

ISAIAH'S PROPHECIES CONCERNING NATIONS SURROUNDING ISRAEL

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No doubt many of us continue to be amazed at the volume of detailed and specific prophecies found in the inspired word of God. Many have wondered at the fulfilment, or part fulfilment, of some of these prophecies in the past and given glory to God. Prophecies relating to Israel have often rightly been brought to our attention but there are also prophecies that concern many of the nations that surround Israel. Chapters 13 to 23 of Isaiah contain ten "burdens" describing judgments arising out of local circumstances which continue to the end of the age. Similar burdens are also found in Jeremiah 46-51, Ezekiel 25 -32 and Amos 1 and 2

The first chapters of Isaiah outline judgments to be enacted upon Israel – judgment must begin with the house of God! However, Jerusalem was included in these ten burdens because she had become like the nations surrounding her. The first burden concerns Babylon which hardly existed when Isaiah wrote in approximately 738 BC but it describes its overthrow in 538 B.C. by the Medes – 175 years later. The destruction of Babylon by the Medes is a picture of future Babylon's destruction in the end times. Verses 2-11 of chapter 13 speak of the armies – "my sanctified, mighty ones" informing us that they have been appointed by God to mete out judgment. God is in supreme control of national and international affairs. We are informed in verse 20 that Babylon will "never be inhabited" but the book of Revelation describes the overthrow of Babylon in considerable detail at the end of the age. This would indicate that Babylon must figuratively or literally re-appear in the future. Chapter 13 views Babylon's destruction as a near event while chapter 14 indicates its demise as a distant event connected to the restoration of Israel. The reasons for this are that (i) verse 2 states "they shall take them captives, whose captives they were; and they shall rule over their oppressors" which cannot describe Israel's return from exile at the time of Ezra & Nehemiah (ii) it is very unlikely that Israel's millennial joy flows from Babylon's destruction 2,500 years earlier (iii) the whole earth is at rest which implies the subjugation of the final foe and (iv) verse 26 states that the whole earth is dealt with by the Lord.

Verses 28 -32 of chapter 14 outline the burden of Palestina (Philistia according to JND). It was written in the year of king Ahaz's death who had employed the Assyrians to help him defeat the Philistines. "The rod of him that smote thee" in verse 29 appears to be King Ahaz and he is warning the Philistines not to rejoice as they will be defeated again by Judah. "Out of the serpent's root" is predicting that from Uzziah will come Hezekiah who smote the Philistines unto Gaza (2 Kings 18. 8). The "root" of Philistia will be destroyed from the north (possibly the king of the north Daniel 11 verses 40-42).

The third burden concerns Moab and is described in chapters 15 & 16. The Moabites were idolatrous, complacent and scornful (Jeremiah 48 verses 11-17 and proud (Jeremiah 16 v 6). The Moabites will flee southwards unto Zoar before a northern invader, verse 5 this will happen within 3 years from the time of writing, according to verse 14. Jeremiah 48 v 47 predicts that Moab will be captive in the latter days but not destroyed like Babylon.

Chapter 17 concerns the burden of Damascus but includes the destruction of Israel because they allied themselves with Syria – described in Isaiah chapters 7 & 8. It resulted in great loss of life in Judah (2 Chronicles 28 v5). Considering the events of the last few years it is interesting to read of Damascus as a "ruinous heap" (2 Kings 16 v9 relates how Assyria attacked Damascus.) This episode illustrates for us how alliances with the world will weaken us – the strength of God's people is due to separation from the world. Desolation will result as happened when the ten northern tribes were deported by Assyria. Verses 12 to 14 prophesy how the nations will rush against Israel "but God will rebuke them and they shall flee far off" this agrees with Zechariah 14 v 2– "I will gather all nations against Israel to battle".

It is difficult to be certain which country is referred to in Chapter 18 verse 1 “the land shadowing with wings beyond the rivers of Ethiopia”. Chapter 18 is regarded as God’s judgment of Egypt and Ethiopia warning Israel not to trust in Egypt for deliverance from Assyria. The statement “I will take my rest” in verse 4 indicates how God will wait His time until the harvest of judgment. This prophecy spans the centuries – the past Assyrian invasion anticipates the future one by Assyria who will be defeated. Chapter 19 describes how Egypt shall be afraid and fear because of the shaking of the hand of the Lord. The Lord uses Assyria to ruin Egypt. “In that day shall there be an altar to the lord in the midst of the land of Egypt and a pillar at the border” verse 19 “They cry to the Lord and He sends them a saviour, and a great one, and he shall deliver them” verse 20. There will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria through Israel – the three countries being prominent in that future day and the Lord saying “Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance” verse 25.

Chapter 20 describes the past conquest of Egypt by Assyria – it gives assurance that the future events of chapter 19 will be fulfilled. Isaiah was instructed to walk barefoot and naked to warn Judah not to rely on Egypt to save them from Assyria.

Chapter 21 refers to “the burden of the desert of the sea” - verse 9 and Jeremiah 51 verse 36 and 42 help us to realise this is again Babylon. Elam and Media, now part of Iran, are warned of their future conquest. The sighing which ceases in verse 2 refers to the Jewish relief when Cyrus issued his decree in 536 BC. Isaiah was upset when Babylon fell which helps us to appreciate the correct attitude when our enemies are judged. Belshazzar’s feast is alluded to in verse 5 while verse 9 is similar to Revelation 18 verse 2 – “Babylon is fallen, is fallen”.

Only two verses, 11 & 12, speak of Dumah (Edom) it is a question “Watchman, what of the night?” The reply seems to indicate that morning would come only after hours of darkness – it is necessary to turn to God in repentance. Isaiah 63 verse 1 tells of a glorious victor that comes from Edom while Obadiah verse 21 states that “saviours shall come up on mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau”.

Arabia was facing invasion – described in verses 13 -17 – “the mighty men of the children of Kedar shall be diminished”. However, Isaiah 42 v11 describes the inhabitants of Kedar singing and giving glory to the Lord in a future day.

Although chapter 22 describes the “burden of the valley of vision”, verses 9 and 10 indicate that it is speaking of the city of David and Jerusalem respectively. The first section refers to the sacking of Jerusalem by the Assyrians one hundred years later when Hezekiah was king as well as the final overthrow in the end times.

Tyre was the principal seaport on the Mediterranean coast but there was howling on the ships because they could not enter the port because Tyre was being besieged. Tyre would speak to us of the commercial world where men enrich themselves. Those that trade with Tyre are aghast as its demise as it affects them financially. (We have seen recently during the stock market crash that the whole world is affected by problems surfacing in one area.) Tyre will be destroyed by divine intervention because of her pride – this illustrates the transient nature of man’s achievements and glory 1 Peter 1 v 24-25 Detailed accounts are given in Ezekiel 26 and 27– many nations attack Tyre – Assyrians, Chaldeans, Persians & Greeks. Verse 13 seems to predict Nebuchadnezzar’s attack when he besieged only the mainland – it was left to Alexander the Great to capture the islands.

These chapters would indicate that God is a “great king over all the earth” Psalm 47 v 2 The nations are responsible to God as Nebuchadnezzar discovered and can rise or fall depending on how they treat God’s people (Genesis 12 v 3). Prophecy has been completely and partially fulfilled many times to encourage us to trust in God’s inspired Word for today and the future. Whatever we see around us

we can be assured that His purposes will be brought to fruition and that the forces of evil will be constrained.

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