

## Isaiah 13:1 – 14:32

### Chiastic Structure of Isaiah 13:1 – 14:32<sup>1</sup>

As we look more closely at this smaller section about Babylon, it is important to recognize the literary structure.

- A. God beckons Babylon: the beckoning hand, God's purpose declared (13:2 – 16)
- B. The overthrow of Babylon: the end of the kingdom, the fact of divine overthrow (13:17 – 22)
- C. The security and future of the Lord's people: God's purpose for Israel (14:1 – 2)
- B'. The overthrow of Babylon: the end of the king, the explanation of divine overthrow (14:3 – 23)
- A'. Babylon will overthrow Assyria: the outstretched hand, God's purpose enacted and validated (14:24 – 32)

The chiasm structure is where the first point matches the last point. The second point matches the second to last point. And the center point is the main point.

### Text of Isaiah 13:1 – 14:32

<sup>13:1</sup>The oracle concerning Babylon which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw.

<sup>2</sup> Lift up a standard on the bare hill,

Raise your voice to them,

Wave the hand that they may enter the doors of the nobles.

<sup>3</sup> I have commanded My consecrated ones,

I have even called My mighty warriors,

My proudly exulting ones,

To execute My anger.

<sup>4</sup> A sound of tumult on the mountains,

Like that of many people!

A sound of the uproar of kingdoms,

Of nations gathered together!

The LORD of hosts is mustering the army for battle.

<sup>5</sup> They are coming from a far country,

From the farthest horizons,

The LORD and His instruments of indignation,

To destroy the whole land.

<sup>6</sup> Wail, for the day of the LORD is near!

It will come as destruction from the Almighty.

<sup>7</sup> Therefore all hands will fall limp,

And every man's heart will melt.

<sup>8</sup> They will be terrified,

Pains and anguish will take hold of them;

They will writhe like a woman in labor,

They will look at one another in astonishment, their faces aflame.

<sup>9</sup> Behold, the day of the LORD is coming,

Cruel, with fury and burning anger,

To make the land a desolation;

And He will exterminate its sinners from it.

<sup>10</sup> For the stars of heaven and their constellations

Will not flash forth their light;

The sun will be dark when it rises

And the moon will not shed its light.

<sup>11</sup> Thus I will punish the world for its evil

And the wicked for their iniquity;

I will also put an end to the arrogance of the proud

And abase the haughtiness of the ruthless.

<sup>12</sup> I will make mortal man scarcer than pure gold

### A. God Beckons Babylon

*Babylon:* Babylon was a rising threat to the region (13 – 14; 39). Babylon would displace Assyria (14:25) and take the Southern Kingdom of Judah captive in 586 BC. Assyria took the Northern Kingdom of Israel captive in 721 BC. Isaiah had seen the devastation left (Isaiah 1:7, 9), and maybe the actual Assyrian army itself. Jerusalem stood alone (1:8).

*The Nobles* (13:2): Jerusalem's judges and leaders took bribes (5:23), oppressed others (3:14 – 15), and rebelled against God's law (1:23). They instead delighted in beauty pageants (3:16 – 24), and drinking games (5:22).

*God and the Nations:* God did not and does not cause people to sin. God did not control nations, and does not now. How to explain God's use/prediction of the movements of other nations? God placed the Israelites at the crossroads of Africa, Asia, and Europe, to be a light to them, and to represent the one true God. Israel's leaders were NOT supposed to accumulate wealth and centralize power like every other kingdom or empire. Land was meant to be in the hands of

<sup>1</sup> Modified by Mako Nagasawa from J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Interpretation and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), p.135

And mankind than the gold of Ophir.  
<sup>13</sup> Therefore I will make the heavens tremble,  
 And the earth will be shaken from its place  
 At the fury of the LORD of hosts  
 In the day of His burning anger.  
<sup>14</sup> And it will be that like a hunted gazelle,  
 Or like sheep with none to gather them,  
 They will each turn to his own people,  
 And each one flee to his own land.  
<sup>15</sup> Anyone who is found will be thrust through,  
 And anyone who is captured will fall by the sword.  
<sup>16</sup> Their little ones also will be dashed to pieces  
 Before their eyes;  
 Their houses will be plundered  
 And their wives ravished.

<sup>17</sup> Behold, I am going to stir up the Medes against them,  
 Who will not value silver or take pleasure in gold.  
<sup>18</sup> And their bows will mow down the young men,  
 They will not even have compassion on the fruit of the womb,  
 Nor will their eye pity children.  
<sup>19</sup> And Babylon, the beauty of kingdoms, the glory of the Chaldeans' pride,  
 Will be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah.  
<sup>20</sup> It will never be inhabited or lived in from generation to generation;  
 Nor will the Arab pitch his tent there,  
 Nor will shepherds make their flocks lie down there.  
<sup>21</sup> But desert creatures will lie down there,  
 And their houses will be full of owls;  
 Ostriches also will live there,  
 And shaggy goats will frolic there.  
<sup>22</sup> Hyenas will howl in their fortified towers  
 And jackals in their luxurious palaces.  
 Her fateful time also will soon come  
 And her days will not be prolonged.

<sup>14:1</sup> When the LORD will have compassion on Jacob  
 And again choose Israel, and settle them in their own land,  
 Then strangers will join them  
 And attach themselves to the house of Jacob.  
<sup>2</sup> The peoples will take them along and bring them to their place,  
 And the house of Israel will possess them  
 As an inheritance in the land of the LORD  
 As male servants and female servants;  
 And they will take their captors captive  
 And will rule over their oppressors.

<sup>3</sup> And it will be in the day when the LORD gives you rest  
 From your pain and turmoil  
 And harsh service in which you have been enslaved,  
<sup>4</sup> That you will take up this taunt against the king of Babylon,  
 And say,  
 'How the oppressor has ceased,  
 And how fury has ceased!  
<sup>5</sup> The LORD has broken the staff of the wicked,  
 The scepter of rulers  
<sup>6</sup> Which used to strike the peoples in fury with unceasing strokes,

families who cared for the poor and the foreigner (Leviticus 25). Kings were not supposed to build up horses, wives, or wealth, but simply be a 'model Israelite' (Deuteronomy 17:14 – 20). When leaders built up wealth and power in Jerusalem, they attracted attention from other foreign empires (Isaiah 39).

**B. The Overthrow of Babylon**  
*The Medes:* A people group who neighbored the Babylonians, in Mesopotamia. They were eventually consolidated in, or conquered by, the Persian Empire.

**C. God's Plan for His People**  
 Israel: People in Judaism

Strangers: People not in Judaism

**B'. The Overthrow of Babylon**

Which subdued the nations in anger with unrestrained persecution.

<sup>7</sup> The whole earth is at rest and is quiet;  
They break forth into shouts of joy.

<sup>8</sup> Even the cypress trees rejoice over you,  
And the cedars of Lebanon, saying,  
'Since you were laid low, no tree cutter comes up against us.'

<sup>9</sup> Sheol from beneath is excited over you to meet you when you come;  
It arouses for you the spirits of the dead, all the leaders of the earth;  
It raises all the kings of the nations from their thrones.

<sup>10</sup> They will all respond  
And say to you,  
'Even you have been made weak as we,  
You have become like us.'

<sup>11</sup> Your pomp and the music of your harps  
Have been brought down to Sheol;  
Maggots are spread out as your bed beneath you  
And worms are your covering.'

<sup>12</sup> How you have fallen from heaven,  
O star of the morning, son of the dawn!  
You have been cut down to the earth,  
You who have weakened the nations!

<sup>13</sup> But you said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven;  
I will raise my throne above the stars of God,  
And I will sit on the mount of assembly  
In the recesses of the north.'

<sup>14</sup> I will ascend above the heights of the clouds;  
I will make myself like the Most High.'

<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless you will be thrust down to Sheol,  
To the recesses of the pit.

<sup>16</sup> Those who see you will gaze at you,  
They will ponder over you, saying,  
'Is this the man who made the earth tremble,  
Who shook kingdoms,  
Who made the world like a wilderness  
And overthrew its cities,  
Who did not allow his prisoners to go home?'

<sup>18</sup> All the kings of the nations lie in glory,  
Each in his own tomb.

<sup>19</sup> But you have been cast out of your tomb  
Like a rejected branch,  
Clothed with the slain who are pierced with a sword,  
Who go down to the stones of the pit  
Like a trampled corpse.

<sup>20</sup> You will not be united with them in burial,  
Because you have ruined your country,  
You have slain your people.  
May the offspring of evildoers not be mentioned forever.

<sup>21</sup> Prepare for his sons a place of slaughter  
Because of the iniquity of their fathers.  
They must not arise and take possession of the earth  
And fill the face of the world with cities.'

<sup>22</sup> 'I will rise up against them,' declares the LORD of hosts,  
'And will cut off from Babylon name and survivors,  
Offspring and posterity,' declares the LORD.

<sup>23</sup> 'I will also make it a possession for the hedgehog and swamps of water,  
And I will sweep it with the broom of destruction,'

*Sheol*: The Hebrew concept of  
'the grave.'

Declares the LORD of hosts.

- <sup>24</sup> The LORD of hosts has sworn saying,  
'Surely, just as I have intended so it has happened,  
And just as I have planned so it will stand,  
<sup>25</sup> To break Assyria in My land,  
And I will trample him on My mountains.  
Then his yoke will be removed from them  
And his burden removed from their shoulder.  
<sup>26</sup> This is the plan devised against the whole earth;  
And this is the hand that is stretched out against all the nations.  
<sup>27</sup> For the LORD of hosts has planned, and who can frustrate it?  
And as for His stretched-out hand, who can turn it back?'  
<sup>28</sup> In the year that King Ahaz died this oracle came:  
<sup>29</sup> 'Do not rejoice, O Philistia, all of you,  
Because the rod that struck you is broken;  
For from the serpent's root a viper will come out,  
And its fruit will be a flying serpent.  
<sup>30</sup> Those who are most helpless will eat,  
And the needy will lie down in security;  
I will destroy your root with famine,  
And it will kill off your survivors.  
<sup>31</sup> Wail, O gate; cry, O city;  
Melt away, O Philistia, all of you;  
For smoke comes from the north,  
And there is no straggler in his ranks.  
<sup>32</sup> How then will one answer the messengers of the nation?  
That the LORD has founded Zion,  
And the afflicted of His people will seek refuge in it.'

### **A'. Babylon Will Overthrow Assyria**

*Assyria:* The Neo-Assyrian Empire (911 – 612 BC), centered in Mesopotamia along the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. They had conquered lands stretching from Asia Minor to Egypt. They had conquered the Philistines.

*Philistia:* The land of the five lords of the Philistines, made up of Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron, Gath, and Gaza (Josh.13:3; 1 Sam.6:17), in the southern area of the land of Canaan.

## Questions

1. God Beckons Babylon: 13:1 – 13
  - a. In 13:2, Isaiah says, ‘Lift, raise, wave the hand.’ A signal goes out.
  - b. Why do you think Isaiah would say in v.2, ‘Wave the hand that they may enter the doors of *the nobles*’? The nobles are *the leaders* – the royal household, the priests in the temple, the so-called prophets and religious leaders of Jerusalem. They are the ones who wanted to be like the nobles of all the other nations.
  - c. Do the leaders in Jerusalem deserve an invasion? Well, in the sense that Jerusalem will be the focal point of the Babylonian invasion. Sadly, a lot of other people will be affected, and many deported to Babylon.
2. Babylon Overthrows Assyria: 14:24 – 32
  - a. But what good can come out of this? The Babylonians have their own reasons for plundering the Middle East. But how will God use it to benefit His people and advance His purposes? And now let’s look on the other side of the section. Why did God call Babylon to come? To punish the punishers: Assyria.
  - b. Do your sins attract other people with the same sins? Perhaps not right away, but eventually it does. If you were to start selling drugs, you would draw the attention of other people who sell drugs, who have a lot more experience than you.
    - i. Illus: In the movie *The Godfather*, Michael Corleone, played by Al Pacino, heads up an organized crime family and tries to expand, but discovers that the organized crime business is filled with powerful people that go all the way back to Europe. They are way more powerful than him.
    - ii. Illus: In the Disney movie *The Lion King*, Scar, the evil uncle, makes a deal with the hyenas. He is hungry for power. They are just hungry. So his sin and their sin bring them together. He makes an alliance with them to trick the Lion King Mufasa into a ravine to save his son Simba, only to get stampeded by wildebeests and killed by the stampede. Simba is alone and runs away. But Scar thinks that he can harness the hyenas’ hunger and use them to his own advantage. But the collision happens. He cannot control them. And when Simba finally casts them all out, the hyenas turn on Scar. They eat him. Your sins draw you to people with similar sins. But all throughout, God is shouting your name, trying to get your attention, calling you back to Him.
    - iii. Illus: I was talking with a student whose sister works in the fashion industry. I asked, ‘Is it like the movie *The Devil Wears Prada*, with Anne Hathaway and Meryl Streep?’ Where the deeper you get into the business, the more consuming it gets? The more competitive, the more cutthroat, the more demanding. In fact, Meryl Streep’s character Miranda Priestley, the editor of Runway fashion magazine, was patterned after Anna Wintour, the editor of Vogue magazine in the U.S. Many actual people in the fashion world – designers and publicity people – said no to appearing as themselves because they were afraid to get on Anna Wintour’s bad side. That’s what happens when you’re surrounded by people who are as competitive, cutthroat, and demanding.
    - iv. Illus: In high school, primarily, I really enjoyed being one of the most popular kids. I was the captain of the water polo and swim teams my freshman year. My name would be announced over the homeroom PA system for setting a school record in swimming. Suddenly upperclassmen were inviting me to parties. People wanted me around, and that kind of thing. But in the middle of high school, I started questioning myself, asking a lot of questions, wrestling with my own pain, and started looking at Jesus. I’m really glad for that, because at around that time, I was exposed to some very serious athletes and we talked about blood doping. For those of you who don’t know, blood doping is whether you take out your own blood with a needle, when you’re rested and have a lot of oxygen in your blood. So you store your blood in a certain way, and then when you have a competition, you inject your own blood back into yourself. Then you have more oxygen in your bloodstream, and more energy. The best thing about it is it’s untraceable, because it’s not a steroid or a drug; it’s just your own blood. Now there was something very tempting for me in that. And looking back, I wonder if there was something in my heart I wasn’t paying attention to. Because at around that time, I also cheated in a class with another friend, got caught, and got disciplined. Why was I being drawn to other people

who not only did well, but cheated? In my quest for popularity, was my sin leading me to other people who sinned like I did? That is one thing about sin. And I thank our Lord Jesus that he got my attention, helped me respond to him, and helped to reshape my heart. Because I have no doubt in my mind that if I had continued down that path, my sins would have led me to more sins. And my sins would have drawn me into a collision with other people with similar sins. And that would have been devastating. And yet I also have no doubt that all throughout, God would have been shouting my name, trying to get my attention, and teaching me that those collisions are bitter.

- c. The lesson: God lets people escalate their own sins. And when that happens, an ugly reality follows. Jeremiah says, ‘Your own wickedness will correct you and your apostasies will reprove you. Know therefore and see that it is evil and bitter for you to forsake the LORD your God’ (Jer.2:19). And Paul says in Romans 1 that human beings ‘exchange’ our knowledge of God for evil (1:23, 25, 26). In response, ‘God gave them over’ (1:24, 26, 28).
3. The Overthrow of Babylon Stated: 13:17 – 22
  - a. But of course, the next question is, ‘Who will punish Babylon?’ And the answer is: ‘Another empire.’ The Medes / Medo-Persian Empire (13:17 – 19).
  - b. This is how the punishers get punished. That’s how the judgers get judged. Jerusalem sins. Assyria swoops in and punishes Jerusalem. Then Babylon swoops in and punishes Assyria. Then the Medes will swoop in and punish Babylon. And Babylon was overthrown when the Medo-Persian armies dammed up the Euphrates River, marched through the dry riverbed under the gates into the city of Babylon, and took the city overnight. King Belshazzar was overthrown and killed.
4. The Overthrow of Babylon Explained: 14:3 – 23
  - a. Now on the other side of this chiasm is Isaiah’s explanation for how Babylon falls. The king of Babylon will be killed. The man who led Babylon will be cast down to the ground.
  - b. What happens to this king? Even this king’s dead body will be rejected and dishonored. The book of Daniel records the incident when the Jewish prophet Daniel, serving at the court of King Belshazzar of Babylon, read the handwriting on the wall. ‘That same night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was slain. So Darius the Mede received the kingdom at about the age of sixty-two.’ (Dan.5:30 – 31) Everything he had is taken away from him, even an honorable burial.
  - c. Illus: The villains I love to hate are the Thénardiers in *Les Misérables*.<sup>2</sup> They are real villains, and their lives were headed this way. They run a shady tavern, an inn, where they rob their guests by charging them extra and then literally stealing from them. They take advantage of a young woman named Fantine. Fantine has a little girl named Cosette, and pays the Thénardiers to take care of Cosette while she works. They probably tricked Fantine into this deal, because they don’t care about Cosette at all. Monsieur Thénardier keeps calling her Colette instead of Cosette, and Madame Thénardier treats her like a slave girl. Towards the end of the musical, Monsieur Thénardier is roaming through the streets and the sewers. A student revolt just occurred in the streets of Paris and there are dead bodies there. He sings:

Here’s a tasty ring  
 Pretty little thing  
 Wouldn’t want to waste it  
 That would really be a crime  
 Thank you sir, I’m in your debt  
 Here’s another toy  
 Take it off the boy  
 His heart’s no longer going  
 And he’s lived his little time  
 But his watch is ticking yet!

Well, someone’s got to clean them up, my friends

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<sup>2</sup> Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*, translated by Julie Rose, p.316 describe the Thénardiers as being very ugly people. Madame Thénardier is described as ‘tall, blond, ruddy, barrel-like, brawny, boxy, huge, and agile.’ Monsieur Thénardier is described as being ‘a skinny little runt, pale, angular, bony, rickety, who looked sick but was as fit as a fiddle...’

Before the little harvest  
Disappears into the mud  
Someone's got to collect their odds and ends  
When the gutters run with blood.

It's a world where the dog eats the dog  
Where they kill for bones in the street  
And God in His Heaven  
He don't interfere  
'Cause he's dead as the stiff at my feet  
I raise my eyes to see the heavens  
And only the moon looks down  
The harvest moon shines down!

Something deep in my bones cries out, 'No!! That's an injustice!!' Jean Valjean settles Fantine's debt with them releasing her conscience. So the Thenardiers don't have any psychological pull on Fantine any more, and she dies in peace. Then, Jean Valjean goes to rescue Cosette from them. He pays them generously, even though he can see right away that they treat her like a slave girl, because he doesn't want to haggle for Cosette while she's standing right there. So Valjean rescues Cosette from them. They have a daughter named Eponine, whose character could have been really ugly and bitter, but she falls in love with Marius. Her heart is tested because Marius has fallen in love with Cosette. But instead of being ugly and bitter like her parents, Eponine learns to love them both, and to love being loving. She dies in his arms because of a stray bullet. The implication is that she has opened herself up to God, and God frees her from the poison of her parents. Their little son Gavroche is told by his parents to live in the street, because he would have a better life there. But he demonstrates courage and dies with honor, hoping for better things, so he too opens himself up to God, and God frees him from his parents in the end. Finally, the Thenardiers try to blackmail Jean Valjean and Cosette but it backfires. The ring they have taken turns out to be Marius'. He recognizes it and now knows that he was rescued by Jean Valjean. So the Thenardiers have no leverage on any of them anymore, and Marius and Cosette throw them out of their wedding reception.

- d. That is how God works. It is not true that He don't interfere. He is always interfering, calling people to Himself and His goodness, calling people out from the evil clutches of the enemy, through their hearts. Notice, starting in v.12, Isaiah's language seems to speak of an Enemy with a capital 'E' behind the enemy with a lowercase 'e'. Who is the Enemy behind the enemy? Who ultimately fell from heaven, and was the star of the morning? Lucifer, the angel we now know as the accuser, the satan. God turns the tables by drawing on people's hearts. In the midst of all this sin, and power struggles, God quietly works in the heart, drawing people into His ultimate victory.
5. God's Plan for His People: 14:1 – 2
- a. Why do you think this is the center point of the chiasm, the main point of the section?
    - i. That means that this is the real reason all of this is happening. The real reason that God gave the Babylonians the invitation to come into the promised land was to kick out the Assyrians, make the Babylonians extend themselves too far, and then set them up to be 'ripe pickins' for the Medo-Persian Empire to conquer them.
    - ii. All of that is for the purpose of God having compassion on Jacob once again, bringing them back to the land, and blessing them again. They will be independent, and in fact, the Gentiles will somehow join them as part of God's family and the household of faith. They will be victorious over their enemies, but many of their enemies will become their friends.
  - b. This became true when the Jews became a Diaspora community. Many became 'God-fearers,' meaning as Jewish as you can be without converting through circumcision. Cornelius, the Roman centurion of Acts 10 was one such person. He later became part of Jesus' 'inheritance' (Isa.14:2), a 'servant' who was taken 'captive.'
  - c. Illus: The Swaim family adopting kids. White. Korean. African-American. Mexican. Three Rwandans. Four Nigerians.
  - d. Application: For us, we are part of an expanding family

6. Reminder

- a. Your sins are a magnet for other people with similar sins
- b. God calls you out of the cycle to truly be His people
- c. God will eventually judge the judger, punish the punisher, and defeat the Enemy behind the enemy