

THE LORD'S WORD OF HOPE

13 The oracle concerning Babylon that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw. ²Raise a signal on a bare hilltop. Shout to them. Beckon for them to enter the gates of the nobles. ³I have commanded those whom I have consecrated, I have summoned my mighty warriors—my proudly exulting servants—to express my anger. ⁴The sound of tumult in the mountains, like that of a great multitude. The sound of the uproar of the kingdoms of the nations as they gather together. Jehovah of hosts is mustering the army for battle. ⁵They are coming from a distant country, from the farthest recess of heaven—Jehovah himself and the weapons of his indignation—to destroy the whole land.

⁶Wail, for the day of Jehovah is near; it will be a day of destruction from the Almighty. ⁷Therefore, all hands will fall limp, and every man's heart will melt. ⁸They will be terrified; pain and anguish will seize them. They will writhe in pain like a woman in the labor [of childbirth]. They will look aghast at each other, their faces aflame. ⁹Listen! The day of Jehovah is coming—a cruel day, with wrath and [the expression of] fierce anger—to make the land desolate and to exterminate its sinners. ¹⁰The stars of heaven and their constellations will not show their light. The rising sun will be darkened, and the moon will not cause its light to shine. ¹¹I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity. I will bring to an end the arrogance of the haughty and will humble the pride of the ruthless. ¹²I will make men scarcer than pure gold, and mankind more rare than the gold of Ophir. ¹³Therefore, I will make the heavens tremble, and the earth shall be shaken out of its place by the wrath of Jehovah of hosts on the day his fierce anger is expressed. ¹⁴Like a hunted gazelle, like sheep without a shepherd, each one will return to his own people, each one will flee to his native land. ¹⁵Everyone who is found will be thrust through [with the sword]; indeed, everyone who is captured shall fall by the sword. ¹⁶Their infants shall be dashed to pieces before their eyes; their houses will be looted and their wives will be raped. ¹⁷See, I will stir up the Medes against them; they will not care for silver, nor will they delight in gold. ¹⁸But their bows will mow down the young men; they will not take pity on infants, nor will they look with compassion upon children.

¹⁹Babylon, the jewel of kingdoms, the glory of the Babylonians' pride, will become like Sodom and Gomorrah when God overthrew them. ²⁰It will never again be inhabited, neither will anyone live in it from generation to generation. No Arabian will pitch his tent there, nor will any shepherds rest their flocks there. ²¹But wild beasts of the wilderness will lie there; their houses will be full of jackals. Ostriches will dwell there, and wild goats will frolic there. ²²Hyenas will howl in their once fortified towers, and jackals will howl in her once luxurious palaces. Her time is at hand, and her days will not be prolonged; **14** because Jehovah will have compassion on Jacob and will once again choose Israel. He will settle them in their own land, and the alien will join them; aliens will unite with the house of Jacob. ²The [Gentile] peoples will take [Israel] and bring them to their own land; and the house of Israel will possess the nations as menservants and maidservants in Jehovah's land. [Israel] will make captives of those who were their captors and will rule over those who formerly oppressed them. ³On that day when Jehovah gives you relief from your suffering and trouble and cruel bondage, ⁴you will raise this taunt against the king of Babylon, "How the oppressor has come to and end! How his fury has ceased!" ⁵Jehovah has broken the rod of the wicked, the

scepter of the rulers—⁶the rod that in anger struck down peoples with unceasing blows, that subdued the nations with fury and relentless aggression. ⁷The whole earth is at rest and at peace; they break out into singing. ⁸Even the pine trees and the cedars of Lebanon exult over you and say, ‘Now that you have been laid low, no lumberjack comes to cut us down!’”

⁹Sheol down below is excited to meet you at your coming. It rouses the dead to greet you—all those who were leaders in the world; it makes them rise from their thrones—all those who were kings of the nations. ¹⁰All of them shall respond and say to you, “You also have become weak like us! You have become like us!” ¹¹All your pomp has been brought down to Sheol, along with the music of your harps. Maggots are spread out beneath you, and worms cover you. ¹²How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star, son of the dawn! How you have been cut down to the ground, you who once laid low the nations! ¹³You said in your heart, “I will ascend to heaven; I will exalt my throne above the stars of God. I will sit enthroned upon the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain! ¹⁴I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High!” ¹⁵But you are brought down to Sheol, to the depths of the pit. ¹⁶Those who see you stare at you, they ponder your fate, asking, “Is this the man who shook the earth and made kingdoms tremble? ¹⁷[Is this the man] who turned the world into a wilderness, who overthrew its cities and would not allow his captives to go home?” ¹⁸All the kings of the nations—all of them—lie in state, each in his own tomb. ¹⁹But you are cast away from your tomb like a rejected branch. You are covered with the slain that were pierced with the sword, with those who descend to the bottom of the pit. Like a corpse trampled underfoot, ²⁰you will not join them in burial, because you destroyed your land and killed your people. May the offspring of evildoers never be mentioned again! ²¹Prepare a place to slaughter his sons for the iniquity of their forefathers; so that they may not rise up and possess the earth and fill the surface of the world with cities. ²²“I will rise up against them,” declares Jehovah of host. “I will cut off from Babylon her name and her survivors, her offspring and posterity,” declares Jehovah. ²³“I will turn her land into a place for owls and into swampland. I will sweep her with the broom of destruction,” declares Jehovah of hosts.

²⁴Jehovah of hosts has sworn, saying, “Surely, as I have planned, so shall it happen; and as I have purposed, so shall it be established—²⁵[namely,] that I will crush the Assyrian in my land, and upon my mountains I will trample him down. Then his yoke will be taken off of my people, and his burden removed from their shoulders.” ²⁶This is the plan that has been determined for the whole world; and this is the hand that is stretched out over all the nations. ²⁷Since it is Jehovah of hosts who has determined to do this, who can thwart it? And since it is his hand that is stretched out, who can turn it back? (Isa. 13:1-14:27)

Introduction

The year was 1978; the place was southern Lebanon. The continuous attacks by the Palestine Liberation Organization against the small Christian community had broken the spirit of the people. For this Christian community—composed of several villages with a combined population of about 35,000—the situation seemed

hopeless. The people were afraid to assemble for fear of the terrorists. Their telephone and mail service had been destroyed, cutting them off from the outside world. Sniper fire kept them from working their fields, so that the crops were rotting and many had to go to bed hungry.

The military leader, Major Haddad, turned to a radio/T.V. repairman named Charbel Younes, and said, "Charbel, we must have a strong voice. Without a voice we will perish." Charbel used his skill to build a homemade radio transmitter out of used radio and T.V. parts, and by means of this transmitter Major Haddad would now speak words of hope and encouragement to the people. By the grace of God, what eventually came to be built was a powerful gospel radio station.

On September 9, 1979, the station's message sounded forth: Jesus Christ is Lord! And He is coming soon! You are listening to the Voice of Hope! The Voice of Hope, that is exactly what the station proved to be for those besieged Lebanese communities. Even the weather changed. Rain began falling after years of draught; the people took it as sign from God. Now they were no longer afraid to work their fields, and, in spite of continuing terrorist activities, they began repairing their shell-shocked buildings.

Yes, when the people were overwhelmed and the situation seemed hopeless, Major Haddad knew that what was needed was a voice—and the LORD graciously provided that Voice of Hope (*POWER*, 7/7/85, pp.2-ff.) Many centuries earlier, when God's Old Testament people found themselves in an overwhelming situation, the LORD provided them with His Word of hope and assurance. When we find ourselves in an overwhelming situation, let us look to the LORD's Word of hope and assurance.

I. Remember the LORD's Promise of Final Victory (Isa. 13:1-14:23)

As the people of Judah found themselves being overwhelmed by the invading Assyrian army, the LORD revealed to Isaiah His future victory over the **Babylonians**. Why? He did so in order to give them the full picture and to provide them with the assurance of God's ultimate victory.

At about the very time Isaiah was delivering this oracle, there arose a leader in Babylon who was beginning to re-unite the Chaldeans into a nation, his name was Merodach-baladan; (722-705 B.C. was the period of his reign.) One hundred years later (625-605 B.C.) there would reign a strong Babylonian king, Nabopolassar. During his reign the Assyrian capitol of Nineveh would fall in 612 B.C. and in the last year of his reign the mighty Assyrian empire would come to an end.

When the Assyrian empire fell, a power vacuum was created in the Middle East. Egypt seemed to be the most likely successor to Assyria; but to everyone's surprise, Egypt was defeated by a young Babylonian prince named Nebuchadnezzar. Under Nebuchadnezzar (604-562 B.C.) the Babylonians became

a great international empire; a type, or model, of every great pagan empire that would ever dominate the world. As we consider the description of the conquest of Babylon as it is revealed in Isaiah 13-14, we find that it is also a picture and prophecy of God's final and ultimate conquest over sinful mankind and over the devil himself.

The emphasis of verse 4 is on the great multitude gathered against Babylon, the terrifying noise of this multitude, and the fact that it is the LORD of hosts Himself who is mustering these forces for battle. The assembling of the historical armies of the Medes and the Persians against Babylon suddenly takes on supernatural and cosmic dimensions; the LORD's forces are seen as coming from *"the farthest recess of heaven,"* and the LORD Himself is leading them (vs. 5.) The whole universe is affected by this coming of the LORD's army: *"The stars of heaven and their constellations will not show their light. The rising sun will be darkened, and the moon will not cause its light to shine"* (vs. 10.) In verse 11 we hear the LORD declare, *"I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity. I will bring to an end the arrogance of the haughty and will humble the pride of the ruthless."* Verse 13 describes the cataclysmic destruction of that day: *"Therefore, I will make the heavens tremble, and the earth shall be shaken out of its place by the wrath of Jehovah of hosts on the day his fierce anger is expressed."*

Note that God's judgment and conquest of sinful Babylon (representing all of sinful mankind and all of his empire) is defined as being for the purpose of redeeming His people. One of the reasons the LORD will execute His judgment upon Babylon is *"because Jehovah will have compassion on Jacob and will once again choose Israel. He will settle them in their own land, and the alien will join them; aliens will unite with the house of Jacob"* (Isa. 14:1.) Isaiah 14:1 begins with the word *"because."* In other words, one of the great purposes for the conquest and judgment of Babylon, as described in awesome detail in Isaiah 13, is the redemption of God's people. So it was at the Exodus. The defeat of the Egyptian empire was the means by which Israel was redeemed. So it would be with the defeat of historic Babylon, it would result in the return of God's people to the Promised Land of Canaan. So shall it be on the last day—the judgment of the world and the final redemption of God's people are interconnected.

The statement that the LORD *"will once again choose Israel"* and *"will settle them in their own land"* is historically a reference to Israel's return from the Babylonian captivity; but in the ultimate sense it is a reference to the redeemed of the LORD inheriting the new heavens and the new earth. The statement that *"the alien will join them; aliens will unite with the house of Jacob"* is, in the light of New Testament revelation, a reference to the Gentile believers in Jesus, the Messiah, being grafted into the people of God and becoming partakers of His great salvation.

Isaiah 14:3-8 describe the rest the LORD shall give to His people on that day. The tyranny of the devil and sinful man shall be cut off and replaced by the experience of God's perfect peace—and the whole creation shall be at rest.

Verses 9-20 describe the just retribution that God shall administer on that day: the arrogant and tyrannical king of Babylon is brought down to destruction and utter humiliation. Sheol, the place of the dead, is portrayed as preparing a welcome for the tyrant: Sheol rouses all the dead kings, causing them to arise from their thrones and stand in honor of the Babylonian's arrival (vs. 9.) The dead rulers of the world greet the conquered tyrant with astonishment. They are amazed that he has become as weak and impotent as themselves; that he, too, has succumbed to death; and that, whereas pomp and glory once covered him, now he is covered with worms (vs. 10-11.) As the language of verses 12-15 indicate, this poetic description of the fallen tyrant is not only a reference to the king of Babylon but to the devil himself as the evil power behind the empires of the world—note Revelation 13:2b, a passage in which the devil, portrayed as "*the dragon*," is said to have given authority to "*the beast*," which represents the empires of this world.

Verses 21-23 declare that the LORD's judgment upon "Babylon" shall be final; "Babylon" shall never rise again to practice its evil and tyrannize God's people. The divine command is to make sure that the king of Babylon has no descendant to assume the throne and renew the empire (vs. 21.) To further insure its end, the LORD will make the site of the Babylonian empire to be a desolate, uninhabitable swamp, and He will sweep the empire away with "*the broom of destruction*" (vs. 23.)

Once again, from the poetic language employed, it becomes clear that the historical empire of Babylon is not only in mind; rather, that empire is viewed as a representative and model of all the empires of the world, and especially the final such empire at the end of history.

This entire passage (Isaiah 13:1-14:23), foretelling the final destruction of "Babylon," is depicting the same truth as is summarized in 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10,

God is just. He will pay back affliction to those who afflict you ⁷and give relief to you who are afflicted, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. ⁸He will punish those who do not know God [i.e.; those who have no love for or saving relationship with God] and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. ⁹They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power ¹⁰on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you. (2 Thess. 1:6-10)

When we find ourselves overwhelmed (facing a tyrannical, unjust, evil situation in our own lives personally and as we consider the society around us, let us remember God's sure promise of final victory.

II. Rely upon the LORD's Oath of Commitment (Isa. 14:24)

In Isaiah 14:24-27 the LORD addresses Himself to Old Testament Judah's present situation: the invading armies of Assyria were threatening to swallow up all of Judah.

Identifying Himself as "*Jehovah of hosts*" (the Almighty God,) the LORD swears that He will not allow His people to be swallowed up and consumed by this arrogant, God-defying invader. On the contrary, the LORD declares **under oath** that He "*will crush the Assyrian in my land.*" The Assyrian has invaded God's land, he is tyrannizing God's people, and the LORD will not stand by and allow him to triumph. Compare Zechariah 2:8b, referring to the LORD's people, the prophet declares, "*he who touches you touches the apple of his eye.*"

When the LORD does rise up and take action against the invading Assyrian it will provide deliverance and refreshment for His people: "*his yoke will be taken off of my people, and his burden removed from their shoulders*" (vs. 25.)

It is important to see that the LORD not only points His people to the future and the time of final and ultimate victory, He also assures us **under oath** that He will preserve us in the present from whatever foes we may face and whatever situations we may encounter.

When we find ourselves overwhelmed, let us rely upon the LORD's oath of commitment to us:

All whom the Father gives me will come to me; and he who comes to me I will by no means reject; ³⁸for I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. ³⁹And this is the will of him who sent me, namely, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but should raise it up at the last day. ⁴⁰My Father's will is that every one who looks to the Son and believes in him should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.
(Jn. 6:37-40)

As expressed by the hymn writer,

The soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose,
I will not, I will not, desert to his foes;
That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,
I'll never, no, never, no, never forsake,
I'll never, no, never, no, never forsake.
(Author Unkown)

III. Take Heart from the LORD's Tokens of Victory (Isa. 14:25-27)

In verses 24-25 the LORD Almighty pledged to overthrow the invading Assyrian army that was threatening to swallow up His people. Now in verse 26 He declares that the victory He is about to accomplish against the Assyrians is a token of His final and ultimate victory: *"This is the plan that has been determined for the whole world; and this is the hand that is stretched out over all the nations."*

Thus, that generation of God's people who experienced the threat of Assyria, and who witnessed the LORD's conquest of that invader, (as well as all God's people who read the record of these things,) are to view that conquest of the Assyrians as a token of the LORD's final victory. That victory over the Assyrian armies is recorded in Isaiah 27:36-37. On the night before the besieging Assyrian troops attacked the city of Jerusalem,

... the angel of Jehovah went out and put to death a hundred and eighty-five thousand men in the Assyrian camp. When the people got up the next morning—there were all the dead bodies! ³⁷So Sennacherib king of Assyria broke camp and withdrew. He returned to Nineveh and stayed there. (Isa. 27:36-37)

When we find ourselves overwhelmed, let us take heart from the LORD's tokens of victory. Look at what God has done in the past (the events recorded in Scripture, the deliverances and experiences of God's provisions in your own life,) and take heart. By way of example: A Christian man tells of an experience he had while stranded in south Philadelphia with a broken down car. He found himself in a tough and threatening neighborhood. He was sitting by the curbside waiting for some kind of assistance when a big black car came speeding towards him. To his surprise, and comfort, on the front license plate in bright yellow lettering on a blue background he saw the word: JESUS. It was the assurance that the LORD was with him and would take care of him.

Conclusion

That Lebanese army officer, Major Haddad, knew that what was needed when his people found themselves overwhelmed was a word of hope. That makeshift radio station erected in south Lebanon sounded forth the much-needed word of hope: Jesus is LORD!

When you find yourself in an overwhelming situation, look to the words of hope and assurance that the LORD has provided for us: 1) Remember God's Promise of Final Victory; 2) Rely upon the LORD's Oath of Commitment; and 3) Take Heart from the LORD's Tokens of Victory.