

BEHOLD MY SERVANT
A MESSIANIC STUDY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT BOOK OF ISAIAH
CHAPTERS 13 to 23

- D. **The Nations Judged:** Chapters 13-23
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Isaiah 13:1 to 23:18 is the first major part of the greater section chapters 13 to 35 which Thomas Constable has entitled "God's Sovereignty Over the Nations". (Thomas Constable, *Isaiah*, page 76). Within chapters 13:1 to 23:18 are ten passages beginning with the words "the oracle" or "this oracle". The Hebrew word for oracle is *massa* which has the meaning of a message that is a weight or burden to be proclaimed. It is a message from the Lord containing His judgment or will on its recipients. The ten occurrences of "oracle" in this section are: 13:1; 14:28; 15:1; 17:1; 19:1; 21:1, 11, 13; 22:1 and 23:1. Each of these oracle references begin a separate message or burden from God proclaimed by the prophet Isaiah to a specific nation or people. As these proclamations announce destruction to the nations they also contain promises of hope for the Jewish people. Comments on these promises of hope will be stated as they occur within this section. Similar oracles are recorded in Jeremiah chapters 46 to 51; Ezekiel chapters 25 to 32 and Amos chapters 1 to 2. For other oracle messages see Nahum 1:1; Zechariah 9:1; 12:1; and Malachi 1:1.

Another significant part of these chapters is the repetitive declarations, "the day of the Lord" and "in that day". These are announcements of God's judgment on specific nations resulting in their doom and destruction. Each of these specifically named nations would receive their own "day of the Lord" judgment. Some of these "day of the Lord" prophecies of doom have a near future historical fulfillment while others have an end times or latter day emphasis in which the entire world will be judged and have its punishment declared. Each "day of the Lord" passage will be studied in its context to determine its time of fulfillment. The day of the Lord declarations in this section are stated in: 13:6, 9, 13; 19:16, 18, 19, 21; 22:5, 12, and 25.

The reasons for God's declaration of judgment on these nations can basically be stated as *first*, their evil and cruel treatment of the Jewish people; *second*, their pride and arrogance in placing their trust in their own power rather than in the Lord; and *third*, their worship of idols. These chapters stand as an indictment on any nation that would seek to destroy the Jewish people for their own evil reasons and for any nation that rejects the "*Holy One of Israel*" as being the only true God. Even though nations such as, Assyria and Babylon, were used by God to bring judgment on the Israel and Judah, they did not escape God's judgment on themselves for the reasons stated above. Included in these oracles to the nations in chapters 13-23 are indictments against Israel (Ephraim), 17:3-14 and Jerusalem (Valley of Vision) 22:1-25.

David L. Cooper provides this introduction to this section of Isaiah:

"Isaiah, like the other prophets, looking beyond the borders of Israel, was given a vision of the future that awaited surrounding nations. He looked as far east as Babylon and foretold its complete destruction in "the day of Jehovah," which is the Tribulation. In chapters 13 and 14 is a marvelous prediction of the final overthrow of this ancient enemy of God in the plains of Shinar. These two chapters should be studied, especially in connection with Jeremiah 50 and 51 and Revelation 18, all of which refer to the literal Babylon of the Tribulation. Babylon was never overthrown as was foretold by Isaiah and Jeremiah. Since those predictions have never been fulfilled, we may be certain that the Lord will make good His threat and will accomplish His purposes as set forth in these oracles. In chapters 15 and 16 an oracle relating to Moab, one of the enemies of Israel, is found. Chapter 17 contains a marvelous prediction concerning Damascus, and in 18 appears an oracle against Ethiopia. (This chapter has been misunderstood as referring to the United States, but, when the facts are examined, no evidence is found for such an identification.) In chapter 19 is an oracle concerning Egypt which has been fulfilled, up to vs. 15 at least; but the message concerning the altar to Jehovah and the pillar mentioned in vs. 19 has never been fulfilled. (This verse has been interpreted as referring to the pyramid. Such a position is untenable because the pyramid was hoary with age in Isaiah's day, whereas the altar and the pillar were future from his point of view. It is, therefore, erroneous to interpret this prophecy as referring to the great pyramid. In chapter 20 appears an oracle concerning Egypt and Ethiopia. Several short oracles are found in chapter 21. Another one relating to Jerusalem especially appears in chapter 22, whereas the next one, in chapter 23, relates to Tyre, which was at that time the mart of the world." (D. L. Cooper, *Commentary on Isaiah*: Introduction, Biblical Research Studies Group, undated).

See also Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah*, Vol. 1 pages 286-295; J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah*, pages 110-112 and Thomas Constable, *Isaiah*, pages 76-79 for an extensive introduction on this section of judgment oracles (or burdens) on the nations and how they relate to the overall message of Isaiah. Thomas Constable (page 77), presents a chart adapted from J. Alec Motyer which diagrams the structure of the greater section of chapters 13-27. This chart is presented below:

<p>Babylon (13:1-14:27) Political Overthrow</p>	<p>The desert by the sea (Babylon) (21:1-10) Religious Overthrow</p>	<p>The city of emptiness (24:1-20) Broken laws and gates</p>
<p>Philistia (14:28-32) A Davidic king will yet reign in Zion</p>	<p>Silence (Edom) (21:11-12) Indefinite continuance of things as they are</p>	<p>Zion's King (24:21-23) "After many days"</p>
<p>Moab (chs. 15-16) Moab in need, but through pride suffers destruction in spite of shelter in Zion</p>	<p>Evening (Arabia) (21:13-17) Desert tribes in need: no ultimate refuge in mutual security</p>	<p>The great banquet (ch. 25) All nations feasted in Zion save Moab, excluded by pride</p>
<p>Damascus/Ephraim (chs. 17-18) Strong cities forsaken: the forgotten rock</p>	<p>The Valley of Vision (Jerusalem) (ch. 22) The city torn down</p>	<p>The city of God (ch. 26) The strong city; the everlasting rock</p>
<p>Egypt (chs. 19-20) Co-equal membership: Egypt, Assyria and Israel</p>	<p>Tyre (ch. 23) Holiness to the Lord</p>	<p>The final gathering (ch. 27) The harvest from Egypt and Assyria</p>

Thomas constable comments on this chart:

"Note that each of the first two columns of oracles (chs. 13—23) begins with Babylon, and the fourth section of each of these columns deals with Israel, which the peoples of the world surround in the literary structure of the passage. In the first column: Babylon is to Israel's north, Philistia to the west, Moab to the east, and Egypt to the south. In the second column: Babylon is to the north, Edom to the south, Arabia to the east, and Tyre to the west. Thus the selection of these nations in the literary structure of the passage suggests that Israel occupies the central place in God's plans, and the surrounding nations are vulnerable.

"The oracles probably had a twofold purpose. For those leaders who insisted on getting embroiled in international politics, these oracles were a reminder that Judah need not fear foreign nations or seek international alliances for security reasons. For the righteous remnant within the nation, these oracles were a reminder that Israel's God was indeed the sovereign ruler of the earth, worthy of his people's trust."¹⁸³ (Note 183: The NET Bible note on 13:1) (Thomas Constable, *Isaiah*, page 77).

See also the chart by John MacArthur: God's judgment on the Nations, John MacArthur, NASB, page 956.

1. Judgment against Babylon: 13:1 – 14:23

At the time of Isaiah's pronouncement of judgment against Babylon, it had not yet risen to its full power and prominence and had not yet invaded Judah. This invasion would occur about a century later and thus these words of Isaiah are a remarkable statement of God's omniscience.

Isaiah most certainly would have known about the city of Babylon on the Euphrates River and its rebellious movements against the power and geographical dominance of the Assyrian empire. Isaiah, by his own understanding, however may not have predicted that Babylon would eventually overtake the mighty realm of Assyria. As with the prophecies Isaiah was given regarding the Messiah, these judgments on a nation that had not yet risen to dominant power, can only be attributable to an all-knowing God with whom the world must acknowledge and worship. Another very significant truth to remember when studying these passages is that it was and it remains the divine prerogative of God to raise up or to bring down nations and leaders for His own purposes to accomplish His will on earth. No nations, no peoples nor individuals, stand on their own strength and ability. They exist solely for God's greater glory and to fulfill His plans for His creation. God is completely and victoriously sovereign over the works of His hands.

The most important lesson coming from Isaiah's prophecy regarding Babylon is that Judah and specifically its king, Hezekiah, must not turn away from God while in dread of the assault by Assyria on their nation. They must not look to rebellious Babylon for their safety as is implied by the reception that king Hezekiah gave to the visitors (ambassadors) from Babylon; Isaiah chapter 39. Trusting in Babylon will lead to the exile of some of the king's descendants to Babylon and the looting of all the treasures of the king's house by the Babylonians. (Isaiah 39:5-7). The Lord gave Isaiah the oracle of the judgment on Babylon prior to the events described in Isaiah 39 as a warning not to invite the aid of the Babylonians in Judah's helpless plight before the seemingly unstoppable advance of the Assyrians. In Isaiah's account, Hezekiah turned to the Lord in faith and prayer, Isaiah 37:1-4. Hezekiah, who at times exhibited selfish motives later in his life, was one of the few kings of Judah who devoted himself to the Lord. The Scriptures point to him as one who: "*did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that David his forefather had done.*" 2 Chronicles 29:2. Refer to 2 Chronicles 29-32 and 2 Kings 18-29 for a short history of the life of Hezekiah. Isaiah chapters 36-39 add to the Biblical biography of this renowned king.

David L. Cooper provides this assessment of chapters 13-14:

WHEN we investigate Isaiah, chapters 13 and 14, we see that the prophet was speaking of "the day of Jehovah" which is the Tribulation--the last week of Daniel's prophecy, chapter 9--a period of seven years during which God will be pouring out His wrath upon the world because of its sin. That Isaiah was speaking of the Tribulation in these chapters is evident when we note in 13:10 that there will be great signs and wonders in the heavenly bodies and terrific judgments upon the earth. When this time arrives, God will purge the world of all wickedness and there will be very few men left. When we study this prophecy in the light of others, we see that this is what God does during the Tribulation. Moreover, additional proof that Isaiah saw the destruction of Babylon in the Tribulation is evident from the predictions that, at the time foreseen in the prophecy, Israel will be delivered once and for all (Isa. 14:1,2).

From the unanimous testimony of the prophets we know that Israel will never be delivered until the end of the Tribulation. From the facts just stated we conclude that Isaiah was speaking of the overthrow of Babylon in the end-time.

THIS passage assumes, therefore, that Babylon will be standing at the end of this age. From history we know that it was still standing in the first century, even though its glory had long since passed and it had sunk almost into oblivion as far as being a great metropolitan center was concerned. It seems quite possible that Peter was in Babylon when he wrote his first epistle (I Pet. 5:13). Just when it actually ceased as a city, history does not inform us. The modern town of Hillah is located on one corner of the site upon which Babylon formerly stood. Since Babylon is to be destroyed in the end-time and since it is not in existence at the present, it must arise from the dust of the past and assume the importance that is set forth in these predictions. When one carefully investigates Jeremiah, chapters 50 and 51, one will see that the destruction foretold there was never accomplished. Its overthrow, according to the prophet, was to be very sudden. Israel at the time is to be delivered and to enter into an everlasting covenant with God. She has never thus entered into such a covenant. From these and many other predictions of the prophets we know that this prophecy has never been fulfilled, but it awaits the future for its realization. From this fact also we know that Babylon must arise out of its grave of the past and become a dominant factor in the world at the end of this age. (D. L. Cooper, *Commentary on Isaiah*, Biblical Research Monthly-February 1944).

For the student attempting to understand the tension between what is a near prophecy and a far prophecy of Babylon, it must be kept in mind that Old Testament prophets often presented their prophetic content through the lens of a telescope rather than through the lens of an eye-glass. Within these prophetic messages of Babylon, Isaiah depicted judgment that would come at the hands of the Medes, Isaiah 13:17 and also judgment that would be for a far future eschatological day as is evident from Isaiah 13:1-16. It is critical for the student to examine the context of each verse before determining which time frame is intended. As was seen in the “virgin birth” passage of Isaiah 7:13-16, there are verses that apply to the present political situation and others that apply to the future. It is the same with the prophetic judgment passages on Babylon. To simply lump the entire judgment as pertaining to the conquest of Babylon by the Medes, as many scholars do, is not being consistent with a literal interpretation of the text. In doing so, these scholars must, for example, either allegorize Isaiah 13:1-16 or assume these verses are merely hyperbole which leads to the conclusion that God is exaggerating thus, not being honest with His people. If God exaggerates with these verses, then what other passages does He do the same and what passages can be trusted as being exactly what God intends to say?

The Final Destruction of Babylon: 13:1-16

13:1 *The oracle about Babylon, which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw.*

Isaiah begins this major section of his prophecy with the word “oracle” which has the meaning of “burden” or a “message.” Isaiah also begins this section with a third introduction (see also Isaiah 1:1 and 2:1) of himself as “Isaiah, the son of Amoz.” This must certainly mark this section as an intended separate part of the writing of Isaiah which addresses material different from that of the previous twelve chapters.

Vs. 1 also has the first reference in Isaiah to Babylon and it occurs a total of 13 times within the prophecy of Isaiah: 13:1; 13:19; 14:4; 14:22; 21:9; 39:1; 39:3; 39:6; 39:7; 43:14; 47:1; 48:14; and 48:20. Babylon (“Babel” in Greek), is a very prominent name within Scripture. Babylon as a city was founded by Nimrod who was a “mighty one on the earth” (Genesis 10:8-10). It was at Babylon on the plain of Shinar that the peoples of the earth were influenced to build a city and a tower to reach into heaven and to make a name for themselves. Genesis 11:1-9. The inference was that the peoples were dominated by pride to defy God and seek to raise themselves above His dominance over them. The intent of mankind to rebel against God is an old story, as old as Adam and Eve. People possessed by willful pride seek to throw off God’s rule and they design to rule over their own lives. The created ones seek to overthrow their Creator. The result then as now is always disastrous for them. From the very beginning Babylon was doomed for destruction. In the Genesis account God confused the language of the people, and as a result, the people were dispersed over the face of the earth. In the last days, the day of the Lord, God will finally crush the influence of Babylon and its fall will be complete and utterly without hope of resurrection. See Revelation chapters 17 and 18.

13:2 *Set up a signal flag on the bare mountain top.
Shout out to them,
wave your hand
for them to enter into the gates of the nobles.*

God calls for a “signal flag” (standard or banner) to be raised high so that the warriors God has chosen will rally to it which may be the intent of the words, “*enter into the gates of the nobles*” or this phrase may be a reference to Babylon since Isaiah mentions in vs. 1, that his oracle concerns Babylon (the future Babylon in the times of the end). The call for a standard to be lifted up, for various reasons is recorded in Isaiah 5:26; 11:12; 18:3; 49:22 and 62:10. See also Psalm 74:4. The prophet Jeremiah in his prophecy 50:1-3 declares a similar message to that of Isaiah in 13:2. In the section 13:1-16, Isaiah concerns himself with the time of the end and specifically the days of the great tribulation when Babylon will be completely overthrown, never to rise again. The description of the Lord’s fury and burning anger in this section makes the end-times interpretation the only logical choice for it fits no other historical period. Isaiah directs his prophecy to the near future application of Babylon’s fate in verses 17 and following where it is revealed that God will stir up the Medes against them.

13:3 *I have commanded my special forces;
I have called my warriors to execute my anger,
those who rejoice in my victorious exaltation.*

The warriors in the conquering army will be called God’s “*special forces*” (consecrated ones) who “*rejoice in my victorious exaltation.*” They will be inducted into His service to carry out His will to destroy the future nation of Babylon during the tribulation period. It is solely God’s prerogative to call on any of His created beings to enact His sovereign will in judgment and punishment on any other(s) of His created beings. It is also God’s inalienable right to call those He has called His consecrated ones, mighty warriors and proudly exulting ones. It may be that

the heavenly host itself may be called upon. The prophet Elisha and his servant were witnesses of such an event as described in 2 Kings 6:15-17. See also Zechariah 1:7-11. The purpose of God calling His warriors is to “execute” (carry out) His “anger” (wrath).

God’s anger, previously directed to His people, is now turned against those nations who will destroy Judah. See Isaiah 10:24-27 and Joel 3:1-2. It may be popular for those who write devotional books about God to emphasize only His love and care for the people of the world. However, to ignore His emotions of anger and wrath against all forms of wickedness and ungodliness paints an unbalanced picture of the earth’s mighty Sovereign Lord. In many passages of Isaiah, the prophet does not hold back his portrayal of God as One who decisively deals with sinfulness in displays of His righteous anger. Isaiah’s great name for God is “the Holy One of Israel” who desires all nations to worship Him in holiness and righteousness.

13:4-5 *The tumult resounds on the mountains,
like that of a great many people!
There is an uproar among the kingdoms,
like nations assembling together!
The LORD of hosts is mustering the troops for the battle.
⁵ They come from a far country,
as far as the distant horizons.
It is the LORD and the weapons of his anger,
to destroy the whole land.*

The prophet depicts this God-called army as causing such a noisy tumult on the mountains that it sounds as if kingdoms and nations are being mustered for war. God is calling these nations and kingdoms to be gathered or assembled together. This may be a reference to the great battle or campaign of Armageddon of which God will gather the armies of the world’s nations for the purposes of facing the destruction of the Lord (vs. 6). Other Scriptures depicting the gathering of the nations for a battle include Psalm 2:1-6; Ezekiel chapters 38-39; Joel 3:9-17; Revelation 16:12-16. The destruction of Babylon within the greater “day of the Lord” is prophesied in Jeremiah chapters 50 and 51 and Revelation chapter 18. For an extensive discussion on the campaign of Armageddon and its climax, the return of the Messiah, see Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah*, Chapter 14, pages 309-357.

Introduction to Isaiah 13:6-13:

In verses 6 to 16, the prophet extends the coming destruction of Babylon to the time of the “day of the Lord”. In vs. 6, this coming day of the Lord is “near”, yet in the context of these verses it is evident that this is an end times event as verses 11 and 12 make abundantly clear. The claim that the day of the Lord will be near for Babylon can be understood in many ways but three are suggested as most probable. *First*, for the city of Babylon when it was at its zenith of power and influence, it was also at its apex of pride and arrogance and this is when it was captured by the Medes in 539 B.C. under its famous leader Cyrus but the city itself was not destroyed. The city had earlier been destroyed by the Assyrians in 689 B.C. but was later rebuilt. So, the “near” day

of the Lord prophecy, could have been partially fulfilled by the armies of the Medes and the Assyrians and most likely by the Medes as is stated in vs. 17. *Second*, the reference to “near” in vs. 6 is a time-constant warning similar to the warning in the New Testament that the events accompanying the return of Jesus Christ is near as stated in Revelation 1:3. God’s retributive judgment should always be understood as near for any nation who chooses to rebel against Him and reject His rule over them.

Third, as the complete destruction of Babylon did not occur under the Medes but is promised for a far future time in Revelation chapters 17 and 18, the prophecies regarding the destruction of Babylon in chapter 13 of Isaiah can be understood as a time-compressed event with two terminus points. It began with the overthrow of the city by the Medes and it will be fully complete just prior to the return of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. With all three of these suggested fulfillments being understood as being complementary to each other, verses 1 to 16 of Isaiah chapter 13 can be seen as describing the complete destruction of Babylon and verses 17 to 22 can be seen as describing the beginnings of this destruction.

These verses (6 to 16) are a prediction of the judgment of God on the entire world that will take place in the future time of the Tribulation described in Revelation chapters 6 to 19. God states, as recorded in these verses, that this time of destruction will be upon all the earth. The removal of the light from the stars, the sun and the moon, vs. 10, are Scriptural signs that these terrifying days will have arrived. Scriptures such as Isaiah 24:23, Ezekiel 32:7-8; Joel 2:10; Joel 2:30-31; Amos 8:9; Matthew 24:29; Mark 13:24-25; Luke 21:25 and Revelation 6:12-14 all attest that these signs in the heavens will be God’s unmistakable declaration to the world that its destruction has come.

13:6 *Wail for the day of the LORD is near.
It will come as destruction from the Almighty.*

Isaiah calls this coming destruction “the day of the Lord.” For a detailed discussion on the “day of the Lord” see the notes in this study on Isaiah 2:11-12 and 4:2-6. Isaiah describes the day of the Lord as destruction from the “*Almighty*”. The Biblical use of the name Almighty: (*Shaddai*: almighty and *El Shaddai*: God Almighty) suggests that this name for God depicts His sovereign rule, power and might in ruling His creation with all authority. It also depicts God as bringing destruction on nations and individuals as punishment for their sin. Joel 1:15 for example, contains similar words of God’s coming destruction: “*Alas for the day! For the day of the LORD is near; It will come as destruction from the Almighty.*”

Revelation 16:14 and 19:15 are other examples. The importance of the name “Almighty” in Isaiah 13:6 is that the destruction decreed by God on the earth is certain and unchangeable and it will be a time of terrifying dread as the following verses attest. God makes this decree based upon the integrity and glory of His Name. He can make this decree on no other name as no other name, in heaven above or on earth below, has the absolute authority to bring to pass what is spoken beforehand by God. Isaiah employs a word play in the final phrase of vs. 6: “*destruction from the Almighty*”. It has the meaning of “the destroyer destroys.” For an extended discussion of

the “day of the Lord” see J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come; A Study in Biblical Eschatology*, Zondervan, 1958, Chapter XV, pages 229-232. Also, Victor Buksbazen explains:

“The day of the LORD is described as “a devastation from the Almighty,” a typical Isaianic alliteration, *k’shod mi-Shaddai* – a destruction from Shaddai (v. 6). In the face of God’s wrath, men are helpless, their hands tremble, their hearts palpitate. They are in pain like a woman in labor, they pale, or alternately are flushed (v. 7, 8).

The LORD’S day is a cruel visitation. It is “*dies irae et calamitatis*,” a day of wrath and calamity. The Lord will devastate the earth and destroy its sinners (v. 9).” (Victor Buksbazen, *Isaiah*, page 193).

13:7-8 *Therefore all hands will hang limp,
and every human heart will melt.*

⁸ *They will be terrified.*

*Pangs and agony will seize hold of them;
they will be in pain like a woman in labor.
They will look aghast at each other;
their faces will be aflame.*

Because of the destruction and devastation God will unleash during the coming “day of the Lord”, mankind will be unable to bear it. People of the earth will be terrified resulting in limp hands and melting hearts. They will be in great anguish and pain such as a woman in labor. That day will be so horrifying that people will look at each other in utter astonishment with faces aflame for they have not witnessed anything like it nor were they prepared for it. Even though the prophets the apostles and the Son of God have told them (as written in the Scriptures) about this day to come, the people of earth will be woefully ignorant of its coming and will be totally unfit to deal with it. Isaiah will further describe these days in chapters 24-27.

13:9 *The day of the LORD comes,
cruel, with wrath and fierce anger;
to make the land desolate,
and to destroy its sinners out of it.*

This “day of the LORD” is explained as being *first*, “*cruel, with wrath and fierce anger*.” It cannot be stressed enough that the Lord is preparing a time when His fury, wrath and burning anger will be fully displayed to all peoples on the earth. Isaiah does not “sugar coat” the judgment of God on all who continue in wickedness and rebellion against Him. This anger is vividly described by Isaiah in 30:27:

*Look, the name of the LORD comes from far away,
burning with his anger,
and in thick rising smoke.
His lips are full of fury,
and his tongue is like a consuming fire.*

See notes on Isaiah 9:19; 10:5 and 12:1 for a discussion on the anger of the Lord .

Isaiah further explains *second*, that the “day of the LORD” is a time for the Lord to make the land (earth) a desolation. The Lord intends to violently shake the earth: Job 38:13; Psalm 82:5; Isaiah 13:13; 24:18-23; Jeremiah 50:46; Ezekiel 38:20; Haggai 2:6, 21; Hebrews 12:26; and Revelation 6:12-17. God will also cause the earth to be burnt up during the “day of the Lord”: 2 Peter 3:10. See also Revelation 21:1. Finally, *third*, the Lord intends to remove sinners from the earth: See Revelation chapter 20. Babylon in the end times will fall and will not rise again and the evil to all the earth caused by the corruption of Babylon will be judged. See Revelation chapters 17 and 18. The Lord will finally remove sinners from the earth and then begin His eternal reign upon a new earth and within a new heaven: See Revelation 21:1-8.

13:10 *For the stars of heaven and their constellations
will not give their light.
The sun will be darkened as it rises,
and the moon will not shine.*

A significant cosmic sign will be made in the heavens as a declaration to the events of the “day of the Lord.” The Lord is making a bold statement about the timing of the “day of the Lord.” It will be accompanied by dramatic events in the heavens. No other time in all the earth has yet witnessed this “signature of the Lord” on His day. This sign in the celestial sphere accompanying the greater day of the Lord (the tribulation and Christ’s second coming) is declared in several Scripture passages: Isaiah 24:23; 34:4; Joel 2:10, 30-31; 3:14-15; Amos 8:9; Zechariah 14:6-7; Matthew 24:29; Mark 13:24; Luke 21:25; Acts 2:20; Revelation 6:12-14; and 8:12.

13:11 *I will punish the world for its evil,
and the wicked for their iniquity.
I will cause the arrogance of the proud to cease,
and bring down the haughtiness of the ruthless.*

One of the most ominous reasons for the “day of the Lord” (vs. 9) and its accompanying cosmic sign is the Lord’s intent to bring punishment upon the wicked and evil doers of the world. The arrogance of the proud and the haughtiness of the ruthless will be decisively dealt with by the Lord. The standard by which the Lord judges the ungodliness of the world’s inhabitants is His own holiness (Leviticus 11:44; 19:2; 1 Peter 1:15-16). The face of the God is against those who do evil (Psalm 34:15-16, 1 Peter 3:12). The Hebrew word for “ruthless” is *ariyts* which has the meaning of: tyrannical, powerful and oppressor. This verse stands as a witness against all who are consumed by pride and arrogance and against those who abuse their God given position of power by their ruthlessness and oppressiveness. A day is coming when the Lord will finally deal with all the sinfulness of mankind. None will escape including those who arrogantly think they have power and can stand against God. God’s response to these rebellious rulers is recorded in Psalm 2.

13:12 *I will make human beings more rare than fine gold,
people than the gold of Ophir.*

The result of the judgment upon the wickedness of the world's peoples is stunningly declared by Isaiah. God will render mankind as scarce as pure gold and specifically as scarce as the gold from Ophir. Some scholars are uncertain as to the exact location of ancient Ophir. Victor Buksbazen suggests that it was located in southern Arabia. (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 193). Ophir and its gold (most often in reference to king Solomon) is also mentioned in 1 Kings 9:28; 10:11; 22:48; 1 Chronicles 29:4; 2 Chronicles 8:18; 9:10; Job 22:24; 28:16 and Psalm 45:9.

13:13 *Therefore I will make the heavens tremble,
and the earth will be shaken out of its place,
at the wrath of the LORD of hosts,
and in the day of his fierce anger.*

The day of the Lord will witness the judgment of God with the trembling of the heavens and the shaking of the earth "out of its place." Just how God will accomplish this without the complete destruction of the earth is not stated but God can certainly shake up His created order at any time He so desires with the result He alone has planned. During the latter part of the Tribulation, in a judgment described as the pouring out of the seventh bowl, and which specifically mentions Babylon, God will cause a great earthquake to cause such devastation that islands and mountains were removed (Revelation 16:17-21).

Haggai 2:6-7 is another commentary on this time and its conclusion: "*For this is what the LORD of hosts says. Once again, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. I will shake all nations, and all nations will come with their treasures. I will fill this house with glory,' says the LORD of hosts.*" At the conclusion of God's judgment on the earth during the period of Tribulation, God will cause the wealth of the nations to be brought to the capital of the Messianic kingdom and it will also be a time of peace for this coming kingdom as verses 8 and 9 of Haggai chapter 2 reveal.

Again, as recorded in vs. 9, Isaiah reveals that this day will witness the outcome of God's wrath and fierce anger. If the wicked of the world have any doubts as to what the "day of the Lord" will reveal, let them be forewarned. It is not a day they will welcome. It will be a day of terror and retribution for them. God is giving the wicked advance notice so they will have no excuse if they enter this "day" unprepared. The only way to be prepared for the coming "day of the Lord" is to be counted among the righteous. This inclusion amongst the righteous can only come as a result of those who repent of their sins (Matthew 3:2) and call upon the Lord for salvation (John 14:6 and Acts 4:12.) See also (selected passages only): Isaiah 1:27; 30:15; Ezekiel 14:6; 18:30-32; Matthew 4:17; Mark 1:4, 15; 6:12; Luke 5:32; 13:3, 5; 24:47; Acts 3:19; 5:31; 11:18; 17:30; and 2 Peter 3:9. The sad result however is that even in the midst of the tribulation (during the day of the Lord), the wicked of the world will not repent: Revelation 9:20-21; 16:9 and 11.

13:14-16 *Like a startled gazelle,
and like sheep with no one to gather them,
they will return each one to their own people,
and will flee to their own land.*
¹⁵ *Everyone who is caught will be thrust through;
everyone who is captured will fall by the sword.*
¹⁶ *Their infants also will be dashed to pieces before their eyes;
their houses will be plundered,
and their wives raped.*

The first phrase of vs. 14 is perhaps better translated in the NIV: “*Like a hunted gazelle, like a sheep without a shepherd.*” The work “gather” is *qabats* in the Hebrew and has the meaning of collecting, gathering and assembling” and in the context of vs. 14 it is appropriate to render the translation as “a shepherd.” See Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah*, Vol. 1, page 302. Isaiah uses *qabats* translated as gather, gathers or gathered (or similar) in 11:12; 13:14; 34:15, 16; 40:11; 43:5, 9; 45:20 (come together); 49:18; 54:7 (regather); 56:8; 60:4, 7; 62:9; and 66:18. Its usage is a major theme in Isaiah of God gathering His people from the nations of the world and bringing them to Zion when the Messiah, Jesus Christ establishes His kingdom following His return and after rescuing His people and setting up a just and peaceful reign.

The intent of vs. 14 is that during the destruction that God will bring on the earth in the end-times “day of the Lord”, people will scatter and flee like hunted animals with no one to guide or gather them. Those who have been displaced from the homelands will seek desperately to return to their own kindred. In vs. 15, the prophet declares that any who are found (fleeing from God’s wrath) will not reach safety for they will be killed and in vs. 16, Isaiah even more graphically describes the plight of children and wives who will find no protection in their homes. See also vs. 18. This time of judgment will even come upon Jerusalem as stated in Zechariah 14:3. The Scriptures do not sugar coat the horrors of the judgment of God upon the wicked people of the earth. Thomas Constable comments:

“The reason for this wrathful judgment is the evil of wicked people, especially their pride and haughtiness (v. 11). Rather than human pride resulting in increasing good conditions for ever-expanding numbers of people, it will result in the cutting back of the human population (v. 12; cf. Rev. 6:8; 9:15). The heavens and the earth would shake at the fury of Yahweh of armies when His anger would burn against the wicked (v. 13; cf. 24:18; Joel 2:10; 3:16; Hag. 2:6-7, 21-22; Rev. 6:12; 8:5; 11:13, 19; 16:18). People will scatter like frightened gazelles and sheep in that day as they seek security (cf. Rev. 6:15-17). God’s warriors will slay all the wicked that they can find. Children will be unmercifully slaughtered in the sight of their parents. Houses will be looted and women raped.” (vv. 14-16).

"If we don't have a just God to trust in, we will have no logical reason not to become violent ourselves. It is Isaiah's vision of God's final justice that moderates our anger and frustration right now." 158 [Note 158: Ortlund, page 125] (Thomas Constable, *Isaiah*, page 80).

The First Destruction of Babylon: 13: 17-22

As recorded in verses 17 to 22, it will be the Medes who will be called upon by God to begin the first phase of the destruction of Babylon. The Medes were not influenced or tempted by monetary gain to retreat from their appointed task of conquering Babylon. They were incited to capture Babylon for imperialistic reasons and to remove Babylon as a world power. The Lord used the Medes and the Persians to accomplish His judgment against the Babylonians who never ceased to worship idols and who had rejected the God who had called them into His service for their appointed task.

13:17 *Look, I will stir up the Medes against them,
who do not care about silver
and have no pleasure in gold.*

Isaiah reveals that it will be the Medes who God will stir up to bring destruction upon Babylon. Assyria was God's chosen nation for punishment against Israel and Judah: Isaiah 10:5. Babylon was the nation God elected to punish Judah: Jeremiah 25:1-11 and Habakkuk 1:1-17. Isaiah now declares that Babylon itself will be destroyed by His chosen nation, the Medes. There has been much debate on the understanding of the historical destruction of Babylon as a city and as a nation. Babylon was first "destroyed" by the Assyrian army under king Sennacherib in 689 B.C. but it soon was rebuilt. The first phase of the complete end to the dominance of Babylon in the ancient world came in 539 B.C. when the armies of the Medes and Persian, under king Cyrus defeated Babylon. Daniel 5:30-31 states: "*That same night Belshazzar, the Chaldean King, was assassinated. Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about 62 years old.*" It is not exactly clear as to the role of Darius performed in the capture of Babylon. Some believe him to be the successor of Cyrus. For excellent discussions on "Darius" refer to Stephen R. Miller, *Daniel*, The New American Commentary, Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1994; and John F. Walvoord, *Daniel: The Key to Prophetic Revelation*, Moody Press, 1971.

The second phase of Babylon's demise came in 518 B.C. when Babylon was destroyed by the armies led by Darius Hystaspes and then later by the armies led by Xeres. Babylon has a history of survival and was a small outpost during the days of the first century. Some understand Peter's reference to Babylon as recorded in 1 Peter 5:13 as a literal place while others understand it as coded reference for the church in Rome in the later first century. The ruins of Babylon lay undisturbed for centuries until "discovered" in 1899. For an expanded history of Babylon see Leon J. Wood, *A Survey of Israel's History*, Zondervan, chapters 14 and 15. Vs. 17 also states that the Medes: "*do not care about silver and have no pleasure in gold.*" Isaiah was given a prophetic look into the motives of the Medes who captured Babylon not for loot or treasure but because of their imperialistic motives to replace Babylon as the major world power.

13:18 *Their bows will cut the young men to pieces;
they will have no pity on the fruit of the womb;
their eyes will not spare even the children.*

The opening phrase of vs. 18: “*their bows will cut the young men to pieces*” could also be translated as the bows of the young men will be dashed to pieces. The second part of vs. 18 which describes the ferocity of the Medes in not having compassion on the most vulnerable of the Babylonians is similar to the times of the last days when future Babylon will be forever destroyed and all of the wicked will be brutally murdered. See vs. 16. Some understand that the prophecy in vs. 18 was completely fulfilled in the conquest of Babylon by king Cyrus in 539 B.C. but this does not fit the historical accounts of this incident as very few lives were actually lost. Thomas Constable comments:

Has this prophecy been fulfilled? Babylon suffered defeat in 689 B.C. when Assyria (including the Medes), under Sennacherib, devastated it (cf. 23:13), but the city was rebuilt. Many interpreters believe that the fall of Babylon in 539 B.C. to Cyrus fulfilled this prophecy,¹⁹¹ but Cyrus left the city intact. Others believe the destruction—that Darius Hystaspes began in 518 B.C., and that Xerxes later completed—was the fulfillment.¹⁹² Some scholars believe that what Isaiah predicted here never took place literally, at least completely, so the fulfillment lies in the future.¹⁹³

Many conservatives argue for a near and a far fulfillment. I think the destruction in 689 B.C. that resulted in Babylon's temporary desolation fulfilled this prophecy (cf. v. 22b), and I believe there will also be an eschatological judgment of Babylon (Rev. 17—18), though not necessarily one that requires the rebuilding of the city. Destruction terminology, such as appears in this passage, is common in the annals of ancient Near Eastern nations. It speaks generally and hyperbolically of devastating defeat and destruction, but it did not always involve exact or detailed fulfillment.¹⁹⁴ [Note 191: E.g., Archer, p.621; the NET Bible note on 13:22. Note 192: E.g., Delitzsch, 1:304. Note 193: E.g.; G. H. Lang, *Histories and Prophecies of Daniel*, pp. 33-34; Kenneth W. Allen, “The Rebuilding and Destruction of Babylon,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 133:529 (January 1976): 19-27; and Charles H. Dyer, *The Rise of Babylon: Sign of the End Times*; J. Martin, p.1060. Note: 194: See Homer Heater Jr., “Do the Prophets Teach that Babylon Will Be Rebuilt in the *Eschaton*?” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 41:1 (March 1998): 36, for further specifics.] (Thomas Constable, *Isaiah*, pages 81-82).

13:19 *Babylon, the glory of kingdoms,
the splendor of the Chaldeans' pride,
will be like when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah.*

Isaiah records God's view of the fall of Babylon. The once proud and beautiful city described as “*the beauty of kingdoms, the glory of the Chaldean's pride,*” will be completely destroyed and its fate will be like that of ancient Sodom and Gomorrah. For Isaiah to mention Babylon's fate as compared to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah reveals the intense hatred of God upon the sinfulness and wickedness of the Babylonians. They refused to acknowledge the Holy One of Israel as the Creator and only true God, although king Nebuchadnezzar was brought to recognize God's greatness and sovereignty after seven years of wandering like a beast of the field, (Daniel 4:28-35). However, there is no record of king Nebuchadnezzar truly repenting and serving God only. The worship of idols and false gods by the Babylonians continued right up until their capture by the Medes. Even Cyrus who was chosen to be God's instrument in the eventual release of the Israelite captives (Isaiah 44:28 -45:4), did not know, acknowledge nor

worship God. This is further evidence that God will use any person or nation, regardless of their devotion to Him to accomplish His purposes and establish His will upon His creation.

13:20-22 *It will never be inhabited,
from generation to generation.
Not even the bedouins will pitch their tent there;
nor will shepherds make their flocks to lie down there.
²¹ But wild beasts of the desert will lie down there,
and their houses will be the haunts of howling creatures.
Ostriches will dwell there,
and wild goats will frolic there.
²² Wolves will cry in their former fortresses,
and jackals in the luxurious palaces.
Its time is near,
and its days will not be prolonged.*

The city will “*never be inhabited from generation to generation.*” Just prior to the birth of Christ, the site of ancient Babylon was a great mound in the midst of a desert. Earlier, the armies of Alexander had begun to excavate the mound in an attempt by the Greeks to establish the site as an eastern capital but Alexander died suddenly and the excavation work was halted. Victor Buksbazen comments:

“This is the heart of the prophecy concerning the ultimate fate of Babylon, which was so remarkably fulfilled. Beautiful Babylon, the pride and glory of the Chaldees will become like Sodom and Gomorrah, never to be inhabited again, not even by the wandering Arab, but shall become the eerie haunt of all kinds of spooky desert beasts. Just as Isaiah predicted, Babylon became a heap of ruins and was never inhabited again. The ruins of ancient Babylon were excavated in the 19th century in the neighborhood of the city of Mosul, in modern Iraq.” (Victor Buksbazen, *Isaiah*, page 194).

Isaiah states that the site of Babylon will be a place for habitation only by desert creatures such as the owls, goats, hyenas and jackals. The Hebrew words for the creatures stated in vs. 21 are very obscure and difficult to translate. For example, the NKJV and NASB translation of *ya'anah* in vs. 21 is “ostriches.” See also Isaiah 34:13; 43:20. The KJV has “doleful creatures,” and the NIV has “jackals.” J. Alec Motyer comments, *Isaiah*, page 116, that “*Desert creatures* should probably be “desert wraiths” and *wild goats*, goat-demons (Lv.17:7). In Revelation 18:2, the Apostle John proclaims: “*Fallen, fallen in Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird.*” As it was foretold for the first destruction of Babylon so it will be for its final destiny. God has and will again make Babylon unfit for human habitation.

Introduction to Isaiah 14:1-23:

The beginning two verses of chapter 14 set the context for this section. Although many may understand them as referring to the return of the exiles to Jerusalem following the Babylonian captivity the words of Isaiah in these verses do not fit the historical record of this return. Isaiah describes a far future time when the people of Israel will “*take captive those who were their captors and they will rule over their oppressors,*” (vs. 2). This best fits the days following the second coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, when He will defeat the enemies of His people Israel and lead them to Zion to live in peace. Also, the taunt against the king of Babylon (verses 4-23), is set within this end-times period as described in vs. 3. The taunt against the king of Babylon therefore is directed against the Antichrist who will rule the world system called Babylon during the great Tribulation period.

14:1-2 *But the LORD will have compassion on Jacob,
and will again choose Israel,
and set them in their own land.
The foreigners will join with them,
and they will attach themselves to the house of Jacob.*

² *The nations will take them,
and bring them to their place;
the house of Israel will possess them
for servants and for handmaids
in the land of the LORD.
They will take captive those who were their captors,
and they will rule over their oppressors.*

These two verses should have been a source of great comfort for the people of Israel in Isaiah’s day and should remain so for our day. The prophet declares that the LORD will not forsake His people but have compassion upon them. They will settle (have peaceful rest) in their own land free of oppression and fear of their enemies. As stated above this event has not yet occurred. They will take their captors captive and will rule over their oppressors, not as cruel masters, but as co-worshippers of the Messiah.

14:3 *On the day the LORD will give relief from your sorrow,
and from your trouble,
and from the hard labor you were forced to serve,*

Vs. 3 is the key to the understanding of the timing of the “taunt” against the king of Babylon. The prophetic words of verses 4-23 will occur **on the day** (which could be a shortened reference to the “day of the Lord”), when the LORD will give His people “rest” from their pain, turmoil, harsh service due to their enslavement. The people of Israel will be scattered among the nations and will again in the end-times live under the dominance of a cruel master which the Book of Revelation calls Babylon. Verse 3 therefore links the eschatological timeframe of verses 1-2

with verses 4-23 and places these events at the time when Israel will be rescued by the returning Messiah and brought to Mount Zion where they will live in peace and rest. When they are safely settled in their promised land (again) they will speak out against the Antichrist who will be the king or ruler of the world political and economic system which will be called Babylon.

14:4-23 The Taunt Against the King of Babylon

Those who interpret Isaiah chapter 14:1-23 as a contemporary event during Isaiah's day or referring to the return of the Jewish exiles from Babylon speculate on the identity of this Babylonian king. Some suggests it was Sennacherib who was king of Assyria and Babylon because Babylon during his day was a vassal of Assyria. Others point to Merodach-baladan as the king being referenced by Isaiah. Other kings of Assyria also were known as kings of Babylon, such as Tiglath-Pileser and Sargon II. Others suggest that the king of Babylon was not any particular historical figure, but one who is representative of all the wickedness, arrogance and cruelty of the Babylonian empire. As will be stated later, there is also a popular viewpoint that at least some of the content of these verses are attributed to Satan as the diabolical motivator of any wicked king of Babylon.

As mentioned in the notes of verse 3 above, the time frame for this taunt best fits the context of chapter 14, is the return of the Messiah, Jesus Christ who will defeat the final "king of Babylon, the Antichrist and it is the Messiah who will cause the remnant of His people to settle peacefully and safely in His land, which Isaiah had earlier called Immanuel's land. (8:8). This movement of the remnant to this land of peace and safety is described in Isaiah chapter 35. Specific comments on the content of the taunt against the "king of Babylon" will be given in the notes for each verse in this section, verses 4-23.

Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum comments:

"The one who has claimed to be god, the one who has been able to perform all kinds of miracles, signs and wonders, the one who exercised all the authority of Satan as he ruled the world, will be quickly dispensed with by the Word of the Lord Jesus. For the second time, the Antichrist will die. The arrival of the soul of the Antichrist into Hell is described in Isaiah 14:3-11.

At the time of the redemption of Israel, the Jews whom the king of Babylon sought to destroy will taunt him with a new parable (vv.3-4) commemorating the greater strength of the power of God (v. 5). The Antichrist ruled the nations of the world (v. 6), but then the whole world will rejoice his demise (vv.7-8). As the spirit of the Antichrist enters into the gates of Hell, the previous great ones of the earth already there will suddenly rise up off their thrones (v. 9) in utter shock that he, too, has entered the abode of Hell (v. 10). Yet it will be so, and all the pomp of his worldwide reign will suffer the demise of Hell (v. 11).

Having described the spirit of the Antichrist in Hell, Isaiah later describes the fate of his dead body on earth in 14:16-21. Many will be able to view the body of the Antichrist and will stare in utter disbelief that he died so suddenly and easily, considering he had shaken the kingdoms of the world and the earth trembled in his presence (vv. 16-17). While lesser kings are buried in

pompous sepulchers (v. 18), not so the Antichrist, whose body will be trampled by the fleeting feet of his own armies (v. 19). In fact, his body will never be buried at all (v. 20) His entire family will be destroyed so that they can not try to follow in their father's footsteps and attempt to rule the world (v. 21)." (Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah*, pages 352-353).

14:4 *you should take up this taunt
against the king of Babylon,
and say, 'How the oppressor has ended!
How his fury has ceased!'*

The word "taunt" is the Hebrew word *mashal* which has the meaning of "parable" or "proverb". It is a discourse directed against the "king of Babylon" who is not identified in the text of Isaiah chapter 14. Because of the context of the previous three verses, these notes will indicate that this taunt will take place in the far future during the day when Israel's Messiah will return to defeat the Antichrist (the final king of Babylon) and establish the Messianic kingdom. Verse 4b records the beginning words of this taunt. The people of God, whom the Messiah has returned to rescue, will remark that finally their cruel oppressor has ceased (come to an end) and also his fury has ceased.

14:5-6 *The LORD has broken the staff of the wicked,
the scepter of the rulers,
⁶ that struck down the peoples in wrath
with relentless blows,
that ruled the nations in anger,
with unrestrained aggression.*

The people who will be with their Messiah at the beginning of the millennial kingdom will rejoice because the LORD has removed the wicked power of the Antichrist and has destroyed the symbol of his rule represented by the breaking of his staff and scepter. The staff and scepter in vs. 5 represents the awful tyranny of Antichrist in his unrelenting assault and persecution upon the nations of the world during the future Tribulation period. See Revelation 13:1-10 for a description of the wicked power of Anti-Christ. In Revelation 13:5 it is revealed that the duration of the brutality will last for forty-two months. This intense time of world-wide destruction and persecution is also known as the Great Tribulation which begins after Antichrist breaks his seven- year covenant or agreement with Israel at the end of the first three and half years or the middle of the "week" as prophesized by Daniel: "*Then he will make a firm covenant with many for one week. In the midst of the week, he will cause the sacrifice and the offering to cease; and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes devastation, until the decreed end will be poured out on the one making the devastation.*" (Daniel 9:27).

As Daniel makes clear, there is a complete destruction (to come upon Antichrist) that is decreed (from the Lord), which will come at the end of forty-two months of unrelenting destruction and death caused by Antichrist. See also Daniel chapter 7 for a description of these future days involving the Antichrist and the return of the Messiah, the "Son of Man." At the end of this intense time of persecution and wicked slaughter, Daniel records in 7:21-22: "*While I was watching, this horn made war with the holy ones and prevailed against them, until the Ancient of Days came, and judgment was rendered for the holy ones of the Most High. Then the time came for the holy ones to gain possession of the kingdom.*" When the saints take (gain) possession of the kingdom, following the Great Tribulation, and the victory of the Messiah over the Antichrist, they will proclaim the words Isaiah has recorded in 14:4-21.

14:7-8 *The whole earth is at rest and quiet;
they break forth into singing.
The cypress trees rejoice over you,
the cedars of Lebanon, saying,
"Since you were laid low,
no woodcutter comes up against us."*

When the Antichrist is put to death by the returning Messiah the earth will enjoy rest and quiet and will rejoice with shouts of joy. Even the cypress trees and the cedars of Lebanon will celebrate because they will no longer endure the cutting down of the trees of the forest by the forces of the Antichrist.

14:9-11 *Sheol from beneath is excited to meet you at your coming;
it rouses the spirits of the dead to greet you,
all the leaders of the earth.
It raises up from their thrones
all the kings of the nations.*

¹⁰ *They all will respond and say,
"You too have become weak as we are!
You have become like us!"*

¹¹ *Your pomp is brought down to Sheol,
so also the sound of your harps,
the maggots spread like a bed under you,
and worms cover you.*

The taunt against Antichrist (the king of Babylon) in verses 9-11 addresses the reception that the human soul of Antichrist will receive when he (the soul) descends into Sheol. Sheol is a place where the souls of the dead wait for resurrection. It is also translated as the "grave", "hell" and "the pit." Several Old Testament passages refer to this place.: Numbers 16:30; Job 10:21-22; 26:5-6; 14:21; Psalm 6:5; 88:10-12; 94:17; 115:17; 139:8; 143:3; Proverbs 15:11; 27:20; Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10; Isaiah 38:10. For an extended article on Shoel, refer to "*The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*", 1975. Vol. 5, page 395.

The Scriptures are clear that humans do not simply cease to exist upon death. Humans possess a soul (Matthew 22:37), and this soul will not die with the body but will exist forever with attributes of existence and knowledge. The final destination of the soul is established while humans live upon the earth as a composite creation: body and soul. It is only during this living stage where humans can decide to either reject or accept the gospel and believe in Christ thus deciding upon the destination of their eternal souls. Many will reject the message of the gospel and live in perpetual torment while others will accept the gospel by faith in Christ and will live forever in heaven with their Lord. Many believe that both in OT times and NT times the souls of those who believe the good news of God's provision for them in faith, thus becoming justified (made righteous) will immediately go to be with the Lord and not languish in what the O.T. calls Sheol. A proof of this understanding is found in the account of the mount of transfiguration where Moses (who died) and Elijah (who went directly to heaven) both as living souls met with the transfigured Christ. See Matthew 17:1-8. If this understanding is correct, then the souls described as in Sheol when the soul of the Antichrist descends into it, are souls of those who did not believe or have faith in God which would have been "reckoned" to them as righteousness. Galatians 3:6-9. See also Habakkuk 2:4, Romans 1:16-17 and 5:1.

The un-regenerated souls of the kings of the earth who await the final resurrection at the Great White Throne judgment (Revelation 20:11-15), will be aroused when the soul of Antichrist descends into Sheol (hell). These souls, especially those who had been kings and leaders of the nations, will rise up and meet the solitary soul of the earth's most brutal tyrant. They will be amazed that this one has become as weak (without any power or influence) at they are. They will comment on the fact that the pomp and music of the musical instruments that once accompanied the Antichrist upon earth has been exchanged for the dismal situation and location of Sheol where "*maggots are spread out as your bed beneath you and worms are your covering.*" (vs. 11). Not only is the decay of the body in the grave demeaning to these souls but also the realization that their existence is one of misery and dismay. There is no escape or return to their previous earthly existence.

14:12-14 *How you are fallen from heaven, O shining star,
son of the morning!*

*How you are cut down to the ground,
you who laid the nations low!*

¹³ *You said in your heart,*

"I will ascend into heaven;

I will raise my throne above the stars of God.

I will sit on the mount of the assembly,

on the distant slopes of Mount Zaphon.

¹⁴ *I will ascend above the heights of the clouds;*

I will make myself like the Most High."

In vs. 12, the prophet speaks of someone who “*has fallen from heaven*” and is called: “*shining star, son of the morning*.” In Luke 10:18, Jesus may have used this prophecy by Isaiah to refer to the fall of Satan: *He said to them, "I saw Satan falling like lightning from heaven.* The King James Version translates this verse: “*How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations.*” It is only a conjecture to make this verse refer absolutely to Satan. The word Lucifer in the KJV is the Hebrew word *Helel*, meaning “shining one” or “day star.” The DASV translates this word as “*shining star*.” Because of the KJV translation of *Helel* as Lucifer, many older commentaries assumed that verses 12-14 referred to Satan.

Another popular viewpoint is that Isaiah was using “Canaanite mythology” as the background to his picture of the pride of the king of Babylon. Thomas Constable, for example, cites Robert B. Chisholm Jr. as one who suggests this interpretation:

"A popular interpretive tradition has seen in the language of 14:12-15 an allusion to the fall of Satan. However, this subject 'seems a bit forced in this chapter. The object of this taunt is clearly "the king of Babylon" (v. 4a). Instead the language and imagery seem to have their roots in Canaanite mythology, which should not be surprising in a quotation ostensibly addressed by ancient pagan kings to another pagan king (the quotation of the kings' words is most naturally extended through v. 15) [Cf. 24:21-22; 25:8; 27:1]." [Note: Chisholm, *A Theology...*, pp. 319-20. See also idem, *Handbook on ...*, pp. 50-51; Dyer, in *The Old...*, pp. 540, 542; John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*, 7:442; and Delitzsch, 1:311-12]. (Thomas Constable, *Isaiah*, pages 83-84).

Many O.T. scholars claim that the writers of the Old Testament often used contemporary pagan beliefs and social, religious and legal practices as background texts for their writings. However, this claim does not have to mean that the OT Scriptures originate from pagan sources. God is the author of Scripture and if God allowed the human writers of the O.T. to reference contemporary practices and texts, it was done entirely under the superintendence of His divine care and protection of His Word. One should be very careful in discerning as to what is the proper hermeneutical approach to interpreting Scripture before coming to any conclusion that the Scriptures contain references to pagan beliefs and practices or endorse them.

Those who suggest that verses 12-14 may likely refer to Satan may conclude that the words of verses 13-14 to be about the person mentioned in vs.12 as they seem to fit the sin of conceit or pride for which Satan was condemned. 1 Timothy 3:6. There are five “I wills” in verses 13 and 14 of Isaiah chapter 14.

The five I wills in these verses are: (1) I will ascend to heaven; (2) I will raise my throne above the stars of God; (3) I will sit on the mount of assembly; (4) I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; and (5) I will make myself like the Most High. The similarities with the evil intentions of Satan as stated throughout Scripture seem to contradict claims by some scholars that these “I wills” could only apply to a king or to all the kings of Babylon. A similar statement of pride attributed to an earthly king is described in Ezekiel chapter 28 and in Ezekiel’s account, there are words of pride and arrogance that seem also to apply to Satan as verses 11-19 of that

chapter indicate. However, in the wider context of Isaiah chapters 13 and 14, this taunt or parable seems *to best fit the man of sin* whom Satan will empower during the tribulation to come. It is within the period of tribulation to come that Babylon will finally and completely fall.

14:15-21

In dramatic contrast and irony to the hubris statements, to be made by the future Antichrist in verses 13-14, verses 15-21 reveal the actual destination of the soul of this satanically empowered individual. Instead of ascending above the clouds, this soul will descend down into Sheol. Instead of any attempt to make himself like the Most High, this soul will be powerless and unable to make any impact upon have any influence in the world or the heavens. Instead of boastful statements of pride once made by this once ruthless ruler, this soul will hear the taunts of the dead who will deride him because of his great fall into disgrace without pomp of burial or descendants to follow him.

14:15 *Yet you will be brought down to Sheol,
to the depths of the pit.*

The word “Yet” begins this next section of the taunt against Antichrist. It is a fitting and jarring reminder of Who actually rules history, even history yet to be experienced. Isaiah reveals the words of God in judgment against this future tyrant. As stated above the retributive judgment of God is in startling contrast to what this tyrant thought would be his destiny. The impact of the fall of Antichrist into the Sheol is expressed in the word “thrust.” The Hebrew word *yarad* means to be “brought down” as translated in the DASV. Antichrist will be without any power to prevent his descent into the dismal place of the dead. Isaiah accentuates the deepness of this descent by adding, “to the recesses of the pit.”

14:16-19 *Those who see you will gape at you;
they will ponder over you, saying,
"Is this the one who made the earth tremble,
and shook kingdoms,
¹⁷ who made the world like a desert,
and overthrew its cities,
who would not release his prisoners to go home?"
¹⁸ All the kings of the nations,
all of them rest in glory,
each one in his own tomb.
¹⁹ But you are thrown out of your own sepulcher
like a deplorable branch,
clothed with the slain who were thrust through with the sword,
who go down to the stones of the pit;
like a corpse trampled underfoot.*

Verses 16-19 emphatically restate the taunt of the “dead” kings (verses 9-11) who are roused up to meet the soul of Antichrist when he descends into Sheol. The sarcastic taunt of souls of the “dead” kings are a stinging judgment upon this future brutal dictator and murderer of his own people. In verses 16-17, they “dead” kings ask: *“Is this the one who made the earth tremble, who shook kingdoms, who made the world like a desert and overthrew its cities, who would not release his prisoners to go home?”* In this descriptive taunt, these “dead” kings emphasize the horror of the brief days of the future time of Antichrist. It is little wonder that God will shorten the duration of these days for if not, no life would have been saved. God will shorten the duration of these days. *“For in those days there will be tribulation, like there has never been before from the beginning of the creation which God created until now, or ever will be. Except the Lord had shortened those days, no one would be saved; but for the elect's sake, whom he chose, he will shorten those days.* Mark 13:19-20.

In verses 18-19, Isaiah reveals that the human remains of the future Antichrist will not be honored by a burial place or tomb. Without a tomb or place of remembrance, the body of Antichrist will be like a trampled corpse. Ezekiel 39:1-16 describes the death and burial of Antichrist. The body of Antichrist will be thrown unceremoniously into a pit (Isaiah 14:19) and lie among the stones at the very bottom of this dark and dismal hole.

14:20-21 *You will not be joined with them in burial,
because you have destroyed your land,
you have killed your people.
The descendants of evildoers
will never be mentioned again.*

²¹ *Get ready to slaughter his children
for the sins of their fathers.
They must never rise up, and possess the earth,
and fill the face of the world with cities.*

A final judgment upon Antichrist is stated in verses 20-21. Because of the murderous actions of this cruel tyrant who ruined his own country and had slain his own people, his descendants will be eliminated. His sons will also face death and the line of Antichrist will forever be extinct so that his sons will not be able to rise up and possess the earth nor fill the face of the earth with cities. The intent of the Lord will be to remove from the earth any living memory of this despotic world ruler, who even though his days of terror are to be short, they were foretold as the cruelest and most catastrophic days the earth will ever have to endure.

14:22-23 *"I will rise up against them," says the LORD of hosts,
"and cut off the memory of Babylon and its survivors,
its offspring and posterity," says the LORD.*

²³ *"I will turn it into a possession of owls,
and pools of marshy water;
I will sweep it with the broom of destruction,"
declares the LORD of hosts.*

The words of God, as recorded by Isaiah are now directed in judgment against future Babylon. The presence and influence of Babylon on the earth is to be completely and finally removed. All of Babylon: *"survivors, its offspring and posterity"* (vs. 22) will be eliminated. The physical locality of Babylon (vs. 23) will no longer be known as a place for human habitation for the Lord concludes: *"I will sweep it with the broom of destruction."* The Apostle John further details this destruction of Babylon as recorded in Revelation chapters 17:1-19:2.

Teaching Outline for Isaiah 13:1-14:23

13:1-5 The Lord's chosen Destiny for Babylon
13:6-16 The Lord's chosen Day for Babylon
13:17-22 The Lord's chosen Destroyers of Babylon
14:1-3 The Lord's chosen Deliverance of Jacob
14:4-23 The Lord's chosen Devastation of Babylon

2. Judgment against Assyria: 14:24-27

The previous declaration of judgment on Babylon was for a nation just emerging on the world's stage who as yet had not risen to its terrifying dominance of its local neighbors and of the nations in the wider area of the ancient near east. In chapter 14:24-28, Isaiah announces the judgment of God on a nation posing an immediate threat to Judah and to its neighbors. In these verses, God makes a significant declaration regarding His sovereign intention. The declaration is so determinative that God uses language similar to that of His covenants in which the thing promised will for certain happen just as God said it will happen.

14:24 *The LORD of hosts has sworn,
"Surely, just as I have intended, so it will be;
just as I have planned, it will happen.*

Using covenant-like language, *"the LORD of hosts has sworn."* God makes His intention plain to all who will hear or read the declaration of judgment on Assyria. It is not often that God elevates His promises to that of an oath and when He does, it almost always refers to the covenants He has made with His chosen people. These covenants are confirmed with an oath. References to the covenant oaths include: Genesis 26:3, Genesis 50:24, Deuteronomy 9:5, 1 Chronicles 16:15-16, Psalm 105:8-11, Jeremiah 11:5, Acts 2:30 and Hebrews 6:13-17. If the premise that God uses an oath to confirm His covenants is valid, then in Isaiah 14:28, the usage of "sworn" may be said to represent His covenant keeping promise to His chosen people. In this instance, God is protecting His people, His Land, and His choice of the Davidic throne upon which His Son will one day rule the earth from Mount Zion.

14:25 *I will break the Assyrian in my land,
and on my mountains trample him under foot.
Then his yoke will be removed from off my people,
and his burden pulled off their shoulders.*

God declares that Assyria will be the nation that will be broken in His land and will be trampled on God's mountains. The yoke imposed by Assyria upon His people (who live in the land and on the mountains of God) will be removed from their shoulders. In very certain and clear language God declares that the land and mountains of Judah and by implication all of Israel, are God's land and God's mountains. Students of Scripture would be wise to remember the implications of the covenants of God regarding His land. God intends to keep His promises. He will accomplish exactly what He has set out to do. These promises are not hyperbole and high sounding exclamations to make God appear to be in control of the world He has created. God is sovereign and is absolutely in control of the universe and the earth.

14:26 *This is the plan devised against the whole earth;
this is the hand that is stretched out over all the nations.*

God extends his declaration to include the whole earth. God's hand is stretched out against all nations. His plans and purposes for His chosen people and the land He has promised them will not be frustrated nor thwarted by any actions of any nation on the earth, past, present or future. In a later passage in Isaiah, God states the status of all nations before Him as described by Isaiah in 40:15-17:

*Look, the nations are like a drop in a bucket,
and are regarded like dust on the scales;
he picks up the islands like fine dust.*
¹⁶ *Lebanon is not enough to burn for sacrificial fire,
nor are its animals sufficient for a burnt offering.*
¹⁷ *All the nations are as nothing before him;
they are accounted by him as less than nothing and worthless.*

14:27 *For the LORD of hosts has planned,
who can annul it?
His hand is stretched out,
who can turn it back?*

God reinforces His intentions and plans for His land and His people. Isaiah would later bring force to these comments. It is God who: "reduces rulers to nothing, and makes the judges of the earth worthless." Isaiah 40:23. The Apostle Paul expressed a similar declaration of God's power, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" Romans 8:31. The answer to God's questions in Isaiah 14:27 and to Paul's question in Romans 8:31 is a resounding "no one can stand against God."

The plans of the nations bring God to laughter, Psalm 2:4. With all the Scriptural evidence for God's absolute control of the world and its nations so plainly stated, students of the Scriptures should have the utmost confidence that God will do exactly as He has planned and those who oppose God should shudder in terror at what will happen to them if they continue in their unbelief and rebellion against Him.

Teaching Outline for Isaiah 14:24-27

14:24 The Certainty of God's Plan

14:25 The Contents of God's Plan

14:26 The Comprehensiveness of God's Plan

14:27 The Confidence of God's Plan

3. Judgment against Philistia: 14:28-32

14:28 *In the year that King Ahaz died this oracle was given.*

Isaiah provides a time frame for the issuance of the judgment against Philistia. Isaiah stated that it was "*in the year king Ahaz died.*" Historically this would have been c.715 BC. Isaiah begins this separate judgment regarding Philistia with the introduction that it is an oracle, Hebrew: *massa*, which is a burden or message from God. Isaiah often began his judgment messages with the title of "oracle": Isaiah 13:1, 14:28, 15:1, 17:1, 19:1, 21:1, 21:11, 21:13, 22:1, 23:1 and 30:6. The introduction of prophetic messages with the title of "oracle" is first introduced in Scripture in relation to the evil intentions of Balaam, the son of Beor, against the people of Israel as recorded several times in Numbers chapter 24. Although Jeremiah uses this title, it is always in reference to God's derisive indictment against His rebellious people who look to oracles for their evil intentions: Jeremiah 23:33, 23:34, 23:36, 23:38, 50:36 and Lamentations 2:14. Other miscellaneous usages of oracle are found in 2 Kings 9:25, 2 Chronicles 24:27, Proverbs 30:1 and Proverbs 31:1.

14:29 Do not rejoice, all you Philistines,
because the rod that struck you is broken;
for out of that serpent's root will come a more poisonous viper,
and his fruit will be a fiery serpent.

Isaiah cautions the people of Philistia not to rejoice because of the rod that had struck them was now broken. Even though this oracle of judgment was dated by Isaiah as the year King Ahaz died, it is most unlikely that Ahaz was the person identified as the "rod" that struck Philistia. King Ahaz never led an attack on Philistia, instead it was the Philistines who invaded Judah, 2 Chronicles 28:18. It is most probable that the "rod" and the "serpent" which struck Philistia was the Assyrian king, Tiglath-Pileser III who had earlier invaded Philistia. The viper or venomous serpent who is described as the serpent's root is most likely king Sargon II and his "fruit" (son) described as a flying serpent was king Sargon III. These kings were very aggressive in their dominance of the nations of the ancient near east. For an extended discussion, refer to Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah*, Vol. 1, pages 324-325.

14:30-32 *The firstborn of the poor will graze in pasture,
and the needy will lie down in safety.*

*But I will kill your root with famine,
it will slay even your remnant which survived.*

³¹ *Wail, O gate!*

Cry, O city!

You are melted away, O Philistia, all of you;

for out of the north comes smoke,

and there is not a single straggler in its ranks.

³² *What will one answer the messengers of this nation?*

"The LORD has founded Zion,

and in her the oppressed of his people will find refuge."

Even though some people of Philistia would have felt secure and safe enough that even the most helpless would eat at the news of the broken rod, God promises (vs.30) that the root of the Philistines would be destroyed by famine. As the people of Philistia watched the smoke from the destruction of many cities in Judah just to the north, they would wail and become demoralized (melt away) by the terror of the approaching Assyrian armies (vs. 31). Isaiah asks a rhetorical question (vs. 32): How will then someone answer the messengers who had sought an alliance with Judah against Assyria, while watching the destruction of the cities in Judah? Isaiah, in the latter half of this verse, reminds the people of Philistia that it was the Lord who had founded Zion and those of His people who are afflicted will seek refuge in Zion. God will protect His city which He has founded and His people will find refuge in His city. A soon to be realized prophetic fulfillment of this statement is recorded later in Isaiah chapters 36 and 37 when the Assyrian armies who were threatening Jerusalem with destruction were themselves destroyed by the angel of the Lord (Isaiah 37:36).

Teaching Outline for Isaiah 14:28-32

14:29 No comfort for Philistia

14:30 No security for Philistia

14:31 No future for Philistia

14:32 No alliance for Philistia

4. Judgment against Moab: 15:1 – 16:14

Moab was a small nation located between the Arnon and Zered rivers on the east side of the Dead sea. The first mention of Moab in the Scriptures is found in Genesis 19, verses 30-38. Following the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Lot and his daughters fled to the mountains of Zoar and stayed for a while in a cave. The daughters, convinced they and their father were alone in the world, contrived together to get Lot drunk with wine and then to have incestuous relations with him to produce offspring to preserve their family lineage. The child born to the firstborn daughter was a son whom was named Moab who became the father of the Moabites.

The Moabites and Israelites had a very contentious history some of which is recorded in Numbers, chapters 22 to 25. One of the greatest sins committed by the Israelites during this time is recorded in Numbers 25:1-5. The men of Israel had sexual relations with the women of Moab and sacrificed to the pagan gods of Moab. This evil action was attributed to the counsel of Balaam (Numbers 31:16) who had earlier been used of God to bring blessings upon Israel instead of a curse as requested by Balak, king of the Moabites (Numbers 22 to 24). Other significant incidents of warfare between Israel and Moab are recorded in Judges chapter 3; 2 Samuel chapter 8; 2 Kings chapter 3 and 2 Chronicles chapter 20. Major prophecies against Moab other than in Isaiah chapters 15 and 16 are recorded in Jeremiah chapter 48; Ezekiel chapter 25; Amos 2:1-2 and Zephaniah 2:8-9.

The major complaint of the Lord against Moab was that even though the peoples of Moab and Israel were related through Lot, the Moabites became arrogant and taunted and reviled Israel, Zephaniah 2:8-9, and because they scorned Israel during its days of failure and said the “*house of Judah was like all the nations*” thus claiming the Israelites were not led by God. Ezekiel 25:8-11. However, the Lord is gracious and forgiving to the people of Moab and as stated in Jeremiah 48:47, God will restore the fortunes of Moab in the latter days. This is likely a reference to the days of the future Messianic Kingdom.

15:1 *An oracle about Moab.*

*In a single night Ar of Moab is devastated and destroyed;
in a single night Kir of Moab is devastated and destroyed.*

Isaiah records an “oracle” (Hebrew *massa*) meaning a burden or message from God concerning Moab. Occurrences of “oracle” within Isaiah chapters 13-23 occur in 13:1, 14:28, 15:1, 17:1, 19:1, 21:1, 21:11, 21:13, 22:1 and 23:1. The lengthy section 15:1 -16:14 contains the burden. See introduction to this section directly above. Isaiah begins his oracle with a statement of the swiftness of the judgment on two of the cities of Moab, Ar and Kir for they will be devastated and ruined “in a night”. “Ruined” is the Hebrew word *damah* meaning “silenced” which signifies the total destruction that will happen to these cities of Moab.

The timing of this destruction will be in three years according to Isaiah’s statement in 16:14. Ar was located on Moab’s border with Ammon near the Arnon River. It is also mentioned in Numbers 21:15, 28 and in Deuteronomy 2:9, 18, 29. Kir may be a shortened form of Kir-Harseth which was located in the central section of Moab. Isaiah mentions Kir-Harseth in 16:7, 11. See also 2 Kings 3:25. The shortened form of Kir occurs in Isaiah 15:1 and 22:6. See also 2 Kings 16:9; Amos 1:5 and 9:7.

15:2-4 *Dibon goes up to the temple,
to the high places to grieve.
Moab wails over Nebo and Medeba;
all their heads are shaved,
every beard is cut off.*

³ *In their streets they wear sackcloth;
on their housetops and in town squares,
every one wails falling down with weeping.*

⁴ *Heshbon and Elealeh cry out,
their voice is heard even to Jahaz.
Therefore the armed warriors of Moab cry aloud;
their souls tremble.*

Dibon once belonged to Gad but was captured by Moab. Jeremiah also brings a message of judgment against Moab in chapter 48 and mentions Dibon in verses 18 and 22. The reason they are grieving and wailing in their temple, *bayit* in the Hebrew, is because of the failure of their god Chemosh to save them from the sudden catastrophe that has come upon them and their land. The people have clothed themselves with sackcloth and have shaved their heads and cut off their beards in their grief. This removing of their hair was a sign of great humiliation and mourning. See also Isaiah 22:12; Ezekiel 7:18; Amos 8:10 and Micah 1:16. Their warriors also cry aloud because of the destruction of their land. Nebo, Medeba, Heshbon, Elealah and Jahaz, like Dibon were cities in Moab where complete destruction has been decreed as judgment from the Lord. Jeremiah declares that: “*Then Moab will be ashamed of their god Chemosh, as the house of Israel was ashamed of Bethel, their confidence.*” Jeremiah 48:13. It is not stated which country or army was responsible for the defeat of Moab. The Assyrians may have been the invaders for they certainly were the most powerful nation who were seeking physical and political control of the eastern Mediterranean countries during the time of the prophetic ministry of Isaiah.

15:5-9 *My heart cries out for Moab;
her nobles flee to Zoar, even to Eglath-shelishiyah.
They weep as they go up the Ascent of Luhith;
in the way of Horonaim they raise a cry of destruction.*

⁶ *For the waters of Nimrim are gone;
the grass is withered,
the new shoots fail,
there is nothing green.*

⁷ *Therefore the abundance they have acquired,
and that which they have saved up,
they will carry away over the Wadi of the Willows.*

⁸ *The cry echoes around the territory of Moab;
their wailing reaches to Eglaim,
their wailing reaches to Beer Elim.*

⁹ *For the waters of Dimon are full of blood;
yet I will bring even more on Dimon,
a lion will attack those of Moab who escape,
even the remnant, those left in the land.*

Isaiah expresses his heart-felt grief over the coming destruction of Moab. He expresses his deep feelings for Moab again in chapter 16 verses 9 and 11. Isaiah seems to be very concerned for the plight of the Moabites who are fleeing into desolate conditions as stated in vs. 6. The Moabites are suffering greatly and the prophet feels genuine anguish for those who are the cousins of the Israelites. Isaiah speaks for God in vs. 9 stating “*yet I will bring even more on Dimon a lion will attack those of Moab who escape.*” The motif of a lion portrays a destroying army which has been sent by God to bring terrifying judgment on those who have sinned against Him. See also: Isaiah 5:29; Jeremiah 50:17; Ezekiel 22:25 and Joel 1:16. It is the horrific future that the Moabites will face that causes Isaiah to weep over these people, even if their destruction was due to their own sins and evil actions. Isaiah, in the midst of prophesying doom, invokes deeply held feelings and emotions for those who will face the judgment of God. See Victor Buksbazen, *Isaiah*, pages 203-204 for an extended discussion on Moab and specifically the so-called “Stone of Mesha,” which gives some historical background to the relationship between Israel and Moab.

Isaiah chapter 16: Introduction

In chapter 16 of his prophecy against Moab, Isaiah gives further details of one of the responses of the Moabites to their impending destruction. Since the Moabites were closely related to the Israelites they were aware of the sacrificial system God had decreed the Israelites use for dealing with sin. In a dynamic contrast, which certainly is more than just coincidence, Isaiah mentions a lion in chapter 15 vs. 9 and then in the very next verse, chapter 16 vs. 1, the prophet mentions a lamb. Although the context of these passage deals with God’s judgment on a pagan nation, the mention of a lion as a conquering symbol, immediately followed by the mention of a lamb as a salvation symbol is a juxtaposition of terms that points to the person and work of the coming Messiah. It appears just too obvious to those who study God’s Word and are amazed at the incredible richness of Scripture. This may seem to be reading too much into the words of Scripture but it is certainly interesting that the lion and lamb motif is mentioned in the same context of vs. 5 of chapter 16 which is a very clear reference to the future reign of the Messiah. Also, in this chapter the prophet Isaiah seems to be speaking for the Moabites giving them words of comfort in the face of their peril. Isaiah also seems to be speaking to the Israelites exhorting them to provide protection for the fleeing peoples as they seek shelter from the advancing enemy. The direction of their flight seems to be southward as the invaders are coming from the north. It is possible that the invaders were the Assyrians and the time frame is not known exactly but could fit the Assyrian southern advance in the years of 715-713 B.C. or during the destruction caused by the Assyrian armies under King Sennacherib in 701 B.C.

16:1: *Send lambs for the ruler of the land from Selah,
through the desert to the mount of the daughter of Zion.*

The words in the NASB, “*Send the tribute lamb*” may be understood as a gift from the king of Moab to the king of Judah requesting the aid of the Israelites to provide shelter for the peoples of Moab. It was the practice of an earlier king of Moab, Mesha, who was a sheep breeder, to send payment (tribute) to the king of Israel in the amount of 100,000 lambs and the wool of 100,000 rams. This practice continued until the death of Ahab in 853 B.C. Meshna rebelled against Israel

and refused to pay the tribute. This incident and the resulting war between Moab and the Israel-Judean alliance is recorded in 2 Kings chapter 3. The tribute lamb was sent to “*the ruler of the land*” to the “*mount of the daughter of Zion*” which is a reference to the king in Judah who reigns from Mount Zion. It is interesting that the peoples of Judah and Moab are both called daughters in the first and second verses of this chapter.

16:2-5 *Like birds hovering around,
after being pushed from the nest,
so are the daughters of Moab at the fords of the Arnon.*

³ *"Give counsel, make a decision;
make your shade like night at noon;
hide the outcasts;
do not betray the fugitive.*

⁴ *Let the fugitives of Moab settle with you;
be a hiding place for them from the destroyer."
For the oppressor has ended,
destruction has ceased,
those trampling others have vanished from the land.*

⁵ *The throne will be established by loyal love;
he will sit on it in truth in the tent of David,
judging, seeking justice,
and quick to execute righteousness.*

The Moabites had fled south, like frightened birds, to the “fords of the Arnon” and also to Sela, which is present day Petra in Jordan, which is further south. From Sela the Moabites sent a plea of desperately needed help. They would be at the fords of the Arnon awaiting a response from Judah. In verses 3-5 Isaiah either records the words of the Moabites or makes an impassioned plea on their behalf to the king and people of Judah to “*hide the outcasts*” and “*do not betray the fugitive*” and also to “*let the fugitives of Moab settle with you*” and “*be a hiding place for them from the destroyer.*”

In vs. 4 the words of the prophet take the reader to a time in the future when the “*destroyer*”, and the “*oppressor*” who are the armies invading Moab, have “*vanished from the land.*” The word “*destroyer*” is the Hebrew word *sadad* which has the meaning of powerful, ravage, spoil and devastate. It is usually translated as destroyed or destroyer in Isaiah: 15:1; 16:4; 21:2; 23:1, 14; and 33:1. “*Oppressor*” is the Hebrew word *muwts* which occurs only in these verses and has the meaning of thresher. It is translated as “*extortioner*” in the KJV with the margin note of “*wringer*”. The action of the destroyer “*trampling*” is the Hebrew word *ramas* and occurs in Isaiah in 1:12; 16:4; 26:6; 28:3; 41:25 and 63:3

This may be a prophetic reference to the complete destruction of the Assyrian army during the reign of Hezekiah, Isaiah chapters 36-37. It could also be a far future reference to the period just prior to the establishment of the millennial kingdom when the returning Messiah will conquer all who oppose the remnant of chosen people. This far future reference is possible due to the prophetic words of vs. 5 of this chapter in which a clear statement of the ruler of the millennial kingdom is made within the context of the plea from Moab and Isaiah for help for the oppressed Moabites.

In vs. 5 a clear messianic prophetic message is stated by Isaiah, "*The throne will be established by loyal love; he will sit on it in truth in the tent of David.*" The NKJV translates this verse as: "*In mercy the throne will be established; And One will sit on it in truth, in the tabernacle of David.*" The ESV translates vs. 5 as: "*then a throne will be established in steadfast love, and on it will sit in faithfulness in the tent of David one who judges and seeks justice and is swift to do righteousness.*" This one who will sit on the throne, "*judging, seeking justice and quick to execute righteousness*" (DASV), can only rightly refer to the Messiah who will sit on David's throne during the future millennial kingdom. To ascribe these words to any Judean king, present or in the future leading up to the Babylonian conquest of Judah, would do injustice to the words of Scripture regarding the promised faithful judge Who will reign on David's throne on Mount Zion in righteousness. (Refer to: 2 Samuel 7:8-17, Psalm 89:1-37, Psalm 132:11, Isaiah 2:1-4, Isaiah 9:7, Luke 1:32). Victor Buksbazen comments:

"It is significant that the Moabites use terms which strongly reflect the Messianic expectations, nurtured by the faithful remnant in Israel and by Isaiah himself, centering around the Messianic king, who will sit upon the throne of David and execute justice and righteousness. (Victor Buksbazen, *Isaiah*, page 206).

David L. Cooper adds:

THE vision of the Moabites appealing to the Davidic house at Jerusalem for assistance in a crisis was suggestive to the prophet of the time in the future when the nations of earth will make their appeal to the Messiah in Mount Zion for His blessing and protection. Thus in verse 5 of chapter 16, Isaiah foretold the reign of King Messiah: "And a throne shall be established in lovingkindness; and one shall sit thereon in truth, in the tent of David, judging, and seeking-justice, and swift to do righteousness." As we have already seen in our study of chapter 9, King Messiah will return to this earth and establish His reign in Judah when the people of Israel confess their national sin of rejecting Him. He will then mount the throne of David and re-establish it. This, of course, will be the beginning of the millennial reign of our Lord. Converted Israel at that time will go into all the world and proclaim the truth to every mortal who survives the Tribulation and who enters the millennial kingdom. These nations will accept the Lord Jesus Christ and His salvation. Then each converted nation will apply to King Messiah to be annexed or united to the kingdom of Israel as is suggested in these most striking words: "Of the increase of his government and of peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of Jehovah of hosts will perform this" (Isa. 9:7). (D.L. Cooper, *Commentary on Isaiah*, Biblical Research Monthly-March 1944).

- 16:6-12** *We have heard about the pride of Moab,
how proud;
his arrogance, pride, and insolence;
his boastings are bogus.*
- ⁷ *Therefore let Moab wail for Moab,
everyone of them will wail.
Absolutely devastated,
mourn for the raisin cakes of Kir-hareseth.*
- ⁸ *For the fields of Heshbon waste away,
even the vines of Sibmah.
The lords of the nations have broken off its choice branches,
which reached even to Jazer,
which spread into the wilderness.
Its shoots were spread abroad,
they crossed over the sea.*
- ⁹ *Therefore I will weep with those weeping from Jazer
for the vine of Sibmah.
I will water you with my tears, O Heshbon and Elealeh;
for on your summer fruits and on your harvest
the shouts of joy have ceased.*
- ¹⁰ *Gladness and joy are removed from the fruitful field;
there is no more singing in the vineyards,
or shouts of joy.
No treader treads out wine in the presses;
I have put an end to those shouts.*
- ¹¹ *Therefore my heart groans like a harp for Moab,
and my inner being for Kir Hareseth.*
- ¹² *When Moab presents himself for worship,
when he wearies himself on the high place,
and comes to his sanctuary to pray,
it will not be effective.*

Verses 6-12 are a declaration of a previous judgment of God on Moab, according to the summary stated in vs. 13, “*This is the word that the LORD spoke about Moab in the past.*” In these verses, God shows deep compassion for the people of Moab. Just as the Moabites will “wail” vs. 7, so God Himself will weep bitterly and drench the Moabites with His tears, vs. 9, and His heart “intones like harp for Moab”, vs. 11. One of the reasons the Moabites will wail is for the destruction of their crops and particularly for the “raisin cakes of Kir-hareseth, vs. 7. These cakes were also a favorite delicacy of the Israelites: 2 Samuel 6:19, Song of Solomon 2:5 and Hosea 3:1. The Moabites suffered the loss of their vineyards as the nations who suppressed them trampled down their choice clusters, verses 8 to 10.

Even the destruction of their fruitful fields did not cause the Moabites to seek the one true God. They instead went to their “*high place*” and their “*sanctuary*” to pray, vs. 12. Their prayers to their pagan god Chemosh would be useless. The history of the Moabites and their devotion to Chemosh is recorded in these Scriptures: Numbers 21:29, Judges 11:24, 1 Kings 11:7 and 11:33, 2 Kings 23:13, Jeremiah 48: verses 7, 13 and 46. Jeremiah chapter 48 gives the final outcome of this history: vs. 13 “*Then Moab will be ashamed of their god Chemosh*” and vs. 46 “*The people of Chemosh have perished*”. Yet God is not finished with the Moabites and will have mercy on them in the future. Following the judgment stated for Moab in Jeremiah 48:46, God graciously extends compassion and in vs. 47 states: “*Yet I will bring back the exiles of Moab in the latter days,*” says the LORD.”

16:13-14 *This is the word that the LORD spoke about Moab in the past.*

¹⁴ *But now the LORD has spoken, saying, "Within three years, as the years of a hired worker, the glory of Moab will be despised, with his entire population; and the survivors will be few and insignificant."*

These summary verses state more details as to the timing of this despising of the glory of Moab and the reduction of the people of Moab to be a very small and the survivors (remnant), will be few and insignificant. This timing is stated as “*within three years as the years of a hired worker.*” vs. 14. Thomas Constable comments:

“Isaiah concluded this oracle by announcing Moab's imminent ruin (cf.15:1). The preceding verses describe an earlier revelation that the prophet received, but now he learned that Moab's invasion would be within three years. A hired man would count down the three years day by day, and the Judeans would do the same as they anticipated the degrading of Moab's glory and population. Only a remnant would survive.

The fulfillment came when Assyria invaded Moab sometime between 715 and 713 B.C. or, perhaps, when Sennacherib destroyed it in 701 B.C.”

The grief of the judge of all the earth is one of the two striking truths of this oracle. The other is that all this total loss and suffering arises from the single sin of pride (16:6). 219 [Note 219: Motyer p. 151]. (Thomas Constable, *Isaiah*, page 89).

Therefore, it is likely Isaiah wrote this prophecy of the destruction and degrading of Moab either between the years 718-716 B.C. or in 704 B.C. which gives three years in advance for each of these possible time frames.

Teaching Outline for Isaiah 15:1 – 16:14

(1) The Emotional Issue

The Wailing of Moab for its destruction 15:1-15, 16:7

The Weeping of the Lord for the Moabites 16:9 and 11

(2) The Central Issue

The false worship of the Moabites 6:12

The true worship of the Israelites 16:5

5. Judgment against Damascus and Ephraim: 17:1-14

The judgment of God on the nations including Israel continues in Isaiah chapter 17 with an “oracle” concerning Damascus in verses 1-3. Verses 4-11 concern God’s judgment on “Jacob,” (Israel) and verses 12-14 are about God’s rebuke of the nations. As noted previously the word “oracle” is a translation of the Hebrew word *massa* meaning oracle or burden. The use by Isaiah of the word “oracle” helps to form an internal outline of this large section of his prophecy, chapters 13-23 which can be entitled, “The Nations Judged”. In these chapters, Isaiah begins a new section regarding the judgment of God on these nations in Isaiah 13:1, 14:28, 15:1, 17:1, 19:1, 21:1, 21:11, 21:13, 22:1 and 23:1.

Chapter 17:1-3 of Isaiah contains the message of God’s judgment on the cities of Aram (Syria): Damascus and Aroer. The spiritual background of God’s judgment on Damascus and Israel may be, among other things, the actions of King Ahaz recorded in Isaiah 7 and 8 and in 2 Kings 16 and 2 Chronicles 28. Ahaz, who was among the most evil of the Judean kings, made sacrifices to the gods of Damascus and arranged for an altar to be made in the temple in Jerusalem patterned after the pagan altar in Damascus. God is not mocked and the evil of pagan worship no matter where it is located will eventually have its due reward, the wrath of God.

The text of Isaiah does not indicate when this oracle of judgment was delivered by Isaiah but it certainly would have been before the destruction of Damascus in 732 B.C. and of Samaria “the fortified city,” vs. 3 in 722 B.C. by the armies of Assyria. The political reason for the fall of the cities of Aram and Ephraim was the rebellion of Syria (Aram) against Assyria and the attempt by the Syrian king Rezin to have Israel and Judah join in a coalition to fight the dominance of Assyria. Refer to Isaiah chapters 7 and 8; 2 Kings 16 and 2 Chronicles 28.

17:1-3 *An oracle about Damascus.*

*"Look, Damascus will cease to be a city,
it will be a heap of ruins.*

² *The cities of Aroer are forsaken;
they will be places for flocks to lie down,
and no one will make them afraid.*

³ *The fortified town of Ephraim will disappear,
along with the kingdom of Damascus.*

The remnant of Syria:

*they will end up like the glory of the children of Israel,"
says the LORD of hosts.*

The prophet’s oracle (burden, message) concerns the coming demise of Damascus (vs 1), Aroer (vs. 2) and the cities of Ephraim which is the northern kingdom of Israel (vs. 3). Regarding Damascus, Isaiah states that it will “*cease to be a city, it will be a heap of ruins.*” The cities of Damascus and Aroer or Aram fell to the Assyrians under king Tiglath-Pileser III in 732 B.C. Ephraim (Israel) was conquered by the Assyrians in 722 B.C. and most of its citizens were deported and dispersed among the nations under the dominion of Assyria.

The latter part of vs. 3: *“They will end up like the glory of the children of Israel”* refers to the cities and territory mentioned in verses 1-3. Vs. 4 states that: *“in that day the glory of Jacob will be brought low.”* The two statements are most likely related thus indicating that both Aram and Israel will face a future of misfortune yet they will have a remnant. Their glory will fade but not entirely be extinguished.

17:4-6 *"In that day the glory of Jacob will be brought low,
and the fatness of his flesh will become thin.*

⁵ *It will be as when harvesters gather the standing grain,
and his arm reaps the ears of grain;
like one gleaning ears of grain in the valley of Rephaim.*

⁶ *Yet there will be some leftover gleanings in it,
like when an olive tree is harvested by beating,
two or three olives remain in the top branches,
four or five in the most fruitful branches,"
says the LORD, the God of Israel.*

Isaiah predicted that “in that day” there will be a remnant of people left for both nations following the Assyrian assault but the numbers of people and their plight will be meager. The reference to “in that day” in vs. 4 refers to the overthrow of both Syria and Israel by the Assyrian armies and also predicts a future eschatological day. See notes on vs. 7-11. The reference to the glory of Jacob (vs. 4) is to the northern kingdom of Israel containing 10 tribes all who were along with the 2 tribes in the southern kingdom of Judah, descendants of Jacob. Following the destruction of Israel by the Assyrians in 722 B.C., the northern kingdom no longer held a position of power as a sovereign state. This part of the “promised land” existed as Samaria in the days of Jesus under Roman control and its inhabitants were often despised by the people of Judah for being polluted with the taint of interbreeding with Gentiles. The Assyrians took most of the population into exile and re-populated Israel with non-Jewish peoples who later married those of pure Jewish descent in Samaria and thus produced descendants who were racially impure according to their cousins to the south. See John 4:9. This is also the background implication for the parable of the good Samaritan, Luke 10:30-37 and Christ’s healing of ten lepers, Luke 17:11-19.

Isaiah’s comments in verses 4-6 regarding the thinness or leanness of the flesh could refer to scrawny flocks that are unfit for profitable slaughter, and the almost complete striping of the harvest, leaving very little for the gleanings (Leviticus 19:9-10) describes just how far was the glory of Israel to fade. It was to diminish into almost complete obscurity. Yet there remains something for the remnant to gather, the remnant who will return of Israel and of the house of Jacob (Isaiah 10:21).

17:7-11 *In that day a person will look to their Maker,
and turn their eyes to the Holy One of Israel.*

- ⁸ *They will not look to the altars,
the work of their hands;
neither will they look to what their fingers have made,
the Asherah poles or incense altars.*
- ⁹ *In that day their refuge cities will be
like the forsaken forests of the Amorites,
which were abandoned because of the children of Israel.
There will be desolation.*
- ¹⁰ *For you have forgotten the God of your salvation,
and have not been mindful of the Rock, your refuge.
So you plant beautiful plants,
and plant special foreign vines.*
- ¹¹ *In the day you plant it, you fence it in,
and in the morning you cause your seed to germinate;
but the harvest vanishes
in the day of disease and incurable pain.*

Isaiah next turns his attention to a far future time. The words “in that day” of verses 7, 9 and 11 and the context of verses 12-14 should be understood as the days of the Great Tribulation. David L. Cooper, quoting from the KJV explains:

In Isaiah 17:7,8, however, it is quite evident that the prophet lifted up his eyes from beholding the devastation wrought by Tiglath-pileser III and beheld the end of the age, foretelling the destruction that would come at that future time. This position becomes evident when we note the following language: "In that day shall men look unto their Maker, and their eyes shall have respect to the Holy One of Israel. And they shall not look to the altars, the work of their hands; neither shall they have respect to that which their fingers have made, either the Asherim, or the sun-images. In that day shall their strong cities be as the forsaken places in the wood and on the mountain top, which were forsaken from before the children of Israel; and it shall be a desolation" (Isa. 17:7-9). In verse 7 is a universal prediction that all men will, at the time foreseen, look unto their Maker and their eyes shall have respect to the Holy One of Israel. Then they will no longer look to their altars, the work of their hands, nor to anything which they have devised in the form of worship. We know positively that they did not do anything like this at the time of the immediate fulfillment of verses 1-6 of this prophecy. On the contrary, we understand that at the conclusion of the Tribulation men will look to God and He will spare them. Thus, between verses 6 and 7 of our prophecy, we have the long lapse of time intervening between the days of Tiglath-pileser III of Assyria and the days of the Tribulation which are yet future.

But why will there be such universal wreckage at this future time--especially in Israel? The answer to this question is found in verses 10 and 11: "For thou hast forgotten the God of thy salvation, and hast not been mindful of the rock of thy strength; therefore thou plantest pleasant plants, and settest it with strange slips. In the day of thy planting thou hedgest it in, and in the morning thou makest thy seed to blossom; but the harvest fleeth away in the day of grief and of

desperate sorrow." (D. L. Cooper, *Commentary on Isaiah*, Biblical Research Monthly-March 1944).

God, in these verses (7-11), discusses the mindset of those who remain after the horrors of the Tribulation. This weak remnant will look to their Maker the Holy one of Israel, vs. 7. They will disdain their previous pagan objects of worship vs. 8, as these objects failed to protect them from their enemies. The main reason why their strong cities are forsaken and their land is desolate, vs. 9 is because they have forgotten the God of their salvation and the rock of their refuge vs. 10, which certainly is directed solely to the people of Israel. Vs. 11 reinforces the demise of their agricultural resources as previously stated in verses 5 and 6 due to their rejection of worshiping the God of Israel and replacing this with worshiping worthless idols that their hands had made.

17:12-14 *Woe, the uproar of many peoples,
that roar like the roaring of the sea,
and the roar of nations,
like the roar of the crashing of mighty waves!*
¹³ *Though the nations roar like the roar of many waters,
he will rebuke them,
and they will flee far away,
chased like the chaff of the mountains before the wind,
and like the whirling dust before the storm.*
¹⁴ *In the evening, look, terror!
Before the morning, they are gone.
This is the plight of those who plunder us,
and the lot of those who loot us.*

The prophet declares a prophecy against the nations God has chosen to deliver judgment on the peoples of the northern kingdom of Israel and because of the inclusion of the word "us" in vs. 14 also includes the peoples of the southern kingdom of Judah. Thus, Isaiah is delivering a message of rebuke and certain judgment on Assyria in the near future and Babylon in a more distant time and to Babylon in the eschatological days of the Tribulation. Even though both of these powerful nations were used by God to bring about discipline and judgment on His chosen people, these nations would not escape judgment themselves due to their treachery, pagan worship and failure to acknowledge the one true God of not only Israel but of all the peoples of the earth. The prophecy of the sudden and overnight removal of the oppressive army who "plunder us" and "loot us," vs. 14, was to be first fulfilled during the days of King Hezekiah of Judah. The Assyrian warriors who were at the very doorstep of Jerusalem and were on the verge of destroying the city were themselves destroyed in a single night, (Isaiah 37:36-37). There was also to be another fulfillment in the destruction of Babylon by the Medes and Persians and still to be a far future fulfillment of the destruction of Babylon at the end of the Tribulation Period, (Revelation 17 and 18).

Teaching Outline for Isaiah 17:1-14

The Revelation of Judgment: (The places involved) 17:1-3

The Result of Judgment: (The plight involved) 17:4-9, 11

The Reason for Judgment: (The purpose involved) 17: 10

The Recompense of Judgment: (The punishment involved) 17:12-14

6. Judgment against Ethiopia: 18:1-7

This short chapter in Isaiah does not begin with an “oracle” yet it has an extremely important message as it ties together events during Isaiah’s time with the far future when the nations who were historically enemies of Israel and Judah would one day be worshipping the Lord together with the Jewish remnant as people of the Lord. Chapter 19 continues this theme with the nations of Egypt and Assyria. Chapter 18 concerns a near and far prophecy of the ancient nation of Cush.

The historical background for chapter 18 is still within the context of the greater threat of Assyria which threatened the nations around Judah and Israel with destruction during the ministry career of Isaiah. Egypt was weakened with internal strife between its upper and lower Nile regions. The nation of Cush was understood to be located south of Egypt in the area of modern Ethiopia, and perhaps extending to Sudan. Victor Buksbazen provides a historical background:

“Around the year 720 B. C., Ethiopia, taking advantage of the internal problems of Egypt, conquered that land and became master of the Nile Valley for the next sixty years. Shabaka, the Ethiopian ruler of Egypt (circa 716-701 B.C.), expecting an Assyrian invasion of the Nile Valley, sent ambassadors to the various provinces of Egypt and to neighboring kingdoms, seeking to enlist their support against Assyria in the event of war.” (Victor Buksbazen, *Isaiah*, pages 211-212).

18:1 Woe to the land of buzzing wings beyond the rivers of Ethiopia;

The prophet brings a message of woe or judgment against Cush, described as the “*land of buzzing wings*” which may be a reference to the deadly tsetse fly which plagued this area or to swift sailing ships that plied the inland rivers. The land is described in as being “*beyond the rivers of Ethiopia*” (Cush), which would be an indication of the Nubian-Cush sphere of influence extending both north and south of its borders.

18:2 *that sends ambassadors by the sea,
even in papyrus vessels on the waters.
Go, you swift messengers,
to a nation tall and smooth,
to a people feared far and wide,
a nation strong and conquering,
whose land is divided by rivers.*

Isaiah states, this land (the rulers of the land) send envoys by the sea. The sea is most likely a reference to the waters of the Nile which flowed north towards its very wide delta area. These envoys travelled swiftly in “*papyrus vessels*” to seek aid from the provinces of Egypt and likely to the nations of Judah and Israel although the text does not state this possibility. It may be inferred that Judah and Israel have this connection for the last verse of chapter 18 mentions the future connection between the southern nations and Mount Zion. The message of the prophet in vs. 2 is to these envoys and they are instructed to go “*to a nation tall and smooth, to a people feared far and wide,*” a powerful and oppressive nation whose land the rivers divide”. This nation could be the tall and smooth skinned Nubians or to the peoples who resided in the northern sections of Egypt. J. Alec Motyer suggests another possibility:

2. Envoys go out. Tall and smooth is usually interpreted as referring to Ethiopians, a proverbially tall people in the ancient world. But $\sqrt{m\ddot{a}šak}$, ‘to draw out, prolong’, is never found meaning ‘tall’. ‘Drawn out’ could mean ‘long-standing’ (Jer. 31:3), i.e. having a long record in history, and therefore well-established. Smooth (*môrāt*) means polished, as of a sword sharpened and gleaming, ready for action (Ezek. 21:9); maybe, therefore, ‘in battle trim’, well-armed. This understanding makes the people in question exactly the sort to seek out for an alliance. (J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah*, page 135).

The exact destination of these envoys is not as important as the message God has for them which the prophet brings in verses 3 and following.

18:3 *All you inhabitants of the world,
and you dwellers on the earth,
when a signal flag is lifted on the mountains, look;
when the trumpet is blown, listen.*

The prophet’s message now extends to “*All you inhabitants of the world*”. Isaiah is not just pointing to a local event of one nation seeking aid from another but is introducing a message from God to the world at large. The import of this message is for the peoples of the world to pay attention. God is at work and significant signs and events are to take place in which the peoples will both see and hear. A signal flag (banner or marker) will be raised on the mountains indicating more than just one banner or marker will be raised. Also, a trumpet will be blown that the peoples of the world will hear. This certainly is a reference to an event to occur in the far future. Isaiah gives more details of this event in the following verses.

18:4 *For this is what the LORD said to me,
"I will quietly watch from my dwelling place,
like heat shimmers in sunshine,
like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest."*

Isaiah introduces these next events with the words, “*For this is what the LORD, said to me.*” It must have been highly significant in the eyes of the prophet to emphasize the authority of the Lord in the declaration of this message. Connecting the message of vs. 3 and verses 4-7, this authoritative declaration is of paramount importance. God is speaking! The peoples of the world are to pay attention to what God will be doing and where the message is leading. God, as stated in vs. 4 is allowing us the privilege of being ushered into His chambers where we witness His pronouncement of judgment on the nations of the world. Not all is lost however for following these days of judgment there will be peoples who will bring gifts to the Lord as their act of worship to the Messianic ruler of His earthly kingdom as vs. 7 reveals.

18:5-6 *For before the harvest,
when the blossom is over,
and the flower becomes a ripening grape,
he will prune off the shoots with pruning shears,
and cut off and remove the spreading branches.
6 They will be left together for the mountain vultures,
and for the beasts of the earth;
the birds of prey will spend summer feeding on them,
and all the beasts of the earth will spend winter eating them.*

This judgment is stated which involves the destruction of the agricultural resources of these people who are likely the Assyrians who brought complete destruction and exile upon the northern kingdom of Israel and the same to all but the city of Jerusalem in the southern kingdom of Judah. The Lord would not allow the Assyrian’s sinful self-determination, pride and their failure to acknowledge His plans and purposes to go unpunished. For God to announce the destruction of this nation’s (Assyria) harvest meant complete devastation and famine which would force the peoples of the nation to abandon their homeland in search of food. The political and social structure of the nation would collapse.

18:7 *In that time a present will be brought to the LORD of hosts
from a people tall and smooth,
to people feared far and wide,
a nation strong and conquering,
whose land is divided by rivers.
to the place of the name of LORD of hosts,
to Mount Zion.*

God, through the prophet, declares that in the time of the Messiah’s kingdom, “*in that time*” the people who were tall and smooth (vs. 2) and were once were feared far and wide and were a strong nation of war and lived in a land divided by rivers (the Ethiopians and perhaps also referring to the Assyrians) will bring a gift of homage to the Lord of Hosts, to the place of the name of the Lord of Hosts, Mount Zion.

The introductory words of vs. 7, “*In that time*”, must therefore refer to a time in the far future when the Lord of Hosts will be in residence on Mount Zion. This prophecy will be for a time when all the people of the world would witness when the Lord establishes His kingdom on the earth and will rule in righteousness and holiness from David’s throne on Mount Zion. For a discussion regarding this glorious time, see Geoffrey W. Grogan, *Isaiah*, page 123.

In the latter part of Isaiah chapter 19, verses 23-25, the prophet makes this astonishing revelation that other nations will also worship the Lord, together with the people of Israel, God’s inheritance. The message in Isaiah’s day for the people of Judah was certainly that they were not to put their hope and trust in the temporary might of the surrounding nations to save them from the Assyrian armies. The Lord of hosts will save them and they must put their faith, hope and trust solely in Him. This message is the same today for all who read the words of the prophet Isaiah. The Lord calls us to pay attention to His word and obey it!

Teaching Outline for Isaiah 18:1-7

The Revelation of Judgment: (Woe declared) 18:1-3

The Realization of Judgment: (Wreckage described) 18:4-6

The Result of Judgment: (Worship delivered) 18:7

7. Judgment against Egypt: 19:1-15

In chapter 19, Isaiah proclaims an oracle or burden of judgment against Egypt which in the first section, verses 1-15, is similar to declarations of judgment against other nations but in the second section, verses 16 to 25 is one of the most profound prophetic statements of God’s world-wide intent for all nations in the future when the Messiah returns to rule over His kingdom.

The background of Isaiah chapter 19 is the conflict within Egypt which has led to internal strife and to a weak and divided leadership. During the years 720 to 721 B.C., Egypt was attacked by the Assyrians and the Ethiopians. The Ethiopian king, Shabaka, became the eventual ruler of Egypt. The reference to Egypt being delivered into the hands of a cruel master and mighty king in vs. 4 could refer to king Shabaka from Ethiopia or perhaps to king Sargon of Assyria. The Assyrians defeated the Egyptians in war but it was king Shabaka of Ethiopia who actually ruled the Egyptians with cruelty and brutality. See Herbert W. Wolf, *Interpreting Isaiah*, page 122, for a short introduction to chapter 19.

19:1 *An oracle about Egypt.*

*Look, the LORD rides on a swift cloud
and comes to Egypt.*

*The idols of Egypt tremble at his presence;
the hearts of Egyptians melt within them.*

In verses 1-4, the prophet proclaims a message of judgment on Egypt in the form of a picture of God riding on a swift cloud to come to Egypt, vs. 1. (See also Deuteronomy 33:26; Psalm 18:10, 68:33 and 104:3-4). It is not that God needs to ride on the clouds to get from place to place but

Isaiah is describing the rapid advance by God to bring His will to this evil nation. God is a sovereign King over the His created world. This will not be the first lesson the Lord would teach the nation of Egypt. The story of the Exodus and God's dealing with a stubborn Pharaoh and his people was a reminder to all peoples of the foolishness of trusting in idols and false gods. Sadly, Egypt would need to have a repeat lesson. However, the lesson for the people of Isaiah's day was more than learning of the judgment of God upon Egypt. The people of God were only to trust in the true God who had a covenant relationship with them and not to trust in any nation for help in times of crisis or at any other time.

19:2-4 *"I will stir up the Egyptians against the Egyptians;
each one will fight against his brother,
each person against his neighbor,
city against city,
and kingdom against kingdom.*

³ *The spirit of Egypt will be demoralized within them;
I will make their plans ineffective.
They will seek guidance from idols,
and from spirits of the dead,
along with mediums and sorcerers.*

⁴ *I will hand the Egyptians over to the hand of a cruel master,
and a fierce king will rule over them,"
says the sovereign LORD of hosts.*

Isaiah declares that it is God who is behind the civil strife which will soon come upon the Egyptians. God will incite the Egyptians to fight against each other including city against city and kingdom against kingdom. The strategy of the Egyptians to resist God's plans for this nation will be defeated by God. The word "plans" in vs. 3 is the Hebrew *etsah* meaning strategy, purposes, counsel or advice. The Egyptians will consult their idols and spirits but they will be of no help. God will also bring a cruel master and a mighty king to rule over them (vs. 4). Many suggestions have been made as to the identity of this "fierce king." These suggestions include the Assyrian kings Sargon 11, Sennacherib or Esarhaddon or the Ethiopian king Shabaka. Since this fierce king or his country was not mentioned it is best to let Isaiah's prophecy stand as a warning to Egypt that they will face God's judgment upon them in the person of His choosing.

This was God's judgment on Egypt which as a nation had continually refused to acknowledge Him as the one true God and Creator and Lord of the Earth. Even the past history lesson of the plagues many years before was not heeded by these heathen people who lived in close proximity to a land whose ultimate ruler was God.

19:5-10 *The waters from the sea will be dried up,
and the Nile river will be waterless and dry.*

- ⁶ *The rivers will become foul;
the streams of Egypt will be depleted and dried up;
the reeds and rushes will wither away.*
- ⁷ *The bulrushes by the Nile,
by the mouth of the Nile,
and all the sown fields by the Nile,
will wither, be blown away and gone.*
- ⁸ *The fishermen will lament,
all those who cast hooks into the Nile will mourn,
and those who spread nets on the waters will waste away.*
- ⁹ *Those who work in combed flax will despair
and those who weave white cloth will grow pale.*
- ¹⁰ *The weavers will be crushed;
all those who work for wages will be grieved.*

In verses 5-10, Isaiah describes the physical outcome of God's judgment. The Nile river, described in vs. 5 as "*the waters from the sea*" will dry up along with all other rivers, canals and streams. Those who earn their living by the sea including farmers who need irrigation for their crops, fishermen who will have no catch and those who make linen from combed flax and the weavers of fine linen, these will have no livelihood. The leaders of Egypt to the hired laborers will be "crushed" and "grieved in soul".

Although some may interpret these verses as an allegory referring to the collapse of the economic, social and government structure of Egypt, there is no reason to change from a literal historical-grammatical interpretation which has been used up to this point in this study of Isaiah. David L. Cooper makes this comment on these verses in defense of a literal historical-grammatical interpretation:

"An examination of Isaiah 19:5-10 discloses the fact that in addition to the civil war which would wreck the country, there would also be the drying up of the Nile River which would prove to be a national calamity. The Nile ceased to flow several centuries before the days of Joseph. Then in his time there was a famine in the land for seven years, caused by the drying up of the Nile. Isaiah, in this special paragraph which we are studying, likewise foretold the ceasing of the yearly inundation of Egypt by the Nile. As a result the fisheries would be stopped, the manufacture of linen cloth for the priests and for the wrapping of mummies, and the manufacture of cotton for the great masses of Egypt would cease. General distress would be the result. All industry alike would cease. The waters would no longer be in the canals, the fields would be reduced to dust, and the topsoil would be blown off by the wind. The country from end to end would be one great desolation and waste." (D.L. Cooper, *Commentary on Isaiah*, Biblical Research Monthly-April 1944).

If no history of the Nile since Isaiah's day exists for such a drying up of its waters, then this must be a prophecy yet to be fulfilled. This is in concert with verses 16-25 which describe events during the coming day of the Lord. The reference to the river drying up is also consistent to another future day prophecy recorded in Isaiah 11:15:

*The LORD will divide the gulf of the Egyptian sea;
with his scorching wind he will wave his hand
over the Euphrates River.
He will split it up into seven streams,
and enable people to cross over in sandals.*

See also Isaiah 44:27 and 50:2.

19:11-13 *The princes of Zoan are absolutely foolish;
the Pharaoh's wise counselors give stupid advice.
How do you dare say to Pharaoh,
"I am a sage,
a student of the ancient kings?"*

¹² *Where now are your wise men?
Let them tell you now
and make known what the LORD of hosts
has planned concerning Egypt.*

¹³ *The officials of Zoan have become fools,
the officials of Memphis are deceived;
they have caused Egypt to go astray,
those who were the cornerstones of her tribes.*

The prophet turns his attention to those who bring advice to Pharaoh and to his court. The wisdom of these advisors will be seen as stupidity for they could not have foreseen the actions of God against their nation. The drying up of the Nile (vs. 5) would be a devastating blow to the Egyptians who worshipped the river as a god. "Zoan, (vs. 11), also known as Tanis, was a major city in the Nile delta area of northern Egypt. Memphis (vs. 13), also known as Noph was also a major city and was once the capital of northern Egypt.

In vs. 13, the word "deceived" is the Hebrew *nasha*. It occurs first in Scripture in Genesis 3:13 where Eve responded to God about her disobedience by eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, "*The serpent deceived me, and I ate.*" Other notable occurrences of *nasha* are found in Jeremiah 4:10; 29:8; 37:9; 49:16; Obadiah verses 3 and 7. Also in vs. 13, the word "cornerstones" (cornerstone) is the Hebrew word *pinnah*. It has a significant meaning in the Scriptures. The word "cornerstone" (stone) refers to the Messiah in Psalm 118:22; Isaiah 8:14-15; 28:16 and Zechariah 10:4. In the New Testament, this prophecy of the Messiah is stated in Matthew 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17; Acts 4:11; Romans 9:33; Ephesians 2:20; and 1 Peter 2:6-8.

19:14 *The LORD has poured a spirit of distortion into her;
they have caused Egypt to go astray in everything she does,
like a drunkard staggering around in his own vomit.*

Isaiah sums up the actions of the foolish advisors and wise men, “*they have caused Egypt to go astray in everything she does.*” The nation has been judged by God who has mixed or poured within her a spirit of distortion. “Distortion” is the Hebrew word *ivim* and has the meaning of perversity and warping. In the Old Testament, it only occurs in this verse. Because of repeated sins and rebellion against God, the Lord had given the so-called wise-men of Egypt over to the consequences of their actions. Like the famous Pharaoh of the time of the exodus, they had so hardened their own hearts to any acknowledgement of the wisdom of God or to seek the only God who could save them from the consequences of their sins, that God poured upon them the perversity of their evilness and let their sins lead them to its ultimate end: death.

19: 15 *Egypt can do nothing about it,
head or tail,
palm branch or reed.*

Isaiah declares the physical condition of the people of Egypt, “*Egypt can do nothing about it.*” The leaders, wise men, and all peoples of Egypt have been completely demoralized, defeated and distraught. This was the condition of the Egyptians when king Shabaka from Ethiopia overcame the nation with his forces and ruled them for several years. It was not that Shabaka was insightful and powerful enough by his own wisdom and power to walk into Egypt and conquer it, but it was God who delivered the Egyptians into the hand of this cruel master, (compare vs. 4). God is the One who rules the earth with His power, purposes and plans. God raises up rulers and deposes them to accomplish His will on the earth. (Daniel 2:21). The words “*head or tail, palm branch or reed*” were used by Isaiah to describe the judgment upon Israel for its refusal to seek the Lord. (Isaiah 9:13-16). The elders, dignitaries and prophets of Israel were leading the people of God astray just as the wise-men of Egypt through their foolish (stupid) advice were leading Pharaoh and the people of Egypt astray.

Summary of 9:1-15: The rulers of the earth are reduced to nothing and will last but a moment in time. Isaiah 40:23-24. Proud and powerful nations and leaders need to heed the word of God. They have their position only because it is a part of God’s will for His earth and suits His plans and purposes to accomplish what He wishes. Any nation or ruler should humbly submit in worship and adoration to God for the place and position He has established them in order to carry out His will for all peoples on the earth.

Teaching Outline for Isaiah 19:1-15

The demoralization of Egypt’s people: 19:1-4

The destruction of Egypt’s prosperity: 19:5-10

The deflation of Egypt’s princes: 19:11-15

8. Egypt, Assyria and Israel to Worship the Lord: 19:16-25

The latter section of chapter 19 of Isaiah is punctuated with six “in that day” prophecies: verses 16, 18, 19, 21, 23 and 24. These prophecies move the narrative from the time of Isaiah to the time when the Lord will send a Savior and Champion to deliver Egypt from their oppressors and then Egypt, Assyria and Israel will together worship the Lord. Victor Buksbazen comments on the wider passage of Isaiah chapters 18-20 which reveals God’s plans for these nations:

“Chapters 18-20 form a remarkable prophecy which deals with the destiny of Ethiopia, Egypt, Assyria and Judah. Here Isaiah reaches the pinnacle of prophetic universalism, unsurpassed anywhere else in the Old Testament.” (Victor Buksbazen, *Isaiah*, page 211.)

19:16-17 *In that day the Egyptians will be like fearful women; they will tremble and fear because the LORD of hosts waves his fist; he shakes it against them.*

¹⁷ *The land of Judah will become a terror to Egypt; everyone who hears mention of it will be terrified, because of what the counsel of the LORD of hosts advises against it.*

Isaiah states that “in that day” the Egyptians will tremble and fear because of what the Lord will bring to them, due to the action of the Lord who “waves his fist” and “shakes it against them.” The Lord made a similar statement, as recorded in the second chapter of Zechariah, verses 8-12 which in many ways is a parallel passage to these verses in Isaiah. “For this is what the LORD of hosts says: “After his glory sent me against the nations that plundered you--for the one who touches you, touches the apple of his eye.”⁹ For, look, **I will shake my fist against them**, and they will be plundered by their own slaves. Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent me.¹⁰ Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion; for look, I will come and I will live in your midst,” says the LORD.¹¹ “Many nations will join themselves to the LORD on that day, and will be my people, and I will dwell in your midst, and you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you.¹² The LORD will inherit Judah as his portion in the holy land, and will again choose Jerusalem.”

Even tiny Judah, according to vs 17, (in that day implied), will be a terror to the Egyptians due to God’s purpose against Egypt. Since 1948, Egypt has fought four wars with Israel and has lost each one. It is not difficult to see how Egypt, in the days leading up to the Messianic kingdom, will be in dread of the small nation of Israel due to the works of God on behalf of Israel.

19:18 *In that day there will be five cities in the land of Egypt that speak the language of Canaan, and swear allegiance to LORD of hosts. One will be called the City of Sun.*

Isaiah speaks of a number of cities in Egypt which, “in that day” will speak the language of Canaan or Israel which will be the Hebrew language. These cities will also be loyal to the Lord of hosts and swear allegiance to Him. One of the five cities will be called the “City of Sun” which can be understood as the “City of Destruction” which could be a reference to the Egyptian City of On and known as Heliopolis (Greek). The city of On was known for its worship of the Sun as a god. In the Millennial kingdom, this city will worship the Lord of hosts as God.

19:19 *In that day there will be an altar to the LORD in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar dedicated to the LORD at its border.*

Not only will there be cities in Egypt that speak Hebrew and are loyal to God, but an altar to the Lord will be erected in the midst (perhaps middle) of Egypt. Also, a pillar will be raised to the Lord in Egypt near its border. In ages past, Abraham built an altar to God as an indication of his commitment to God. Genesis 12:8 and Jacob erected a pillar to express his allegiance to God because of the Lord's covenant which He had made with Abraham and later with Isaac and then with Jacob. Genesis 28:22. One of the important aspects of Jacob's erection of the pillar was that he named the place where the pillar stood Bethel, which means the "house of God". In vs. 20 the purpose of the altar and pillar are stated as, "a sign and a witness to the LORD of hosts in the land of Egypt". Within Egypt, in the Millennial kingdom, the altar and a pillar in Egypt will represent the fulfillment of the covenant God made with Abraham and also signify that the house of God will be recognized in that former pagan nation. A further reason for the erecting of the altar and pillar is that they will be a witness of the response of God who, will send them a "Savior and a Champion" in response to their crying out to God because of those (nations) who will oppress them. It is not known which nations will oppress the Egyptians in the days prior to the coming of the Lord to set up His kingdom. When Christ, the Savior and Champion, returns to deliver Israel from their enemies, He will also deliver Egypt from their enemies.

19:20 *It will be a sign and a witness to the LORD of hosts in the land of Egypt. They will cry out to the LORD because of oppressors, and he will send them a savior and a defender who will deliver them.*

The prophet in vs.20 records a reminder to Egypt of the mercies of God. When the people of Israel cried out to God when they were slaves in Egypt, God sent a champion to deliver them and set them free. When Egypt will also face oppression and circumstances from which they cannot escape, they also will cry out to God who will save them from their enemies. The pillar which will be erected at the border of Egypt which will be dedicated to the Lord will act as both a sign and a witness to the people of Egypt that they can "look" to the Lord to be their savior who will defend them against and deliver them from their oppressors.

19:21 *The LORD will reveal himself to Egypt, and the Egyptians will know the LORD in that day. They will worship with sacrifices and offerings, and will make a vow to the LORD and keep it.*

Isaiah provides just how intimate the people of Egypt will be with their God, the Lord of hosts. The Egyptians of this later day will know the Lord as God makes Himself known to them. The Egyptian people will worship the Lord with sacrifices and offering just as the Israelites will be doing in the Millennial temple, Ezekiel chapters 45 and 46. The Egyptians will also, in that day, "make a vow to the Lord and keep it."

19:22 *The LORD will strike Egypt, striking and then healing them. They will return to the LORD, and he will listen to their prayers and heal them.*

The prophet adds more detail of the workings of the Lord. For some reason, which is not stated in Isaiah chapter 19, the Lord will strike Egypt and then heal the people so that the Egyptians will “return to the Lord”. When the Egyptians return to the Lord, God will respond to them and will heal them. This striking of Egypt could refer to a further action needed to completely bring Egypt to be obedient to God as referenced in Zechariah 14: 16-19 or to another incident not mentioned in elsewhere in the Scriptures.

Thomas Constable comments on verses 19-22:

Abraham built an altar to express his gratitude and commitment to the Lord (Gen. 12:8; cf. Josh. 22:34; 24:26-27), and Jacob erected a pillar when he memorialized God's covenant to him (Gen. 28:22). The Egyptians will do these things throughout their land to express those things in that day (v. 19)

.....

Israelites during the Judges Period cried out to God because of their oppressors, and He sent them deliverers (Judg. 3:9, 15; 6:7; 10:10). Their great oppressor in the past, of course, had been Egypt herself. Similarly, when the Egyptians call out to God for help, He will send them a Savior and a Champion, Messiah (v. 20). The Lord revealed Himself to the Israelites and brought them into a saving relationship with Himself through bitter defeat in the Exodus (Exod. 7:5; 9:29; 14:4).

He will do the same to the Egyptians in that future day (v. 21; cf. Jer. 31:34; Zech. 14:16-18), and they will respond with appropriate worship. Parents sometimes strike their children to bring them into line, and God will discipline Egypt to bring her to Himself. He will hurt them, but He will hurt them to heal them, like a surgeon (v. 22). This whole section is a picture of reconciliation still future. (Thomas Constable, *Isaiah*, pages 94-95).

19:23-25 *In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria. Assyrians will come to Egypt, and the Egyptians will go to Assyria. Egyptians will worship with Assyrians.*

²⁴ *In that day Israel will be a third member with Egypt and with Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth.*

²⁵ *For the LORD of hosts has blessed them, saying,*

*"Blessed be Egypt my people,
Assyria the work of my hands,
and Israel my inheritance."*

Isaiah in verses 23-25 brings to a climax the prophecy of the events of that day. A highway will exist connecting Egypt with Assyria (and successor nations). The highway will be used for travel and communication between these nations and most importantly this highway will facilitate worship as these nations will worship God together. Once fierce and powerful enemies will now peacefully worship God as God works out His perfect plan for the nations of the earth.

Isaiah punctuates this stunning relationship with God's viewpoint as to the relationship of these nations and Israel with Him. In vs. 24, Isaiah states, "*In that day Israel will be a third member with Egypt and with Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth.*" This is one fulfillment of God's covenant with Abraham, stated in Genesis 12:1-3 ending with the words, "*Through you all the families of the earth will be blessed.*" This blessing includes the Israelites as well as the Gentiles.

The last sentence of this prophecy is unique in the Scriptures as it ascribes intimate affection to the Gentile nations of Egypt and to Assyria (and successor nations) that otherwise was only between God and His chosen people Israel. God calls Egypt, "my people" which was a phrase He often used for Israel. (Exodus 5:1, 6:7; Leviticus 26:12; 1 Samuel 9:17; 2 Samuel 7:8; 1 Chronicles 17:9; 2 Chronicles 6:6; Psalm 81:13, Isaiah 10:24; Jeremiah 7:12, 12:4 30:3; Ezekiel 36:8; Daniel 9:20; Joel 2:27; Amos 7:15, 9:14). However, the prophet Zechariah proclaims regarding "that day": "*Many nations will join themselves to the LORD on that day, and will be my people, and I will dwell in your midst, and you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you.*" (Zechariah 2:11). In this last verse of Isaiah chapter 19, God calls Assyria, "*the work of my hands*" a phrase that also was used by God to refer to Israel. (Isaiah 60:21). However, the Lord reserves solely to Israel, the term, "Israel my inheritance". Deuteronomy 32:9 and Joel 3:2.

The lessons of chapter 19 verses 16 to 25 are important for Israel and all who believers in Christ, the Messiah. These lessons include: *First*, God will honor and not forget His covenants with His people. *Second*, God will shape or direct the events of history to fulfill His plans and purposes for the peoples of the earth. *Third*, God will not leave helpless and provide a Savior to those who cry out to Him in true repentance. *Fourth*, God desires all peoples to come to Him in worship and He will call these people, whether Jew or Gentile, His people who are the work of His hands to bring about His perfect purposes for mankind. *Fifth*, God will cause former enemies, whom the Lord has blessed, to be the source of blessings in the midst of the earth. *Sixth*, these events will take place in "that day", a day the Lord has established when the peoples of the earth will worship the Lord and they will know the Lord personally for He will reign among them.

Teaching Outline for Isaiah 19:16-25

In that day, the Egyptians will be terrified of the land of Judah: 19:16-17

In that day, five Egyptian cities will speak the language of the Hebrews: 19:18

In that day, an altar and a pillar "to the Lord" will be erected in Egypt: 19:19-20

In that day, the Egyptians will know the Lord: 19:21-22

In that day, a highway will exist between Egypt and Assyria: 19:23

In that day, Egypt, Assyria and Israel will be together as a blessing in the earth: 19:24--25

9. No escape for Egypt and Ethiopia: 20:1-6

The short chapter of Isaiah 20 is a summary of the lessons God wanted the Israelites to know regarding trusting other nations for safety when facing their enemies. These few verses also act as the conclusion to the prophecies regarding Egypt and Cush (Ethiopia) in the Judgment of the Nations section, chapters 13 to 23. Isaiah, as he had previously done in 6:1 and 7:1 of his prophecy, indicates an exact time when the Lord gave him the words regarding Egypt and Cush.

20:1 *In the year when Sargon the king of Assyria sent his commander-in-chief to Ashdod, he fought against Ashdod and took it.*

The year (vs. 1) can be established as 711 B.C. Sargon II of Assyria sent his military commander, or Tartan which is a title for the chief of staff for the Assyrian forces, according to V. Buksabazen, *Isaiah*, page 220. Ashdod was the northernmost city of Philistia about 35 miles south west of Jerusalem. The people of Ashdod had rebelled against paying tribute to Assyria. The Assyrians in response replaced the king of Ashdod, Ahimiti, with another ruler, Yamani who would be more favorable to Assyria. However, Yamani was forced by the people of Ashdod to also withhold tribute from Assyria and it was then that King Sargon II sent his military commander to conquer Ashdod. Yamani realizing the immediate danger fled to Egypt for protection. When the Assyrians also threatened Egypt, the Egyptians handed over Yamani to the Assyrian forces. (adapted from Thomas Constable, *Isaiah*, page 97).

20:2 *At that time the LORD spoke through Isaiah the son of Amoz, saying, "Go, and take off the sackcloth from your waist, and remove your sandals from your feet." So he did it, walking naked and barefoot.*

The identifying phrase “*at that time*”, would have been the time of the conquest of Ashdod by the Assyrian king Sargon II, 711 B.C. See vs. 1 above. God requested that Isaiah to do a most unusual thing. Isaiah was to remove his sackcloth, which indicated that he had been in mourning, from his waist and remove his sandals from his feet, so that he would be walking both naked and with bare feet. Isaiah obeyed this command and went “*naked and barefoot*”. The reference to naked is acknowledged by many commentators to be without his outer garment. He would have still worn his undergarment. To be completely naked would have been seen as a shameful way to walk about where people could see him. Thus, Isaiah was a visual portrait as an object lesson for the end of a period of mourning and the transition to a portrait of judgment as a sign to Egypt and Cush as verses 3-4 explain. Both Jeremiah (13:1-11; 19:1-15; 27:1-2; 32:6-16; 43:8-13) and Ezekiel (2:8-3:3; 4:1-17; 5:1-4; 12:1-16, 17-20; 21:18-23; 37:15-23) were requested by God to be visual portraits as object lessons of His judgment.

20:3-4 *Then the LORD said, "Just like my servant Isaiah has walked naked and barefoot for three years as a sign and a harbinger against Egypt and Ethiopia,
⁴ so the king of Assyria will lead away the captives of Egypt and the exiles of Ethiopia, both young and old, naked and barefoot, and with buttocks bared, to the shame of Egypt.*

The Lord gave the reason for this shameful appearance of Isaiah. It was to be a sign and token against Egypt and Cush. In vs. 4, the Lord continues, “*so the king of Assyria will lead away the captives of Egypt and the exiles of Ethiopia, both young and old, naked and barefoot, and with buttocks bared to the shame of Egypt.*” Isaiah’s appearance for three years was a portrait sign-act to the nations of Egypt and Cush that they would also walk in this same manner, as captives to Assyria. The historical timeframe for the fulfillment of this prophecy most likely came in 701 B.C. when the Assyrians defeated the Egyptians at Eltekeh.

Also in vs. 3 the Lord addressed Isaiah as “My servant”. This is a very significant title that the Lord gave to the prophet. It signifies that the prophet was acting on the Lord’s behalf to bring a specific message to certain peoples and nations. Many individuals and the nation of Israel were called God’s servant. Abraham is the first to be called God’s servant, Genesis 26:24. Others include Moses: Numbers 12:7-8; Joshua 1:2,7; 2 Kings 21:8 and Malachi 4:4. Caleb: Numbers 14:24. David: 2 Samuel 3:18 and numerous other verses. Job: 1:8 and other verses; Eliakim: 22:20; The Son of God, Messiah as Servant of the Lord: Isaiah 42:1; 49:5-7; 52:13; 53:11; Zechariah 3:8; Matthew 12:18. The nation Israel: 41:8-9 and numerous other verses. Nebuchadnezzar: Jeremiah 25:9; 27:6 and 43:10. Zerubbabel: Haggai 2:23. God called His faithful proclaimers: My servants the prophets: 2 Kings 9:7; 17:13; Jeremiah 7:25; 26:5; 29:19; 35:15; 44:4; Ezekiel 28:17 and Zechariah 1:6. In the New Testament, believers are called the servants of the Lord. This catalog of verses contains some very prominent names including that of king David but most importantly the Servant of the Lord (Messiah) of whom Isaiah will have much more to say in the later chapters of his prophecy.

20:5-6 *They will be dismayed and ashamed because Ethiopia was their hope, and Egypt their boast. ⁶ In that day the inhabitants of this coastland will say, 'Look at what happened to our hope, to those we fled to for help and deliverance from the king of Assyria! How will we ever escape?'"*

Isaiah describes the sign-act and its meaning to Egypt and Cush and was further intended to be a dramatic message to the people of Judah who were now “*dismayed and ashamed*” because they realized that the nations of Egypt and Cush, whom they were trusting in to protect them from the advance of the Assyrian armies, would be of no help. The people of Judah who looked away from the Lord to these pagan nations now were in distress and exclaimed, “*How shall we ever escape?*” The purpose of the proclamations of Isaiah, as recorded in this chapter and others, specifically chapters 36-37 was to answer this question. The only way of escape from the Assyrian advance to destroy Jerusalem was for Judah, from its lowest member of society to the king, to trust in the Lord. The Lord alone could be trusted. No other nation or peoples could accomplish their salvation.

Teaching Outline for Isaiah 20:1-6

The Destruction of Ashdod: 20:1

The Drama-Act of the Prophet: 20:2-3

The Doom of Egypt and Cush: 20: 4-5

The Despair of Judah’s Hope: 20:6

Prophecy of Babylon's Fall: 21:1-10

Chapters 21 to 23 of Isaiah contain the second set of five oracles in the wider section of chapters 13 to 23. The oracles in this second set are: the Prophecy of Babylon's Fall 21:1-10; the Judgment against Edom 21:11-12; the Judgment against Arabia 21:13-17; the Valley of Vision and Weeping over Israel including the prophecy of David's Key and the Peg 22:1-25; and the Prophecy of Tyre's fall 23:1-18.

An introduction to Babylon is contained in the study of the Judgment against Babylon, Isaiah 13:1 – 14:23. The second oracle against Babylon, chapter 21, verses 1-10 is a prophecy most likely about the complete destruction of Babylon by the Assyrians in 689 B.C. during a time when Babylon was an ally of Judah. The destruction of Babylon described in these verses was probably not the "capturing" of the city of Babylon by Cyrus in 539 B.C. because Elam (21:2) did not exist after 646 B.C. and could not have been a party to the capture of Babylon by Cyrus. Also, Cyrus the Persian did not lead a destructive attack against Babylon but led his forces to walk into the city almost unopposed. As well, it would be unlikely that Isaiah would show so much anguish (21:3-4) over Babylon's fall if it was during a time when Babylon was the terrifying enemy of Judah instead of being Judah's ally. See Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah*, Vol. 1, page 369 for an expanded discussion.

The purpose of this prophecy, 21:1-10, in its local setting is to warn the people of Judah not to trust in Babylon as an ally against Assyria. This best fits the context of the previous chapters of Isaiah in which the prophet brought a message to Judah not to trust the nations near Judah to be of any help against the ravaging forces of Assyria. As with many passages of Isaiah, the prophecy in 21:1-10 also has a connection with the latter days, in this case during the tribulation period, in which the final destruction of Babylon is described: Revelation chapters 17 and 18.

21:1 *An oracle about the Wilderness by the Sea.*

*Like whirlwinds in the Negev sweep through,
it comes from the wilderness,
from a terrifying land.*

The prophet describes an oracle or "burden" concerning the "wilderness of the sea". In the context of verses 1-10, this oracle is against Babylon, vs. 9. The identification of the "wilderness of the sea" as Babylon can be verified by a comparison with Jeremiah 51:12-13.

"Raise the flag signaling the attack of the walls of Babylon, reinforce the watchmen, post the guards, prepare the ambushes. For the LORD has planned and done what he has spoken concerning the inhabitants of Babylon.¹³ O you who dwell along many waters, abundant in treasures, your end is come, the thread of your life is cut."

Babylon was built on the marshes and over the many streams which made up that part of the Euphrates River. When the river was in its flood mode, the walls of Babylon loomed above what could be described as a city floating on the sea. Against this “floating city” came windstorms from the Negev which was a barren and hot desert area. These hot and dry desert windstorms created a deserted and unbearable wilderness. Thus, the prophet could state at the end of vs. 1, “*It comes from the wilderness, from a terrifying land.*” This description is an introduction to the definition of the peoples or nation which is coming against Babylon.

21:2 *A harsh vision was told to me;
the treacherous man deals treacherously,
and the destroyer destroys.
Go up, O Elam;
lay siege, O Media;
all the sighing she has caused
I will bring to an end.*

Isaiah describes the vision of which he has been shown to him as “harsh” for “*the treacherous man deals treacherously, and the destroyer destroys.*” Elam and Media are called upon to rise up against the assault of the Assyrians. The assault by Assyria would put an end to all the “groaning” of the nations which had been caused by the brutality of the Babylonians. The words treacherous and treacherously are *bagad* in the Hebrew. The ESV translate these words as “*The traitor betrays.*” Isaiah will use *bagad* again in 24:16 (twice); 33:1 (twice) and 48:8. The words destroyer and destroys are *sadad* in the Hebrew. The NIV translates these words as: “*The looter takes loot.*” The NKJV translates them as: “*The plunderer plunders*”. Isaiah had used *sadad* previously in 15:1 and 16:4 and will use this word again in 23:1; 23:14 and 33:1 (twice). Isaiah 33:1 is an emphatic usage of these words by the prophet referring to Assyria:

*Woe to you who destroy,
but you have not been destroyed;
and you traitor,
but they have not betrayed you!
When you finish destroying,
you yourself will be destroyed.
When you have finished betraying,
they will betray you.*

21:3-4 *Therefore my loins are filled with anguish;
pangs have seized hold of me,
like the pangs of a woman in labor.
I am so bewildered by what I hear,
troubled by what I see.*

⁴ *My heart flutters,
horror has frightened me;
the twilight that I desired has brought me only trembling.*

Since Babylon was an ally of Judah (Isaiah 39:1-8), the prophecy of the destruction of Babylon, whom the people of Judah were hoping would help them against Assyria, would have caused Isaiah much anguish and terror as the prophet describes in verses 3 and 4. The prophet felt compassionate and empathetic for his fellow Jews in Judah, who were now without any help from any nation who could stand against the fierce armies of the Assyrians. This very human response to a helpless situation demonstrates how Isaiah identifies with his people. The prophecy Isaiah has been given by God meant Judah was now defenseless and helpless and facing certain destruction.

21:5 *They prepare the table,
they lay the carpet,
they eat, they drink.
Get up, you commanders,
oil the shields.*

While there is no direct reference to any specific nation or situation, Isaiah seems to describe a banquet by a visiting delegation, perhaps the envoys of Babylon, who visited Judah as recorded in chapter 39:1-8. While feasting with the leaders of Judah, the visitors were plotting to overthrow this tiny country and steal its treasures. The Assyrians were described as the “treacherous one” and the “destroyer” in vs. 2 and in vs. 5 it is possible that the allies of Judah, the Babylonians were also seen as just as treacherous and destructive to this small nation of Judah.

21:6-7 *For this is what the Lord says to me,
"Go, post a lookout,
let him report what he observes.*

⁷ *When he sees chariots
with pairs of horses,
riders on donkeys,
riders on camels,
let him be vigilant, very vigilant.*

In light of the treachery of both Assyria and perhaps also Babylon, the Lord requests the prophet to “station the lookout” and let the lookout report what he sees. The Lord in vs. 7 cautions Isaiah to tell the lookout to pay close attention if he sees “chariots, with pairs of horses, riders on donkeys, riders on camels.” This was likely an indication that an invading army (Assyria army) was on the move and the lookout was to keep watching carefully for other developments that would arise from the advance of this invading army.

21:8-9 *Then he cried out,
"O Lord, I stand constantly on the watchtower in the day,
and am stationed at my post every night.*

⁹ *Look, here comes a man on a chariot with a pair of horses."*

He announces,

*"Babylon is fallen, fallen;
and all the carved images of her gods
are smashed into the ground."*

The lookout reports that he is continually watching and suddenly reports that he sees a "troop of riders, horsemen in pairs" and he hears the message, "Babylon is *fallen, fallen; and all the carved images of her gods are smashed into the ground.*" Thus, the prophet hears the tragic news that, Judah's ally, who were treacherously plotting the destruction of Judah, were themselves destroyed by the overwhelming force of the Assyrian armies. Babylon would fall and yet rise again. However, the final defeat of Babylon would need to wait until the days of the great tribulation in the future and these very words, "*Fallen, Babylon the great is fallen.*" would once again ring out, this time by an angel from heaven. Revelation 18:1-3 (DASV): "*After these things I saw another angel coming down out of heaven, having great authority; and the earth was brightened by his glory*² *He shouted out with a mighty voice: "Fallen, Babylon the great is fallen, and is become a dwelling place for demons, and a haunt for every unclean spirit and every unclean and disgusting beast.*³ *All the nations have fallen because of the wine of the passion of her immorality. The kings of the earth have had sex with her, and the merchants of the earth have grown rich from her extravagant luxury."*

For a very extensive discussion on the fall of Babylon in the future see Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah*, Chapter 14, pages 309-357. John F. Walvoord comments on the fall of Babylon in Revelation 18:1-3:

"The announcement by the angel given in verses 2 and 3 declares that Babylon the great is fallen. The repetition of the verb "is fallen" found in the aorist tense, indicates a sudden event viewed as completed, though the context would indicate a future event. Seiss believes that the repetition of the phrase "is fallen" is intended to describe "two separate parts or stages to the fall, answering to the two aspects in which Babylon is contemplated, referring first to Babylon in mystery, as a *system* or spirit of false worship, and second to Babylon as a *city*, in which this system or spirit is embodied.¹

In chapter 18, the context seems to indicate that Babylon here is viewed in its political and economic character rather than in its religious aspect.It seems that chapter 17 deals with the religious aspect and chapter 18 with the political and economic aspects of Babylon." [Note 1: Joseph A. Seiss, *The Apocalypse*, p. 407] (John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ: A Commentary*, Moody Press, 1966, pages 258-259).

Victor Buksbazen comments on verses 6-9 of Isaiah chapter 21:

"In contrast to the careless watchmen set by the carousing Babylonians, who failed to warn their masters, God has set His own faithful watchman, the prophet himself, to look into the approaching events with all the keenness of his spirit and his senses. The prophet stands on watch day and night, giving faithful warning about everything that the Lord has shown him.

He sees the approaching enemy, riding on horses, camels and asses, animals, which were used not only as mounts for the cavalry, but for carrying equipment and also to cause confusion in the ranks of the enemies. The prophet-watchman sees the enemy cavalcade entering the city, then emerging with the triumphant shout: "Fallen, fallen is Babylon!" This triumphant shout was later echoed by John: "Babylon the great is fallen and is become the habitation of devils and every foul spirit" (Rev. 18:2). Already in Isaiah's vision, Babylon is the symbol of universal tyranny and injustice, under which all the nations groan and languish.

In the book of Revelation, Babylon symbolizes the wicked world powers which openly defy God and His Anointed, and which eventually will be crushed by the Son of God." (Victor Buksbazen, *Isaiah*, pages 222-223).

21:10 *O my people, threshed and beaten on my threshing floor!
I have reported to you what I have heard
from the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel.*

The message of the destruction of Babylon was news of devastation to the people of Judah and a cause of affliction as recorded by Isaiah who called his people "threshed" and "beaten". Isaiah faithfully relayed the message he had from the Lord to the people of Judah. It was a message from the mighty Lord of hosts (armies) whom had an army that was and is invincible and by implication, the Lord's people needed to stop trusting in foreign pagan nations for their salvation and put their trust and hope solely in the Lord of hosts whom alone could save them from their enemies.

Isaiah made it clear who is the saving One of the people of God. King David earlier had written a song which the people should have remembered as recorded in Psalm 18:1-3:

*I love you, O LORD, my strength.
2 The LORD is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer;
my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge;
my shield and the horn of my salvation,
my stronghold.
3 I called on the LORD, who is worthy to be praised,
so I was saved from my enemies.*

Refer also to 2 Samuel 22:2-4.

Teaching Outline for Isaiah 21:1-10

The Assault of the Enemy: 21:1-2

The Anguish of the Prophet: 21:3-4

The Ambush of the Envoys: 21:5

The Announcement of the Lookout: 21:6-9

The Afflicted of the Lord: 21:10

11. Judgment against Edom: 21:11-12

21:11-12 *An oracle about Dumah.*

*Someone calls to me from Seir,
"Watchman, what of the night?
Watchman, what of the night?"*

¹² *The watchman replied,
"The morning is coming, then also the night.
If you want to ask, then ask; come back again."*

Edom was a small country located to the southeast of the Dead Sea. It was named after Esau, the brother of Jacob. Esau was hated by God. (Malachi 1:3, Romans 9:6-13). Edom was also another name for Esau (Genesis 25:30 and 36:1, 8). Esau's home was in the land of Seir, called in Genesis 32:3 as the country of Edom and described in Genesis 36:8 as the "hill country of Seir." The listing of the descendants of Esau (called Edom) is given in Genesis chapter 36. The names Esau and Edom have the meaning of "red" because of Esau's desire to eat the red stew that Jacob had cooked. (Genesis 25:29-30).

Among the actions of Esau and Edom, two major events are worth the consideration of the student of Scripture. In the first event, as recorded in Genesis 25:27-34, Esau, the older brother of Jacob, was willing to sell his birthright to Jacob for a meal of red stew. God's comment on this action is recorded in vs. 34, "*Thus Esau despised his birthright.*" This act was no little thing in God's eyes. The author of the book of Hebrews in the New Testament comments on this act, Hebrews 12:15-17: "*Make sure no one falls short of the grace of God; so that no bitter root springs up causing trouble, and by it many become defiled.*¹⁶ *Make sure that no one becomes like Esau who was an immoral and godless person, who for just one meal sold his own birthright.*¹⁷ *For you know that later when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected; for he found no opportunity to repent, even though he sought it with tears.*"

In the second event, as recorded in Obadiah 1:1-11; Psalm 83:4-6 and 137:4-6, was the reaction by the Edomites to the destruction of Israel by the Babylonians. The Edomites stood back and gloated over the misfortune of their "brothers". They also took part in the looting of the possessions of the Israelites. An earlier event had fore-shadowed this reaction by Edom. In Numbers chapter 20 and referenced in Judges 11:17, the Edomites did not allow the Israelites, led by their leader Moses, to pass through their land during the time of the wanderings of the Israelites between the time they left Egypt and when they finally entered into Canaan. God's reaction in judgment because of the actions of the people of Edom is recorded several times in the Old Testament: Isaiah 11:14, 34:5-6, 63:1; Jeremiah 9:26, 27:3, 49:7-22; Lamentations 4:21-22; Ezekiel 25:12-14, 32:29, 36:5; Amos 1:11, and Malachi 1:1-5 in addition to the passage in Obadiah mentioned above. Ultimately God brings judgment on Edom because of their refusal to repent of their actions against Israel and most importantly for their refusal to acknowledge and worship God as the Sovereign Lord, the God of Judah and the Creator of the heavens and the earth.

In the passage recorded in Isaiah 21:11-12, the prophet describes a night scene in which someone from Seir, representing Edom calls out to Isaiah who is portrayed as a watchman, and asks, “*Watchman, how far gone is the night?*” The word Edom in vs. 11 is *Dumah* in the Hebrew which has a meaning of “silence” or “place of silence”. *Dumah* was also one of the sons of Ishmael (Genesis 25:13-14). The significance of the name *Dumah* could be twofold: 1) it could refer to the judgment of God on Edom rendering Edom to silence and 2) it was where news could be gleaned about the coming of the Assyrian and later the Babylonian armies in their fury and destructive conquest.

The question in vs. 11, “*Watchman, what of the night?*” may have the meaning of: “how long until the morning of rescue from our oppressors appears” In vs. 12, Isaiah first responds, “*The Morning is coming, then also the night.*” This is likely to have the meaning that the assault from the Assyrians will soon be eliminated (Isaiah 37:36-37) which represents the morning. However, another conquering army, the Babylonians, is coming in the future which represents the night. The second response by Isaiah in vs. 22 is best understood from the meaning of the words, “*come back again*”. These words, according to Victor Buksbazen, are stated not in the Hebrew, but in the Aramaic: “*atha*” - come - (as in Maran-atha – Lord come) and “*Thibayun,*” – “*inquire.*” It is related to the Hebrew “*shuv*”- to return. (Victor Buksbazen, *Isaiah*, pages 223-223).

The message of these two verses, Isaiah 21:11-12, therefore is that the Assyrians will not destroy the Edomites but later the Babylonians will conquer them with brutal force. The Edomites must therefore come to the Lord and repent of their sins. It is also a somber message to the Israelites and is given in the wider context of Judah looking to its neighbors for assistance against the onslaught of the advancing Assyrian armies. Just as Babylon will not be of help to Judah, neither should Judah look to its relations who live in Edom. They too will be soon left helpless and must come to the Lord in repentance as must the people of Judah. Isaiah’s most significant audience who need to heed the message of this short oracle is his own people in Judah, even though it is written as a prophetic picture of what will soon be facing the people of Edom.

Teaching Outline for Isaiah 21:11-12

The People’s Request: (A Call for Reprieve): 21:11

The Prophet’s Response: (A Call for Repentance) 21:12

12. Judgment against Arabia: 21:13-17

David L. Cooper provides an introduction to this section:

“An examination of the complete thought of this short prophecy shows that a war was foretold which would sweep through the country and devastate its villages and cities. Because of the ravages of war the regular caravans that traversed the desert, taking the wares of the east doubtless to Tyre, which was on the Syrian coast and which was at that time the mart of the world, are seen going farther north in order to escape the ravages of war. We see the fugitives from the war-stricken areas fleeing and being entertained with the bare necessities of life--water

and bread--as they escape for their lives. According to verse 16 the prophet declared that the war which he foretold would come within one year. Kedar, one of the principal cities, would be reduced to insignificance. He guaranteed that the prophecy would be fulfilled for, "Jehovah, the God of Israel, hath spoken it." (David L. Cooper: *An Exposition on the Prophet Isaiah, IV: Burdens Concerning The Nations Completed*. Chapters 21-23, Biblical Research Monthly-May 1944).

The location of this oracle or burden is the lands of the Arabians which is a vast desert area to the east and southeast of Judah. Dedan, where the caravans originate, was located about 290 miles southeast of Dumah in the northwestern part of the Arabian desert and Tema was located about 200 miles southeast of Duma, also in the northwestern part of the Arabian Desert. Kedar covers the area in the northwestern part of the Arabian desert. (Notes from MacArthur Study Bible, Updated NASB, page 966). Other Old Testament references: Dedan, Tema, and Arabia are mentioned in regards to God's judgment in Jeremiah 25:23-24 and Dedan, Arabia and Kedar are mentioned as the trading partners of Judah in Ezekiel 27:20-21.

21:13-15 *An oracle about Arabia.*

*In the thickets in Arabia you will lodge,
O caravans of Dedanites.*

¹⁴ *Bring water for the thirsty;
O inhabitants of the land of Tema
meet the fugitives with bread.*

¹⁵ *For they have fled from the swords,
from the drawn sword,
from the bent bow,
and from the pressure of the battle.*

Isaiah records that the caravans from Dedan must spend the night in the "thickets" of Arabia. The Arabian desert does not have forests as some versions attest. The caravans need to seek shelter from an unidentified enemy pursuing them in during an assault in a battle. The members of the caravans are suffering from hunger and thirst and the inhabitants of the land of Tema are called by the prophet to bring them water and bread. The most likely identification of the enemy is the Assyrians who were destroying the neighboring countries to Judah and many of the cities of Judah during the days when Isaiah wrote this oracle.

21:16-17 *For this is what the Lord said to me, "Within a year, according to the years counted by a hired hand, all the glory of Kedar will come to an end.*

¹⁷ *The surviving archers, and warriors of Kedar, will be few," for the LORD, the God of Israel, has spoken.*

Isaiah declares a very specific prophecy which he has received from the Lord. In a year's time, "counted by a hired man", the splendor of Kedar will come to end and the men of Kedar, who were their "mighty men", their warriors would be few. The statement "as a hired man would count it" has the same meaning as in Isaiah 16:14.

This is a definite time period decreed by the Lord with no less time and no more time allotted. The judgment and its timing are assured, “*for the Lord God of Israel has spoken*”, (vs.17).

This oracle concerning Arabia, Isaiah 21:13-17, and those that have just preceded it: Babylon, Isaiah 21:1-10, and Edom, Isaiah 21:11-12, are not just three random declarations of judgment from God on nations surrounding Judah. They have a common meaning: *First*, God is bringing a fierce and pagan nation, Assyria, upon them in an act of punishment for their ungodliness and rebellion against acknowledging and worshipping the Lord God of Israel and all the nations. *Second*, Isaiah, in delivering these burdens of judgment, is also bringing a message to Judah. It is useless for Judah to seek help from her close neighbors against the oncoming Assyrian armies. These neighbors, themselves cannot provide any assistance for they will be destroyed by the Assyrian advance. Judah’s only defense is in total reliance on this same Lord God of Israel who has just spoken to the prophet Isaiah. Judah needs to heed the voice of the Lord!

Teaching Outline for Isaiah 21:13-17

The Pursuit of the Distressed of Arabia: 21:13-15

The Prediction of the Demise of Kedar: 21:16-17

13. Valley of Vision and Weeping over Israel: 22:1-14

There is not a consensus among students and commentators regarding the exact circumstances that Isaiah is “burdened” about in verses 1-14 of chapter 22. Some understand it to be regarding the attack on Jerusalem by the Babylonian armies under Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C. Others cite the possibility of the Assyrian southern campaign in 711 B.C. under Sargon, while some date it in 701 B.C. during the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem in 701 B.C. under Sennacherib. After considering the evidence that these verses themselves declare and considering the greater context of the preceding chapters, it seems that place of priority should be given to the 701 B.C. event. Gary V. Smith provides a very persuasive argument for this date in his commentary: *Isaiah*, Volume 1, Vol. 1, pages 379-381.

The oracle concerning the Valley of Vision, Isaiah 22:1-14 is a fourth declaration of judgment by God in this second set of five oracles beginning with chapter 21:1. The first three oracles, chapter 21, dealt with Babylon, Edom and Arabia. Now (chapter 22) the prophet turns his attention to Jerusalem and specifically to its people and its servants. Just as the neighboring countries to Judah would not escape God’s judgment, the capital of Judah must also reap what it has sown and face the consequences of its self-trust and its failure to completely trust in God for protection from the enemy surrounding the city.

The wider portrait the prophet describes in these verses, 1-14, is that the people of Jerusalem have done everything in their own strength to prepare the city for the defense of the city from the siege against it by the armies of Assyria that have surrounded the city. The historical details of this event are described in greater detail in 2 Chronicles chapter 32 and in Isaiah chapters 36 and 37. Jerusalem’s proud and partying people were praising themselves for their preparation against the Assyrians. They had forgotten their Sovereign Protector whom the prophet Isaiah had so

faithfully declared unto them on many occasions. Due to the iniquity of their self-exaltation, God refused to forgive them. The city walls and structures were saved but the people within them were condemned to face eternity separated from God. See David L. Cooper: *An Exposition on the Prophet Isaiah, IV: Burdens Concerning The Nations Completed: Chapters 21-23*, Biblical Research Monthly-May 1944 for an excellent commentary on these verses.

22:1-2 *An oracle about the Valley of Vision.*

*What is the problem now,
causing all of you to go up to the rooftops?*

² *The city is full of pandemonium,
the town full of revelry.*

*Your slain are not killed by the sword,
nor do they die in battle.*

The oracle (or burden) of Isaiah concerns the “valley of vision.” Most conservative scholars understand this as a reference to Jerusalem. See Geoffrey W. Grogan, *Isaiah*, page 40 for a discussion on the Valley of Vision. Isaiah seems distressed with his own people by exclaiming: “*What is the problem now, causing all of you to go up to the rooftops?*” The NKJV English translation of “*what ails you know,*” and the DASV translation of “*What is the problem now,*”, is literally, “what’s with you?” The people have taken to their rooftops and as vs. 2 indicates they were boisterous and full of noise and exaltation as if in celebration. This is in contrast to the people of Moab who went up to the high places to weep (Isaiah 15:2). The reason for the jubilation of the people of Jerusalem may have been that so far, they in the city have been spared conquest and death that had come to many cities and towns in Judah by the invading armies of Assyria. (Isaiah 36:1).

There is no historical verification of this claim by the Assyrians who also conveniently omitted to admit the defeat of the Assyrian forces as recorded in Isaiah 37:36. Isaiah, as recorded in verses 1-2 therefore was challenging the morality of the people of Judah for loudly celebrating their freedom from capture while seemingly failing to lament the deaths and deportation of so many people of their own country.

The reference in vs. 2 to “*your slain*” being those who were not slain by the sword or died in battle may be understood as those who have died because of starvation from famine caused by the destruction of the crops in the fields outside of the city of Jerusalem. Even though the people within the walls of Jerusalem had not faced death by the swords of the Assyrians, many of them had died by the direct cause of the destruction of the agricultural resources the city depended upon for their food. Isaiah is distraught that the people could ascend to their rooftops to loudly rejoice that they had escaped death while so many people within Jerusalem had died along with thousands more that had died or were taken captive in the cities and towns of the small nation of Judah.

22:3-4 *All your rulers together have fled;
they were captured without even a bow shot.
All who were found were captured together,
even though they fled far away.
⁴ Therefore I said, "Don't look at me,
while I weep bitterly;
don't try to comfort me
concerning the destruction of the daughter of my people."*

Isaiah also berates his own people because they were exultant about the city's escape from capture while their leaders were captured while they were fleeing the onslaught of the Assyrian advance even if these leaders had fled a long distance. The prophet is in deep distress over the death and deportation of so many of his people. He seeks to weep bitterly and does not desire the people of Jerusalem to look upon him or try to comfort him. Isaiah in vs. 4 laments the destruction of the "daughter of my people." This phrase of endearment to his people only occurs in vs. 4 in the prophecy of Isaiah. See Jeremiah 8:19 for a similar expression.

22:5 *For it is a day of panic, defeat, and confusion,
from the Lord, the LORD of hosts,
in the Valley of Vision.
It is a day of battering down of the walls,
and cries for help to the mountains.*

As the people of Jerusalem were engaging in ungodly rejoicing Isaiah brought a prophecy from the Lord of the coming doom of the City of Jerusalem. It is the Lord GOD of hosts who has (or is preparing) a day of panic, subjugation and confusion for His people. The day of panic will occur in Jerusalem (the valley of vision) where there will be a breaking down of walls and a crying to (or against) the mountains. This prophecy of Isaiah is likely referring to the coming destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon (586 B.C.) with assistance from its ally, Edom which is mentioned in vs. 6.

22:6-7 *Elam picked up the quiver,
coming with chariots and horsemen;
Kir uncovered its shield.
⁷ Your key valleys were full of chariots,
and the horsemen took up fixed positions at the city gate.*

Isaiah further describes this coming day of destruction for Jerusalem as involving Elam and Kir along with the unmentioned army of Babylon. The valleys surrounding Jerusalem and the area up to the very gate of the city will be filled with the chariots and horsemen of the enemy. The enemy would lay siege to the gate of the Jerusalem. Thomas Constable comments:

The enemy would be Elam, an ally of Babylon's to her east, and Kir, whose exact location is unknown but was the destination of some Israelites taken into Assyrian captivity (cf. 2 Kings 16:9; Amos 1:5; 9:7). It was also the place (city or land) from which the Arameans originated (cf. Amos 9:7). Isaiah did not identify the main enemy, Babylon herself, but only two of her allies here, perhaps to emphasize the size (by merism) and or distance of the foe.

This enemy would conquer the countryside around Jerusalem and then set up a siege of the city outside her walls at her very gates. (Thomas Constable, *Isaiah*, page 102).

22:8-11 *He stripped back the defenses of Judah.*

*In that day you looked for the weapons
in the House of the Forest armory.*

⁹ *You saw the many breaches
in the walls of the city of David.*

You collected water in the lower pool.

¹⁰ *You numbered the houses of Jerusalem,
and tore down houses in order to fortify the wall.*

¹¹ *You also made a reservoir between the two walls
for the water of the old pool.*

*But you did not look to him who had done this,
or respect him who planned it long ago.*

Isaiah declares that it is not just Babylon and its allies who will be fighting against the people of Jerusalem but it is God Himself (He) who will be the main mover in this judgment upon the city. God will remove the defense of Judah and allow the destruction of Jerusalem because they would rely not upon God but upon their own resources and preparation of their defense against their enemies.

The people of Judah had first depended on the weapons of the house of the forest armory. This armory, also called “the house of the forest of Lebanon”, was constructed from cedar wood during Solomon’s reign and was used for the storage of weapons and valuable items. Refer to 1 Kings 7:1-5; 10:17, 21; 2 Chronicles 9:20 and Isaiah 39:2.

Hezekiah when confronted by the impending siege of Jerusalem by Sennacherib of Assyria, *first*, had weapons and shields made in “*great number*” (2 Chronicles 32:5). *Second*, they saw that the breaches of the wall of the City of David were many and they used the materials from selected houses within Jerusalem to repair (fortify) these breaches (verses 9-10). (See also 2 Chronicles 32:5). *Third*, they collected the waters of the lower pool and made a reservoir between the two walls for the waters of the old pool (verses 9 and 11). See 2 Chronicles 32:1-5. The great indictment against the people for these seemingly worthwhile and prudent defensive actions was they did not depend upon Him who made the old pool or planned it long ago, (vs. 11). It was God who gave the water pool for the needs of the people of Jerusalem. For an extended discussion, see J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah*, pages 155-156.

22:12-14 *In that day the Lord, the LORD of hosts called
for weeping and mourning,
for heads to be shaved,
and for sackcloth to be put on.*

¹³ *But instead there was joy and gladness,
celebratory slaying of oxen and slaughtering of sheep,
eating meat and drinking wine.*

"Let's eat and drink, for tomorrow we die," you exclaim.

¹⁴ *The LORD of hosts revealed himself in my ears,
"Surely this iniquity will not be forgiven until you die,"
says the Lord, the LORD of hosts.*

Because of the self-sufficient attitude of the people of Jerusalem and their failure to consider or rely on God (verses 8-11) and due to their ungodly rejoicing over their own safety despite the great loss of life of those around them (verses 1-3), God was preparing a day (vs. 12) when they would be called by Him to wail and weep and to shave their heads and to wear sackcloth because of the coming days of destruction of their city (verses 5-8). Instead of days of seeking God and mourning for their great loss, the people were expressing "gaiety and gladness" and killing cattle, slaughtering sheep for banquets of meat and wine. Their attitude was so aptly described by Isaiah as "*Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.*" (vs. 13). This is one of the most well-known statements in the Scriptures. The Apostle Paul references Isaiah 22:13 in his first letter to the church at Corinth (1 Corinthians 15:32). The people were demonstrating their complete lack of trust and faith in their God with whom they had received so many blessings and were the recipients and benefactors of the great covenants God had made with His chosen people.

The final words of God (in this section of Isaiah) to these people are chilling: "*Surely this iniquity shall not be forgiven until you die, says the Lord, the LORD of hosts.*" (vs.14). God's spirit will not always strive with man due to the flesh (Genesis 6:3) and there has and will come again times when the actions of humans including God's chosen people will lead many to their earthly demise and others to their eternal destruction. (See also Numbers 14:20-24; Matthew 25:31-46; Revelation 20:11-15; 22:14-15).

14. Replacement of the Disgraced Servant: 22:15-19

Verses 15-19 form a sub-section to verses 15-25 and also to the Valley of Vision oracle which comprises all of chapter 22.

22:15-16 *This is what the Lord says, the LORD of hosts,
"Go to Shebna, the palace manager, and say,*

¹⁶ *What are you doing here?*

What relatives of yours are buried here?

Why have you hewed out a sepulcher here for yourself?

He cut out a sepulcher on this high place,

craving a tomb for himself in the rock.

Isaiah is told to go to the steward Shebna who is in charge of the royal household, Shebna is an Aramaic name and it is likely that he was a foreigner who did not have a family burial plot nor a family tradition within Jerusalem. The Scriptures do not reveal how this person came to have such a high position within the courts of the king. Isaiah is told to confront Shebna and ask, (NASB): “*What right do you have here, and whom do you have here, that you have hewn a tomb for yourself here, you who hew a tomb on the height, you who carve a resting place for yourself in the rock?*” vs. 16. Shebna was not part of the royal family nor of the aristocracy of Judah. He had no lineage rights to make a tomb for himself, which would enshrine his memory among the tombs of kings of Judah and their families. What he could not do in life, which was to become a member of the royal line, Shebna schemed to accomplish in his burial plot.

22:17-19 *Look, the LORD, will hurl you away violently; O warrior.*

Yes, he will seize hold of you firmly.

¹⁸ *He will roll you up tightly like a ball
tossing you into a large country.*

*There you will die,
and there your marvelous chariots will lie.
You are a disgrace to your master's house.*

¹⁹ *I will drive you out of your office;
and you will be pulled down from your exalted position.*

The message given to Isaiah for Shebna is described in verses 17-19. Instead of having a lofty and exalted memorial tomb, he was to be cast down into a vast (wilderness) country where he would die along-side of his “splendid chariots”, his prized possessions. He would die an infamous death as a shame to his master’s house. Isaiah, with great boldness confronted Shebna with these words from the Lord, “*I will drive you out of your office; and you will be pulled down from your exalted position.*” vs. 19. It is not stated how Shebna was removed from being the Steward to the king of Judah’s court (household). It may have been a wasting disease that drove him from royal society or some other action that caused him to be removed from office. However, it occurred, one thing was certain, when the LORD of hosts, vs. 15, makes a decree, it will happen just as God says it will happen. Prior to his final demise, Shebna was demoted to the lesser office of scribe under the superintendence of Eliakim, Isaiah 36:3 and 37:2.

There are a couple of lessons that one should take from this short portion of this prophecy. *First*, God is not mocked: “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.” Galatians 6:7. Shebna contrived to elevate himself to a position he did not have by the right of birth. *Second*, God appoints officials as well as rulers and kings. No one who holds a high position must think they hold this position due to their own strength, wisdom or ability. The only right response to having any high position is to humbly praise God for His divine working within the situation and yourself. This was one lesson king Nebuchadnezzar was to learn personally as he was driven from power immediately after claiming that the nation, Babylon and the royal residence were built by himself,

Daniel 4:30 states regarding Nebuchadnezzar: *"The king said, "Is not this the great Babylon that I have built for the royal residence, by the strength of my power and for my glorious majesty?"* The voice from heaven, Nebuchadnezzar heard, stated his punishment would continue, While the words were still in the king's mouth, a voice came from heaven, *"O King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is proclaimed: The kingdom is removed from you.³² You will be driven from human community and you will live with the animals of the field. You will be fed grass like oxen and seven times will pass over you until you realize that the Most High rules over the kingdom of human beings, and gives it to whomever he pleases."* Daniel 4:31-32.

Teaching Outline for Isaiah 22:15-19

The Steward's Doom Pronounced: 22:15-16

The Steward's Demise Portrayed: 22:17-19

15. Prophecy of the David's Key and the Peg: 22:20-25

22:20-25 *In that day, I will call my servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah.*

²¹ *I will cloth him with your robe, and lash your sash on him. I will transfer your authority into his hand. He will be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah.*

²² *The key of the house of David I will lay on his shoulder. What he opens, no one will be able to shut; what he shuts, and no one will be able to open.*

²³ *I will fasten him like a peg in a secure place; he will become a throne of glory to his father's house.*

²⁴ *They will hang on him all the glory of his father's house, the descendants and offspring, every small vessel, from the cups to all the jugs.*

²⁵ *In that day," says the LORD of hosts, "the peg that was fastened in a secure place will give way. It will be cut down and fall. The load that was hanging on it will fall down," for the LORD has spoken.*

The story of the disgrace of Shebna is immediately followed up with the announcement of the Shebna's replacement in the office of Steward over the house of Judah. Eliakim, son of Hilkiah was appointed to this office when Shebna was removed from this office. The words "in that day" vs. 20 may refer to the days of King Hezekiah from the siege of Jerusalem to the death of the king. Eliakim was to wear Shebna's tunic and his sash. God entrusted him with Shebna's authority and declared that Eliakim was to become *"a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah."* verses 20-21. Perhaps the most significant title given to Eliakim by God is that of *"my servant,"* vs. 20. God does not bestow the office of "servant" to just anyone. It is a position of great responsibility to be called the servant of the great King of creation. Refer to the notes on Isaiah 20:3 where another who was called the servant of God was the great prophet Isaiah.

The prophet Isaiah records nine significant things about God's appointment of Eliakim as Steward over the house of Judah in verses 20-25: (1) He was called "My servant". (2) He was to wear the official clothing of the office of Steward. Similar to Elijah's mantle (cloak) being worn by his successor, Elisha, 1 Kings 19:19. (3) He was to be entrusted with the authority of the office of Steward. (4) He was to become a "father" to all who lived in Jerusalem including the royal house of Judah: the king and his family. (5) God would set the "key of the house of David" on Eliakim's shoulder. When Eliakim used this key to open (a door) no one will close it and when he uses this key to shut (a door) no one will open it. (6) God would "*fasten him like a peg in a secure place*". (7) God stated Eliakim would "*become a throne of glory to his father's house*." (8) Upon him, (the peg) would be hung "*all the glory of his father's house, the descendants and the offspring*." (posterity), and including small things like the cups and jugs (the royal household's furnishings and implements). (9) Sadly, even Eliakim's Stewardship would not last long, for "in that day" (the days of the rule of king Hezekiah), "*the peg that was fastened in a secure place will give way. It will be cut down and fall. The load that was hanging on it will down.*" vs. 25.

Some points to consider regarding these nine declarations of the Lord regarding Eliakim:

First, to whom the Lord call as His servant, great authority and responsibility is bestowed and great results are expected. The Lord, as recorded in the Scriptures, called the following persons His servant: Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Caleb, David, Isaiah, Eliakim, Israel, Messiah: the Servant and the Branch, Nebuchadnezzar, Zerubbabel, also: "*my servants the prophets*" and the followers of Christ (John 12:26). This is an impressive list. That Eliakim was included among them is to be seen as an indication of God's plan for him to fulfill God's purposes. It is not that any pride of place or position should be considered or even imagined by a servant of God, however it is a glorious privilege to be humbly received that God would trust His plans to one He has chosen as a servant.

Second, the wearing of the official clothing (robe and sash) of the office of Steward over the house of the line of David is a symbolic portrait of the high position this servant has in the purposes of God and responsibility to carry out these purposes.

Third, everyone seeing the Steward would recognize his lofty and trusted position and would acknowledge the authority of the Steward to perform kingdom duties and speak for the king.

Fourth, Eliakim was to fulfill a role of fatherhood to everyone in the kingdom, including the king. This would include the role of mentor, elder, comforter, leader and many other superior roles. It was similar to the role that Daniel had as one of just three commissioners to king Darius the Mede (Daniel chapter 6).

Fifth, the key of the house of David may have been an actual key that was used to open and close doors to official kingdom rooms, storehouses, the treasury and perhaps the armory, stated as the "*House of the Forest armory*" in Isaiah 22:8. The reference to "*the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens.*" in

Revelation 3:7 is very dramatic and forceful as the reference in Revelation is a quote from this key that Eliakim carries on his shoulder. Thus, the key represents the authority of the one carrying it in the greater house of David. Eliakim therefore can be seen as a type of Christ in that he, as God's servant, is entrusted with the literal keys of the kingdom of which in the greater house of David, the Lord's kingdom, only the greater servant, the Messiah, will be given to use. The Messiah therefore can be seen as not only the greater King, Prophet, Priest, Ruler and Servant but also as the greater Steward of His own house.

Sixth, the peg was a prominent fixture in ancient houses and tents, for upon it, household goods, clothing and valuable items were hung. The peg had to be solid and sturdy enough to carry the most treasured things of the household and be firmly positioned into a wall or the main pole of the tent. Eliakim was depicted as representing this peg. He was one who was trustworthy enough to carry precious possessions of the kingdom and be firmly established to ensure these possessions would not be lost or "fall off the peg". The peg also represents the role of the Messiah: "*From him will come the cornerstone, from him the tent peg, from him the battle bow, from him every ruler.*" (Zechariah 10:4). This is another majestic reference to Eliakim being a type of Christ representing another significant role that the Messiah will have in His future kingdom.

Seventh, is the reference to Eliakim becoming "*a throne of glory to his father's house.*" Within his family Eliakim, by being trusted to carry out the duties of the Steward of the kingdom, would bring glory to his father Hilkiah. However, this is not the most important meaning of this metaphor. The reference to Eliakim's father's house surely represents the house of the lineage of David and the throne of glory is that belonging to the greater Servant and Steward of this house, the Messiah. Thus again, Eliakim is a type of Christ representing the glorious throne of the great kingdom to come. This is the throne of David upon which the Messiah will sit (Isaiah 9:7):

*Of the increase of his government
and of peace there will be no end.
He will rule on the throne of David,
and over his kingdom,
to establish it,
and to uphold it with justice
and with righteousness from this time forth forever.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.*

Also, the gospel of Luke States: "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David."

Eighth, are the things hung on the peg. As mentioned in the *sixth* point, the peg was the object in the household trusted to carry the precious things of the house. Included with the household objects, such as, the vessels and bowls that the peg carried, are: "offspring and issue". These are a reference to the family lineage and the generations to follow. Also, as with the comment in the *seventh* point, regarding Eliakim's father and family, the immediate family of Eliakim is a

possible meaning to the “*descendants and offspring*.” It also has a more significant royal meaning. The peg has a future reference to the Messiah during the Millennial reign. The Messiah, as the peg, will carry or bear the offspring or issue of the elect people, the remnant of Israel, who will enter into the Millennial kingdom with their Messiah.

Ninth, some scholars understand the last verse of chapter 22 as an indictment against Eliakim who will not continue as the faithful Steward due to his moral failure or the ungodly acts of his children for the reason the peg representing Eliakim’s responsibilities will be cut off and not continue. The context of this prophecy seems to indicate otherwise. The words beginning this verse, “In that day” as mentioned above most likely refer to the days of the Hezekiah from the time of the siege against Jerusalem by the Assyrians to the death of Hezekiah and its aftermath. Isaiah 39:5-8 bring light on this day: “*Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, 'Hear the word of the LORD of hosts: 6 'Look, the days are coming, when all that is in your house, and everything that your fathers have stored up until this day, will be carried off to Babylon. Nothing will be left,' says the LORD. 7 Some of your sons that will be born to you, will be taken away and they will be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon. 8 Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, 'The word of the LORD that you have spoken is good.' For he thought, 'There will be peace and security in my days.'*”

In light of the importance of the nine things the Lord has ascribed to Eliakim and their future prophetic meaning it seems unlikely that Eliakim was to be removed from the scene due to his own or his immediate children’s iniquities. Why would God depose one evil Steward of the royal house of David just to appoint another one who will also cause his own demise and not last long to fulfill the things God had appointed him to do. It seems better to understand “in that day” of vs. 20 to refer to the actions of King Hezekiah and their aftermath as predicted by Isaiah in chapter 39:5-8. When the days of Hezekiah were finished, he and his royal court and those with him would be removed. It seems best to understand Isaiah 22:25 as a reference to the actions of king Hezekiah as the reason why the “*peg that was fastened in a secure place will give way. It will be cut down and fall. The load that was hanging on it will fall down.*”

Teaching Outline for Isaiah 22:20-25

The Summons of the Servant: 22:20

The Significance of the Servant: 22:21-24

The Severing of the Servant: 22:25

16. Prophecy of Tyre’s Fall: 23:1-18

The last oracle or burden of this great section of the prophecy of Isaiah, chapters 13-23, is about the judgment of God on the Phoenician mercantile city of Tyre.

Thomas Constable comments on this Chapter:

“The first cycle of oracles closed by revealing that Egypt, the political oppressor of the Israelites, would come into equal status with Israel in the future (19:25). The second cycle similarly closes

by disclosing that Tyre, the materialistic corrupter of God's people in the past, would come into a relationship of holiness (v. 18). Thus the climax of both revelations of judgment was the divine blessing of the Gentiles.

There are also parallels between Babylon, the first oracle in the first series, and Tyre, the last oracle in the second series. Babylon was the great land power of the ancient world, and Tyre was the great sea power. Babylon gained her power through warfare, whereas Tyre gained hers through peaceful trading. The descriptions of both cities meld into the view of future Babylon presented in Revelation 17—18. There the religious and commercial aspects of future Babylon are strongly reminiscent of Tyre. Note also the reference to a prostitute in both passages.

"Babylon's greatness lay in her glory, the list of her achievements and accomplishments, her sophistication and culture. Tyre did not have all of that, but she did have her wealth and her vast maritime contacts. So between the two of them, Babylon and Tyre summed up from east to west all that the world of that day—and this—thought was significant." 262

This oracle consists of two parts: a poem describing Tyre's fall (vv. 1-14) and a prediction of Tyre's ultimate commitment to the Lord and His people. Tyre was the major city of Phoenicia at this time, and undoubtedly represents the other towns allied with it in the region, in some of the references in this chapter. 263. Similarly, Jerusalem represented all of Judah when used in a collective sense." [Note 262: John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah 1-39*, NICOT, page 427. Note 263: John D. Watts, *Isaiah 1-33*, WBC, page 305]. (Thomas Constable, *Isaiah*, page 106).

23:1 *An oracle about Tyre.*

Wail, you ships of Tarshish.

*Tyre is destroyed without house and harbor;
from the land of Cyprus it is reported to them.*

The prophet calls the ships of Tarshish to wail for "*Tyre is destroyed without house and harbor.*" The location of Tarshish is a much debated by scholars of the history of the ancient near east. Tarshish may have been located in Spain. If so, this location would have made the Mediterranean Sea a Phoenician waterway with boats plying its waves over its full length. Tarshish seems to have been a major trading port with Tyre. Goods from the far west, as the residents of Phoenicia would have understood it, and grain from the Nile delta, vs. 3, would be brought into the port of Tyre which had a close proximity to Judah. The ancient Phoenicians were able seafarers and controlled much of the trade on the Mediterranean Sea. One of their colonies, Cyprus is mentioned later in this prophecy, vs. 12.

The reason that the ships of Tarshish are to wail, is that the center of commerce for the entire eastern region of the Mediterranean Sea was destroyed without house or harbor. The sailors and merchants who relied on Tyre for the buying and selling of goods would have lost their major trading port with all the profits that they could have gained. Within the context of the preceding chapters of Isaiah, the great enemy of Tyre who destroyed it would have been the Assyrians under Sennacherib. The Assyrians defeated Babylon in 703 B.C, vs. 13 and thus it is most likely to understand the historical setting of this prophecy was the conquest of the Assyrians of the entire eastern part of the Mediterranean coast in 702-701 B.C. Only Jerusalem was spared the

destruction brought by the armies of Assyria. The message of the destruction of Tyre was brought first to the east bound ships from Tarshish who had anchored in Cyprus.

23:2-3 *Be still, you inhabitants of the coast,
you merchants of Sidon,
your messengers sail through the sea.*
³ *Over the great waters
they come with grain of the Shihor,
the harvest of the Nile was her revenue.
She was the market of the nations.*

Isaiah commands that the merchants of Phoenicia including the other major trading port of Sidon were to “be silent” or to mourn for the loss of the revenue they once enjoyed including revenue from transporting grain from Egypt (the harvest of the river Nile). Vs. 3 closes with the statement that she (Tyre) was the “*market of the nations*”.

23:4-7 *Be ashamed, O Sidon;
for the sea has spoken,
the stronghold of the sea, saying,
"I have not been in labor,
or given birth,
I have not reared young men,
or brought up daughters."*

⁵ *When the news gets to Egypt,
they will be sorely pained at the report about Tyre.*
⁶ *Travel to Tarshish;
wail, you inhabitants of the coast.*
⁷ *Is this your joyous city,
whose origin is from ancient days,
whose feet have carried her to settle far away?*

Isaiah calls for the Phoenicians (O Sidon) to be ashamed for the “*sea has spoken the stronghold of the sea*” (Tyre) which now has no children to bring up because, it is implied that the men of Phoenicia have been killed or taken captive by the Assyrian armies. Even Egypt will be “in anguish” upon hearing of the demise of Tyre. The ships of Tarshish are to turn around and return to their home port without selling their goods. The inhabitants of the coastlands of the Mediterranean Sea are also to wail due to the loss of this profitable trading center. Even the ability of Tyre to colonize the coastlands has been removed. The reference in vs. 4 to the “*stronghold of the sea*” is most likely a metaphor for the island fortress of Tyre which had a proud and defiant history resisting all who came against it. Even though the Assyrians defeated this “stronghold” and later the Babylonians would bring it under their control, Tyre would in the future return to its former glory as the great merchant city of the ancient near east.

23:8-9 *Who has planned this against Tyre,
the bestower of crowns,
whose merchants are princes,
whose traders are honored around the world?*
⁹ *The LORD of hosts has planned it,
to defile the pride of all glory,
to bring to shame all the honored of the earth.*

Isaiah reveals that the Lord of hosts has planned the destruction of Tyre, who was once the “bestower of crowns” and whose “merchants were princes” and whose “traders are honored around the world.” The NKJV translates this better as: “Whose traders are the honorable of the earth.” The great pride of Tyre and the Phoenicians was now defiled of all their beauty as was the earth itself for God planned to defile “the pride of all glory, to bring to shame all the honored of the earth.” This message, verses 8-9, was most likely for the people of Judah so they would understand that even great nations and peoples can be brought to destruction by God who controls the world. As in the previous oracles by Isaiah, the prophet is declaring to the people of Judah not to seek assistance from the Phoenicians against the advancing Assyrians armies. No former great nation, Egypt, Ethiopia or Phoenicia, nor fledgling nation, Babylon, nor their immediate neighbors, Syria (Damascus) nor Moab, Edom or Arabia or any other nation can be of any assistance against Assyria. God has decreed that Assyria is his agent of destruction in his judgment against the nations. As Isaiah, will later reveal, in chapters 36-37, even this agent of God, will itself suffer complete defeat from God Himself without any aid from any nation.

23:10-12 *Cross through your land like the Nile, O daughter of Tarshish;
there is no harbor any more.*
¹¹ *He has stretched out his hand over the sea;
he has shaken the kingdoms.*
*The LORD has given commands concerning Canaan
to destroy its fortresses.*
¹² *He said, "You will not celebrate any more,
O oppressed virgin daughter of Sidon.
Arise, pass over to Cyprus;
even there you will have no rest."*

The prophet reveals the continuing work of God in making the nations tremble and the sea to be His means of destruction. Canaan will also have its strongholds demolished. The Phoenicians are called upon to leave their land and travel over the sea to its colony Cyprus but even in this small island nation, the Phoenicians will find no rest. In these days, 702-701 B.C., God is using the Assyrians to bring about his punishment for the sins of the countries of the ancient near east. No nation can resist or defeat the Assyrians as God’s agent of judgment.

23:13-14 *Look at the land of the Chaldeans;
this is a people who were not;
the Assyrians established it as a place for desert animals;
they set up their siege towers;
they stripped bare its palaces;
they reduced it to a ruin.*
¹⁴ *Wail, you ships of Tarshish;
your fortress is destroyed.*

Isaiah explains that the Assyrians would defeat Babylon (land of the Chaldeans) and cause the Babylonians to be a people “which was not”. Babylon was reduced to a ruin and therefore could not be of any assistance to Judah in its defense against the invasion of the Assyrians. The defeat of Babylon by Assyria was in 702 B.C. The Assyrian armies would be entirely destroyed by God in 701 B.C. However, Babylon would once again rise to become the most dominant nation in the ancient near east and God would use this pagan nation to bring about the destruction of Judah and His beloved city Jerusalem as future events unfold. In vs.14, Isaiah repeats his command to the ships of Tarshish to wail for their fortress (Tyre) is destroyed. Verse 14 concludes this part of Isaiah’s oracle against the Phoenicians.

23:15 *In that day Tyre will be forgotten for seventy years, for the days of a single king.
Then at the end of seventy years, Tyre will come back as in the song about the prostitute.*

A major change in Isaiah’s message is presented in verses 15-18. In vs. 15, the prophet states that Tyre was to be forgotten for a period of seventy years, “*the days of a single king*” or the period of time of a king’s lifespan. It is not stated when this period of seventy years will begin or end. One scholar suggests that if the seventy years began in 702 B.C. and ended in approximately 630 B.C. it would coincide with the complete collapse of the Assyrian empire following the death of its last king, Ashurbanipal. (See, Gary V. Smith, Isaiah 1-39, page 403).

23:16 *“Take a harp, go about the city,
O forgotten whore;
make sweet melody,
sing many songs,
so that you may be remembered.”*

At the end of this seventy-year period, Tyre will be like a forgotten harlot who walks about the city with a harp and singing many songs with the implication that with its enemy now gone, it can once again play the harlot with its trading partners and entice them to do business as before.

23:17 *After the seventy years, the LORD will restore Tyre, and she will return to her hire,
and will prostitute herself with all the kingdoms of the world on the face of the earth.*

There is a significant change to this prophecy introduced in vs. 17. It is the Lord who will visit Tyre and bring about the resurgence of Tyre, but she will “*prostitute herself with all the kingdoms of the world on the face of the earth.*” After a period of seventy years of judgment, Tyre will once again regain her position as a major trading center. But the city will not have learned from this period of judgment to trust in Him and acknowledge Him. It seems that a shift has occurred in the prophecy from the times of the prophet Isaiah to that of the end times. This is a feature of prophetic Scriptures that God gives a message to “his servants the prophets” that at first speaks to the immediate historical events happening during the lives of the prophets and then moves without break or introduction to the end times.

23:18 *Her merchandise and her wages will be consecrated to the LORD. It will not be stored up or hoarded; her merchandise will be for them who live in the LORD's presence, supplying plenty of food and beautiful clothes.*

Vs. 18 is most assuredly is an end-times prophecy. God will use the profits of sinful nations who have stored up or hoarded the profits (wages) from their trading of merchandise which will be “*consecrated to the LORD*”. These “wages” or profits will become a supply of plentiful food and beautiful clothes for the faithful remnant, the ones who live in the presence of the Lord. See Isaiah 18:7 and 60:10-18. If we remember that God is in absolute control of the world and is sovereign in all of the dealings of the world, it should not surprise us that He will use the monies of the world to ensure His people are looked after.

These last two verses, 17-18, conclude and summarize the entire section of chapters 13-23 which are the judgment of God on the world’s nations and specifically those who have a relationship or border the ancient small nation of Judah. The primary message of these chapters is that Judah must not seek aid from any other nation or peoples in their defense against the advancing Assyrian armies. God is using Assyria as His agent of judgment and retribution against these nations. Judah must trust in God alone for salvation and security. The secondary message of these chapters is that God controls every aspect of all nations including their leadership and their financial resources. He will use the leaders of these nations and the wealth of these nations to accomplish His plans and to bring about His decreed will for the peoples of the earth. Even previous enemies of the nation of Judah will one day become like family and they will worship God together in His glorious kingdom to come upon the earth.

Teaching Outline for Isaiah chapter 23

1 A loss from the Sea

The Wailing of the Ships of Tarshish: 24:1,14

The Wasting of the Strength of Tyre: 24:2-7

2 A Lesson from the Sovereign

The Divine Power of God’s Administration: 24:8-12

The Destructive Power of God’s Agent: 24:13

3 A Levy from the Sea

The Wages of the Harlot Set Adrift: 24:15

The Wages of the Harlot Set Apart: 24:16-18