arab days, it was abandoned and remains so today, though Saddam Hussein did build a palace in the middle of the old city ruins (which is now a museum like the archeological remains of the city). Today people live all around it in towns and on farms, but no one lives in ancient Babylon itself.

ISRAEL WILL BE GATHERED (14:1-3)

14:1 **the Lord will have mercy on Jacob.** In the middle of the judgment on Babylon passages, there are a few verses to remind us of the Lord’s mercy toward his chosen people, which will be returned to their own land.

14:1 **strangers shall be joined with them.** Not only Israel but people from other countries will accept the Lord and his commandments and will become part the covenant people.

14:2 **bring them to their place.** In the last days, others shall make it possible for Israel to return to

their lands and will bring them there. This has been fulfilled in the last 100 years.

14:2 **shall possess them.** In the KJV, “them” appears to refer to the people helping the Jews return to their lands, especially considering the last part of the verse where it speaks of defeating their enemies. But the Book of Mormon version makes it clear that “them” are the lands that Israel will possess.

14:3 **give thee rest.** The rest of the Lord is a great blessing; it is peace and posterity, the exact opposite of “hard bondage” that they had experienced in Egypt.

FALL OF THE KING OF BABYLON (14:4-11)

14:4 **the king of Babylon.** These verses describe the fall of Babylon’s future king. He was “the oppressor” who has ceased and his entire “golden city” has ceased to exist.

14:6 **none hindereth.** Babylon persecuted many and they had no choice but to take it. Now that Babylon is humbled, there is nothing stopped their former persecuted enemies from having their revenge on them.

14:8 **no feller is come up.** “Feller” is a ‘woodsman’ or ‘tree-cutter’; the wood-cutter is the king of Babylon, but now that he is gone, the trees (people) don’t have to live in fear of being cut down.

14:9 **Hell from beneath is moved for thee.** Not physically moved to another place but moved emotionally; ‘Sheol’ is excited to have the king of Babylon there.

14:10 **Are thou also become weak as we?** During life, the king had great power and the respect of all. Now in death, he is just like everyone else.

FALL OF LUCIFER (14:12-23)

14:12 **O Lucifer.** Continuing the theme of the fall of the king of Babylon, Isaiah expands the judgment to “Lucifer,” which is *hēlēl*, means ‘light-bearer’ or ‘morning star.’ This is the only place in the Bible the word “Lucifer” is used, which is a Latin word that means the same thing as the Hebrew and was used here because the KJV translators interpreted this passage as apply to the devil, so used his (to them) familiar Latin name.

14:12 **son of the morning.** This refers to the darkness just before the light comes up. Lucifer is not a character of light but of darkness, forced to wait for the light to burst upon and dissolve him.

14:13 **in the sides of the north.** In the ancient Near Eastern understanding of the world, “the north” was the dwelling place of the gods, a synonym for heaven.

14:14 **I will be like the most High.** Satan’s goal was to have the power and glory of God (D&C 29:36; 76:28) and to exalt himself above his pre-mortal brothers and sisters.

14:15 **brought down to hell.** Though he tried to ascend to God’s throne in heaven above the earth, he shall instead be brought down to the dark confines of Sheol under the earth, as far from his goal as is possible. See also Psalms 28:1; 38:18; 143:7.

14:16 **Is this the man that made the earth to tremble.** Once Satan is powerless, even his fellow dwellers in Sheol will be amazed at his fall and his inability to carry out his grand plans.

14:19 **as the raiment of those that are slain.** Satan was compared to an undesirable branch pruned from a tree and thrown away or the torn, blood-stained, and useless clothing of someone killed in battle. Even the wicked kings of the earth at least are buried in lavish tombs; the devil gets no remembrance at all.

14:22 **I will rise up against them.** Those have elected to follow Lucifer in this life will ultimately be judged of the Lord for their deeds and will never “possess the land” (14:21). Instead, their land will be barren and bitter, swept clean as with a broom (14:23).

14:24 **as I have thought, so shall it come to pass.** The Lord’s plans happen exactly as he decides; unlike other gods of the age, he is not surprised by events.

14:25 **break the Assyrian.** The focus shifts for just one verse from Babylon to Assyria, who will symbolically suffer a similar fate at God’s hand.

14:26 **upon all the nations.** YHWH is the God of all nations, of the whole earth, not just the nation of Israel. This verse prepares us for the judgments of the chapters that follow on the various nations.

14:27 **his hand is stretched out.** As in previous chapters (5:25; 9:12, 17, 21; 10:4), the Lord's hand is

stretched out in judgment on all the nations and no one can reverse his judgment.

PHILISTIA (14:28-32)

14:28 **the year that king Ahaz died.** About 716 B.C.; scholars disagree on the exact timing of his reign, so it could have been as soon as 725 B.C.

14:29 **Palestina.** Here and in verse 31, the Hebrew is *pělešet*, which would normally be translated Philistia or the Philistines, the Sea People who inhabited the southern coastline of Israel though the years of the monarchy.

14:29 **the rod of him that smote thee is broken.** There were two occasions in Isaiah's day when the Philistines managed to break loose of Assyrian rule for a time (after the death of Tiglath-pileser in 727 B.C. and when Sargon died in 705 B.C.), only to be subjugated and defeated later. Either of those incidents could be referred to here.

14:30 **he shall slay thy remnant.** After the time of the Assyrians, the Philistines disappeared from history as a unique people.

MOAB (15:1 – 16:14)

15:1 **The burden of Moab.** The lands of Moab were east of the Dead Sea. Historically, they were generally enemies of Israel. Like other local kingdoms, they were generally subject to Assyria during Isaiah's lifetime but experienced periods of independence at the death of certain kings and during the rebellion of Ashdod I 713 B.C.

15:2 **to Bajith, and to Dibon.** Several verses in this chapter refer to cities or landmarks in the land of Edom. The listing includes cities in the north and the south, indicating the destruction will cover the entire land.

15:5 **My heart shall cry out for Moab.** Though Isaiah lifted up his voice against them, seeing their pending destruction in vision brings him grief and pain.

15:5 **flee unto Zoar.** Zoar was in the far south of the lands of Moab, at the southern end of the Dead Sea. The Assyrians attacked from the north, forcing the refugees to move as far south as they could.

15:7 **shall they carry away.** Moab was a prosperous trading country. The Lord is saying that they will have to leave behind their wealth and can only take what they can carry with them as they flee the advancing army.

15:8 **Eglaim...Beer-elim.** Cities on the northern and southern borders of Moab, signifying that the entire land will be in mourning.

MOAB SEEKS REFUGE IN JUDAH (16:1-5)

16:1 **Send ye the lamb to the ruler.** This refers to an offering or gift from the king of Edom ("from Sela") to Judah ("the mount of the daughter of Zion").

16:2 **as a wandering bird cast out of the nest.** Or, "Like fluttering birds pushed from the nest" (NIV). The Moabites are forced from their homes and looking for a place of refuge ("Let mine outcasts dwell with thee," verse 4), calling upon Judah for help after many hundreds of years of animosity.

16:5 **in mercy shall the throne be established.** Moab appeals to Judah by extolling their virtues if they were to help.

LAMENT FOR MOAB (16:6-14)

16:6 **We have heard of the pride of Moab.** Judah begins the reply by first citing the historical interactions between Judah and Moab, stating that in the past, Moab has shown only pride toward Judah.

16:7 **Kir-hareseth.** Modern day Kerak; Kir-hareseth was the location of great wine making, so the references to fields, vine, plants, branches, and water fit in that context.

16:8 **the fields of Heshbon languish**. Judah bemoans the fate of Moab, with its fields destroyed, its crops decimated its harvest wasted.

16:10 **gladness is taken away**. As a result of their destruction, Moab has no gladness in the harvest, no

singing with the treading of grapes, no shouting for joy.

16:14 **the glory of Moab shall be contemned**. Or, "the glory of Moab will be humbled" (NJB).

SYRIA/ARAM AND ISRAEL (17)

JUDGMENT AGAINST DAMASCUS AND ISRAEL (17:1-11)

Because Aram and Israel allied against Judah, they are combined in their oracle. Verses 1-3 show this clearly, by first referring to Damascus, then Aroer and Ephraim, then back to Damascus, forming an a-b-b-a pattern.

17:1 **Damascus**. The capital city of the kingdom of Syria/Aram.

17:2 **cities of Aroer**. Probably referring to an area in the land of Gad (see Numbers 32:34).

17:3 **Ephraim**. This chapter deals with both Syria and Israel together, Ephraim being the dominant tribe of the northern kingdom of Israel. Because of that content, it can be dated to about the same time as chapters 7-8.

17:4 **in that day**. This phrase is used here, in v. 7 and again in v. 9, giving three separate pronouncements of judgment on Aram and Israel. This first one refers to a lack of food that is harvested, leaving only thin gleanings, making Jacob lean. It is also like an empty grain fields after the harvest with little left (v. 5) and an olive orchard where the trees have already been shaken to get the harvest, with only a few remaining. In other words, Israel and Aram will not have much left after Assyria and the Lord get through with them.

17:4 **the glory of Jacob**. Verse 3 already said that the glory of Damascus would be "as the glory of the children of Israel." Now this verse tells us that their glory will be "made thin," meaning "nothing but a fraud" (Oswalt, 1:350).

17:5 **as when the harvestman gathereth the corn**. The destruction of Israel and Syria will be like when someone goes through the field with a sickle, harvesting wheat (the KJV often translated "wheat" as 'corn'), cutting down the stalks and collecting the good grain, leaving a mowed down field behind. It is

also compared to the grape harvest or the olive harvest where very little is left on the vine or tree after the work.

17:7 **a man look to his Maker**. In the middle of this great 'harvest' and affliction, Israel and Syria will finally turn to the God who made them and abandon their other gods, whom they have made. "Maker" would not just draw Israel's attention to the creative role of Yahweh but to the covenant that he made with them. The word "look" here is to fix the gaze upon, thus focus on what the Lord is doing.

17:8 **the groves**. The word is *ʾāšērîm*, referring to the many statues of the goddess Asherah, the consort of Ba'al or El.

17:10 **Because**. With this phrase, we are introduced to the reason for the destruction just described, and verses 10-11 shift to second person (being addressed to "you" or Israel). The two reasons given are that they have "forgotten the God of thy salvation" and "not been mindful of the rock of thy strength." In other words, they have neglected and forgotten about the Lord. "If God has touched my life, yet my life is not different, then I have not perceived the implications of that touch, an dit is in fact void of significance (1 Cor. 11:24-29; Gal. 3:1-5)" (Oswalt, 1:353).

17:10 **plant pleasant plants**. Isaiah compares those who have forsaken the Lord and followed other gods to someone who plants a plant (a grape vine, from the description) but then grafts it with foreign branches ("strange slips"). At first, it seems to flourish but at harvest time it's just "a heap" (verse 11) bring grief and sorrow.

FATE OF NATIONS THAT OPPRESS ISRAEL (17:12-14)

17:12 **Woe**. This is the Hebrew *hōy*, often more a greeting than a pronouncement of judgment.

17:12 **the multitude of many people.** From the context, this refers to the Assyrian army, which is made up of men from many nations and make a great noise when the move or fight.

17:13 **God shall rebuke them.** Nations might rush like mighty waters to oppress Israel (“us” in verse 14) but ultimately God will chase them away with only a word, and they will be like a sagebrush plant in the wind, rolling along helplessly.

17:13 **as the chaff of the mountains.** Threshing was often done on a hill so the wind could blow the chaff away from the wheat. The imagery here is that the coming army is not like a mighty wave but like the useless chaff blowing down during the harvest season from God’s threshing floor.

17:14 **at eveningtide trouble; and before the morning he is not.** This clearly refers to the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem in 701 B.C. which was resolved by the power of the Lord literally overnight (see 37:36-37).

BEYOND ETHIOPIA (18)

Textually, chapter 18 is closely tied to 17:12-14, which speak of the destruction that Assyria nearly brings to Judah but which is averted by the hand of the Lord overnight. The image of the ambassadors coming from Cush with an important message may well be based in the reality of 715-712 B.C., when the Nubians from Cush conquered Egypt and called on other nations to join them in defeating Assyria. However, the prophet takes their image well beyond his own day into a more eschatological experience.

Elder Joseph Fielding Smith (later President) said that this chapter was “a reference to the sending forth of missionaries to the nations of the earth to gather again this people who are scattered and peeled. The ensign has been lifted upon the mountains, and the work of gathering has been going on for over one hundred years. No one understands this chapter, but the Latter-day Saints, and we can see how it is being fulfilled” (Parry, *Understanding*, 171).

18:1 **Woe.** This ties 17:12-14 and 18:1-7 together as both begin with the greeting *hōy*.

18:1 **the land shadowing with wings.** Both Hyrum Smith and Joseph Fielding Smith said this is a reference to North and South America (Parry, *Understanding*, 172). The “shadowing” word is more the sound of the wings than a shadow, and is often translated “whirring” (NASB, NIV, RSV, NJB) or “buzzing” (NAB, JPS).

18:1 **beyond the rivers of Ethiopia.** The Hebrew word is ‘Cush’ which represents a land at the edge of their known world. It was the land at the upper (south) end of the Nile.

18:2 **That sendeth ambassadors.** Missionaries from the Church go out all over the earth. The imagery is that of messengers going all over the world, following the commission in verses 2-3, with the message to pay attention and act (see and hear) when the ensign is lifted up on the mountains (compare 11:10).

18:4 **I will take my rest.** “The Lord watches, unobserved...remaining *quiet*,” but he “is more than a watcher; he presides over the process” (Motyer, 162). This could be a bit of a surprise to someone who expected God to do some mighty thing with the raising of the banner/ensign, but he will first watch and see who comes, who hears, who acts, then react accordingly. It gives people time to respond.

18:4 **like a clear heat . . . a cloud of dew.** The Lord carefully manages the harvest of souls, providing heat when needed or nourishing water at other times.

18:5 **afore the harvest.** The Second Coming will be a time of judgment and destruction. So before that “harvest,” the Lord will bring in the harvest and prune the grape vines, leaving the rest for the birds and wild animals to consume. Compare to 5:1-7.

The meaning of the passage also relates to the suddenness of it—men make their plans and prepare for a harvest, but the Lord steps in, conducts the harvest himself, and cuts off the unproductive branches. God is in charge.

18:7 **the place of the name of the Lord.** The “present” brought to the Lord in that day of harvest is a “people scattered and peeled” who come to place

where the name of the Lord is known, “mount Zion.”
Compare to 2:1-4.

EGYPT (19 – 20)

EGYPT’S DEVASTATION (19:1-17)

19:1 ***the Lord rideth upon a swift cloud.*** The cloud symbolizes both the Lord’s presence and his dominion over the heavens. Yahweh was in a cloud when he saved the Israelites from the Egyptian army (Exodus 14).

19:1 ***shall come into Egypt.*** The Lord doesn’t limit himself to oversight of Israel—he is the God of the whole world, even Egypt, that ancient nation that worships many other gods.

19:2 ***set the Egyptians against the Egyptians.*** This is a prophecy of civil war, spreading out first from families to neighborhoods to cities to “kingdoms” or large, geographical areas.

19:3 ***seek to the idols.*** The Egyptians will turn to their false gods and to charmers, necromancers, and those who claim to work magic, but it will not help them.

19:4 ***a cruel lord; and a fierce king.*** In the middle of this tragedy, a man will arise that will conquer the people and turn out to be a cruel and evil master. This person is unknown, if he is historical, or if in the future. But the point here is that he is successful because the Lord allows it.

19:5 ***the river shall be wasted.*** Egypt is totally dependent on the Nile River for survival. If the river dried up, the ancient economy would be in a shambles, which is reflected in verses 6-10 as people cannot fish, make clothing, or grow crops.

19:11 ***the princes of Zoan are fools.*** Zoan (often known by its Greek name, Tanis) was the Egyptian capital at the time of Isaiah. The words of the leaders will become foolish, letting everyone see their deception and destruction influence, causing Egypt to be “as a drunken man staggereth in his vomit” (19:14).

19:13 ***the princes of Noph.*** Noph, or Memphis as we know it, was the other important city (with Zoan) of Lower or northern Egypt.

19:15 ***any work.*** Because of the drought and political mismanagement, productive work will come to a grinding halt.

19:16 ***like unto women.*** Not the bold heroine often portrayed in today’s movies but the stereotypical fearful woman who is paralyzed by the events before her.

19:17 ***Judah shall be a terror unto Egypt.*** Never in the history of Israel and Egypt has this been true—until our generation. With the Six-Day War in 1967 and the Yom Kippur War in 1973, Israel’s military might humbled Egypt and brought that country to the negotiating table.

Verse 17 acts as a bridge between the first part, full of talk of destruction, and the last part of this chapter, full of talk of salvation.

EGYPT TURNS TO THE LORD (19:18-25)

Though we see this prophecy yet to be fulfilled, at least one ancient Egyptian Christian felt like it was done in his own day. Athanasius, who was instrumental in forming the early creeds, lived in Alexandria where there were many Christians, and exclaimed of these verses, “The thing is happening before our very eyes, here in Egypt, and thereby another prophecy is fulfilled, for at no other time have the Egyptians cased from their false worship save when the Lord of all...won over everybody to Himself and through Himself to the Father” (Grogan, 6:588).

19:18 ***speak the language of Canaan.*** Some in Egypt will convert to the Lord and even begin to speak the language of Israel and make similar covenants (“swear to the Lord”).

19:19 ***an altar to the Lord.*** Altars are symbols of worship, sacrifice, and covenants and are often associated with temples. Building one in Egypt is a symbol of their conversion, and the pillar marking the border indicates their commitment to the Lord.

19:20 **he shall send them a saviour.** A great 'deliverer' will rise up and lead Egypt to freedom. The identity of this future leader is not given but it will be a dramatic and fascinating time in Egypt's history. It could be Christ himself.

19:21 **the Egyptians shall know the Lord.** Isaiah predicts that the great pagan nation will know Jehovah, worship him, make covenants with him, and live the gospel. Though there were and are Christians in Egypt, they are a very small minority among the population today and certainly do not reflect this prophecy.

19:22 **he shall smite and heal it.** This sums up the chapter—the Lord will humble Egypt through their challenges and will heal them as they turn to him and accept his laws.

19:23 **a highway out of Egypt to Assyria.** Assyria and Egypt were the greatest of enemies in Isaiah's day. When Egypt is converted to the Lord, that animosity will end and the two nations will prosper through cultural and economic exchange.

19:24 **Israel be the third.** Not only will Egypt and Assyria join forces but Israel will be a third partner in the mix, all three enjoying blessings from the relationship.

19:25 **my people/work of my hands.** Egypt and Assyria are called by titles typically reserved for the house of Israel.

ISAIAH DRAMATIZES CONQUEST OF ETHIOPIA AND EGYPT (20:1-6)

Prophets are sometimes asked by the Lord to illustrate his words with personal actions. In this chapter, the Lord asked Isaiah to represent his actions against two nations (just talked about in

chapters 18-19) by walking "naked and barefoot" for three years! This sign represented their slavery and being humbled by the power of the Assyrian empire in Isaiah's day, preceding the attack on Jerusalem in 701 B.C.

20:1 **the year that Tartan came unto Ashdod.** This was 711 B.C. Tartan was the servant of Sargon and Sennacherib (2 Kings 18:17). Ashdod was a port city on the coast in Philistine territory that was destroyed at this time.

20:2 **loose the sackcloth.** Evidently, Isaiah was already wearing a goat hair garment, symbolic of mourning and sadness, though the reason is unknown. The Lord told him to take it off for three years so that he would not be seen as mourning what will happen to these two nations.

20:2 **naked and barefoot.** Removing his sackcloth garment would not make him naked as we use the term, but he would be down to a basic loincloth or something similar. Similarly, Peter in the New Testament (John 21:7) is said to be "naked" when he leaps into the water to swim to Jesus, but it merely means he took off his outer garment so he could swim in his lighter inner garment.

20:3 **a sign and wonder.** Isaiah's act was a sign to all who saw him of the truth of his words.

20:4 **So shall the king of Assyria lead away.** Assyria forced those captured in battle to march without clothing or shoes, just as Isaiah had done. Likewise, we stand 'naked' before the Lord in our sins, which are only 'covered' (one Hebrew meaning of atonement) by the sacrifice of the Savior.

20:6 **how shall we escape?** Seeing Assyria's power to conquer even mighty Egypt, the Israelites will wonder how they themselves could ever escape the same fate.

BABYLON AGAIN (21:1-10)

Chapters 21-23 are transitional chapters, coming back to the themes in the previous one of judgment on the nations but also moving to the apocalyptic tone of chapters 24-27 which are often called Isaiah's apocalypse. These chapters are painful for Isaiah to see and write (21:3-4).

21:1 **the desert of the sea.** An interesting image for Babylon, which is in the desert but sat astride the Euphrates River which often flooded, filling the plain with water. However, Jewish commentators note that the word translated "sea" also means 'west,' which could point to the location of Babylon relative to its conquerors.

21:2 **A grievous vision.** Isaiah felt particular pain about this vision. It filled him with anguish and pain and made him bow down in dismay (21:3). It made him fear and hurt his heart (21:4). Compare 15:5; 16:9, 11.

21:2 **the treacherous dealer dealeth treacherously, and the spoiler spoileth.** Or, “the plunderer plunders, and the destroyer destroys” (RSV).

21:2 **Elam . . . Media.** Babylon was destroyed by the Medes and Persians under the leadership of Cyrus in 538 B.C., almost 200 years after Isaiah gave this prophecy. “Isaiah . . . presents here a simple war cry uttered by a military leader (or perhaps one of the warriors)” (Parry, *Understanding*, 189).

21:5 **watch in the watchtower.** Better translated, “spread out the rugs” (NAB), where the people of Babylon sat to eat and drink, unaware of the danger that is coming.

21:6 **Go, set a watchman, let him declare.** Isaiah is a silent observer of the coming destruction, watching from the tower of his calling as prophet even as the city did not watch but enjoyed themselves.

21:8 **And he cried, A lion.** Better, ‘he cried out like a lion [roaring]’; the prophet on the watchtower cried loudly in warning but no one listened.

21:9 **Babylon is fallen, is fallen.** The news comes from the conquering army, their work done and heading home. John uses Isaiah’s language in Revelation 14.

21:10 **O my threshing.** Isaiah spoke to Israel who will one day be scattered by this Babylon, letting them know that as they were threshed by Babylon, so will Babylon be threshed by others because the Lord has said it.

EDOM AND ARABIA (21:11-17)

TALKING WITH MAN OF EDOM (21:11-12)

21:11 **Dumah.** Dumah lies between Israel and Babylon in the northern Arabian Peninsula.

21:11 **out of Seir.** Another name for Edom. Isaiah had a conversation with an unnamed man from Edom who asked him, ‘What is left of the night?’ or ‘How long until dawn?’

21:12 **The morning cometh.** Isaiah the watchman replied that morning was coming but it would be again followed by night, and told the man to ask again later if he wanted to know more. Likewise, we can be in a time of apostasy and watch for the morning light of gospel truth, but later it will slip into apostasy again. Only when we keep asking will we receive the comfort of the Lord.

JUDGMENT AGAINST ARABIA (21:13-17)

21:13 **Arabia.** Though the prophecy is directed to Arabia, that is not a people but a territory inhabited by many different tribes, so three sites/groups are mentioned: Dedan, Tema, and Kedar. Dedan and

Tema were cities in the northern part of the Arabian Peninsula; both benefitted from being part of the Frankincense Trail. Kedar was a nomadic tribe of people that lived in the same area.

These verses could well be tied to the Assyrian campaign against northern Arabian tribes in 715 B.C.

21:13 **the forest in Arabia.** There are few forests there now but northern Arabia perhaps had many more trees in ancient times, as did much of the Middle East. It makes a good place to hide from the armies who would attack them. An alternative translation is “thickets” (NASB, NIV), describing a more bush-like covering.

21:14 **prevented with their bread.** Better, ‘they met with bread those that fled,’ meaning that the kind people of Tema gave food and drink to those fleeing the destruction of the attacking army.

21:16 **Within a year.** The tribe of Kedar was prosperous because of their trade and control of the caravan routes. But the attacking army will overrun them in less than a year.

JERUSALEM (22)

Chapter 22 reminds Israel that the promised judgments on these nations just discussed also hangs over them, and reminds them how to correctly respond when the Lord spares them, as he did with Jerusalem and the Assyrian attack (discussed in chapters 36-37). But Isaiah is sad because he knows prophetically that the victory over the Assyrians in 701 B.C. (Isaiah 36-37) is short-lived and that the city will be destroyed by the Babylonians, which occurred in 586 B.C.

In the second half of the chapter, Shebna (22:15-19) is offered as an example what *not* to do—stealing from others to enrich and make himself famous with an elaborate tomb. How we act in times of tragedy as well as in times of triumph says much about who we really are. The best reaction to both is the same—humility and gratitude and a willingness to acknowledge that all things in our lives—good or bad—come from the Lord.

JUDGMENT AGAINST THE VALLEY OF VISION (22:1-14)

22:1 **the valley of vision.** This phrase is only used here in this chapter in all of scripture, but it's clear from the context that it is Jerusalem, the place where prophets have visions and teach them to the people.

22:1 **gone up to the housetops.** In many cities, pagan gods were worshipped on rooftops. Perhaps that was Jerusalem's condemnation here, which matches the next verses. An alternative is the people going up on their roofs to see the destroyed Assyrian army in 701 B.C., when the Lord struck them down overnight.

22:2 **a joyous city.** Not joyful in a positive way but boisterous and raucous, full of revelry. It is a reflection of the evil in the town. Again, if this is tied to the 701 B.C. activity, then they may be celebrating the victory over the Assyrian army, but loudly and without any humility.

22:3 **they are bound by the archers.** They were captured without a single bowman being used.

22:4 **I will weep bitterly.** Isaiah was overcome with grief at the vision of what will happen to Jerusalem,

in spite of a temporary deliverance. He doesn't want anyone to see him or try to comfort him.

22:5 **a day of trouble.** The destruction of Jerusalem is a day of panic and confusion as the army breaks down the walls and tramples through the city.

The three phrases here have a great assonance: trouble (*mēhûmāh*), treading down (*mēbûsāh*), and perplexity (*mēbûkāh*).

22:6 **bare the quiver . . . uncovered the shield.** The mercenaries of Babylon are armed and ready to attack the city.

22:8 **the house of the forest.** This was part of the royal palace (1 Kings 7:2-5; 10:17-21) that was used as an armory. The inhabitants of the city look to that building for their defense, ignoring the building right next to it—the temple of the Lord, and the covering/defense the Lord had promised to them if faithful.

22:9 **the breaches of the city.** As they are being attacked, the people see the walls being breached. They gathered water at the pool at the south end of the city to help in their defensive efforts. This could have reference to Hezekiah's tunnel that brought water into the city walls.

22:10 **houses have ye broken down to fortify the wall.** Lacking any other building material because of the siege, the Jerusalemites tore down their own houses to try and hold off the attacking army as they punched holes in the walls. It is a frantic scene, one of great fear and drama.

22:11 **Ye made also a ditch.** The word translated "ditch" is *miqvāh*, a reservoir used to store water or to perform ritual cleansing. But in all this effort to preserve the city and the people, they did not look to the God who gave them the city in the first place.

22:12 **did the Lord God of hosts call to weeping.** The Lord's call to the people is to repent and come to him sorrowing for their sins.

22:13 **behold joy and gladness.** Instead of humble and contrite people, however, they ignore him and

spend their time eating, drinking, and enjoying themselves.

22:13 **let us eat and drink, for to morrow we die.** Both Paul (1 Corinthians 15:32) and Nephi (2 Nephi 28:7-8) used this phrase in their own writings.

22:14 **this iniquity shall not be purged from you till you die.** “Surely this iniquity shall not be forgiven you until you die” (NASB).

SHEBNA AND ELIAKIM (22:15-25)

22:15 **Shebna, which is over the house.** Shebna was a steward in the king’s house, a government official of some importance. His name means ‘vigor’ and was probably a shortened version of his full name, Shebnayahu, ‘vigor of the Lord,’ though as Isaiah portrays him, he is anything but committed to the Lord, which could be why Isaiah only used the first part of his name.

22:16 **hewed thee out a sepulcher.** A tomb was found in the Kidron valley dated to Isaiah’s time that had an inscription: “This is [the tomb of Shbn]yhu, who is over the house. No silver or gold is here, but rather [his bones] and the bones of his servant-woman with him. May the one who opens this be accursed” (Walton, 4:94).

22:17 **will surely cover thee.** Or, “He shall grip you firmly (NAB). Shebna thinks he is in control but instead Yahweh will sieze him and take charge.

22:19 **I will drive thee from thy station.** Shebna would be replaced by another. Shebna is a type of the wicked among Israel and what will happen to them.

22:20 **Eliakim the son of Hilkiah.** Eliakim’s name means ‘God raises,’ an appropriate name for Shebna’s replacement. He was a priest and a good man and is thus a type of Christ who will come and replace the wicked leadership of Israel in the future.

22:21 **clothe him with thy robe.** Eliakim would get Shebna’s authority.

22:22 **the key of the house of David.** Keys represent authority; in this case the key opens the door to the house of David, which could either be the palace or the temple.

22:23 **as a nail in a sure place.** This language, familiar to Latter-day Saints in another context, represents the person being fixed and immovable in the position granted him.

22:24 **hang upon him.** Using the metaphor, many things ‘hang’ on this sure nail—glory, posterity, and the vessels of the temple. Likewise, as Jesus hung on the cross fixed by nails, everything depended on his act.

22:25 **be removed, and be cut down, and fall.** Speaking of Eliakim, this would mean that even his sure position would end because of the sins of the house of Judah. Speaking prophetically of Christ, it is a prophecy of his crucifixion and the fulfillment of his atoning sacrifice.

TYRE (23)

Chapter 23 concludes with an oracle about Tyre and Sidon—the Phoenician kingdom. Tyre was the benchmark for prestige in Isaiah’s day, a center of trade and wealth. Ezekiel 28 describes its fall more than 100 years after Isaiah. Tyre is a good final nation on which to focus because perhaps more than any other; its fall because of sin demonstrates that “The Lord of hosts hath purposed it, to stain the pride of all glory, and to bring into contempt all the honourable of the earth” (23:9).

Tyre was attacked three times in the 700s by Assyria, the final time in 701 B.C., after which for about 70 years, Assyria did not allow them to regain any

economic strength. Only after the decline of Assyria in 630 B.C. did the Phoenician city-states begin to have some success again.

THE SONG OF DESTRUCTION (23:1-14)

23:1 **Tyre.** Tyre was a prosperous city of the Phoenician nation because of their position on the coastal area, which allowed for maritime trade and commerce. They also had great natural resources that could be used and sold. Thus they represent materialism and worldly possessions, a fitting symbol for the final ‘lifting up’ (“burden”).

23:1 **Howl, ye ships of Tarshish.** Because Tyre would be destroyed, her trading partners would howl and weep.

23:1 **Chittim.** The island of Cyprus, founded by the inhabitants of Tyre.

23:4 **Zidon.** The partner city of Tyre was Sidon, both prosperous ports on the Phoenician coast.

23:5 **As at the report concerning Egypt.** Egypt, another trading partner, will also feel great pain with Tyre and Sidon's destruction.

23:9 **The Lord of hosts hath purposed it.** Though the world will wonder at Tyre's destruction, it was done by the will of the Lord "to bring into contempt all the honourable of the earth."

TYRE RESTORED (23:15-18)

23:15 **sing as an harlot.** Not comparing the city to a prostitute except in calling out; after the seventy years of exile, they will get the attention of the rulers and her former trading partners as a harlot stands in the street with a musical instrument and sings to bring attention to herself.

23:17 **the Lord will visit Tyre.** Tyre will rise up because of the Lord's blessings.

23:17 **shall commit fornication.** At first, they will deal with things not approved by the Lord.

23:18 **shall be holiness to the Lord.** After a time, Tyre's wealth will be used for good, to bless the righteous and see to their needs. This may have happened in the days of Josiah, king of Judah (740-708 B.C.) when he purged the kingdom of idol worship and rebuilt the temple and the city (2 Kings 23; 2 Chronicles 34).

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JPS – Jewish Publication Society (also called Tanakh)

JST – Joseph Smith Translation

KJV – King James Version

LXX – Septuagint (Greek Old Testament)

MT – Masoretic Text (Hebrew)

NAB – New American Bible

NASB – New American Standard Bible

NIV – New International Version

NJB – New Jerusalem Bible

NLT – New Living Translation

RSV – Revised Standard Version

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