

Isaiah Chapter 13, Hebrew Text with Translation and Footnotes
And What About the Nations Other Than Israel?
Is There a Prophetic Word for Them? Yes, Indeed!
The Day of YHWH Is Coming On Babylon!¹

¹There are 3 end-notes for **chapter 13**: (1) “The Historical Jesus and Christian Theology,” by N.T. Wright; (2) “Medes”; and (3) “Chaldea.”

Slotki states that “A new section begins with this chapter extending to the end of **chapter 23**, in which the prophet surveys the neighboring peoples with whom Israel has had relations and pronounces their fate. He first deals with Babylon in **13:1-14:23**.” (P. 61)

Alexander states that “Here begins a series of prophecies (**chapters 13-23**) against certain powers, from the enmity of which Israel had been more or less a sufferer. The first in the series is a memorable prophecy of the fall of the Babylonian empire and the destruction of Babylon itself (**chapters 13-14**)...”

“The Medes are expressly named as the instruments of its subjection, and the prophecy contains several other remarkable coincidences with history, both sacred and profane. Hence it was justly regarded by the older writers, both Jews and Christians, as an extraordinary instance of prophetic foresight...”

“[19th century German writers on **Isaiah** who reject Isaiah’s authorship, and claim the chapter is either late exilic or post-exilic claim the passage contains:]

- (1) a spirit unworthy of Isaiah, i.e. one of bitter hatred and desire of revenge;
- (2) a want of resemblance in the style and diction to the genuine writings of Isaiah, and a strong resemblance to some later compositions;
- (3) a constant allusion to historical events and a state of things which did not exist for ages after Isaiah...

“The answer to the first reason is that it is false. Such is not the natural impression which the prophecy would make on an unbiased reader. This perversion has been unintentionally aided by a rhetorical mistake of Calvin and other Christian interpreters in representing the **14th chapter** as taunting and sarcastic in tone, which, on the contrary, is characterized by pathos...”

“The second argument is unsound in principle and precarious in application. On the ground that every writer always writes alike, only one composition of any author can be certainly proved genuine...The true strength of the doctrine...lies not in the *moral* or *philological* arguments...but in the *historical* one, that these chapters contain statements and allusion which imply a knowledge of what happened long after Isaiah’s death...”

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“This...is tantamount to saying that prophetic inspiration is impossible. And this is, after all, the only question of importance. If there cannot be prophetic foresight, then of course a reference to subsequent events fixes the date of writing which contains it. If, on the other hand, there is such a thing as inspiration and prophetic foresight, there is nothing to weaken the presumption created by a uniform tradition, the immemorial position of this prophecy [as a part of the writing of the historical Isaiah], and the express terms of a title not less ancient than the text, of which, according to oriental usage, it is really a part...

The great majority of Christian writers understand these chapters as a specific prophecy of the downfall of the Babylonian empire occasioned by the conquests of the Medes and Persians. To this event there are unequivocal allusions. There are some points, however, in which the coincidence of prophecy and history...is not so clear. This is especially the case with respect to the total destruction and annihilation of the city itself, which was brought about by a gradual process through a course of ages...

“The true solution of this difficulty is, that the prediction is generic, not specific; that it is not a detailed account of one event exclusively, but a prophetic picture of the fall of Babylon considered as a whole...The king of Babylon, whose fall is here predicted, is neither Nebuchadnezzar nor Belshazzar, but the kings of Babylon collectively, or rather an ideal king of Babylon, in whom the character and fate of the whole empire are concentrated...

“Even supposing that the writer of this prophecy lived at the time of Cyrus, how will the [non-believing] interpreter account for his prediction of that total desolation, which was not consummated for ages afterwards, but which now exists to the full extent of the prophetic description in its strongest sense?...

“It is universally admitted that the **13th chapter**, and the greater part, if not the whole, of the **14th chapter**, constitute a single prophecy...**Chapter 14** is...not a mere continuation of **chapter 13**, but a repetition of the same writer in a different form...While **chapter 13** is more historical in its arrangement, **chapter 14** is dramatic, or at least poetical. Another point of difference is, that in **chapter 13** the downfall of Babylon is represented rather as an act of Divine vengeance, in **chapter 14** as a means of deliverance to Israel, the denunciations of Divine wrath being there clothed in the form of a triumphant song, to be sung by Israel when Babylon is fallen.” (Pp. 265-68)

Gray entitles **chapters 13-23** “Prophecies mainly devoted to Foreign Nations.”

He comments that “The main section of the **Book of Isaiah** falls into the following subsections: The Oracle of Babylon, **13:1-14:23**; The Fall of Assyria, **14:24-27**; of Philistia, **14:29-32**; The Oracle of Moab, **chapters 15-16**; The Oracle of Damascus (and Ephraim), **17:1-11**; The Tumult of many Nations, **17:12-14**; The Land beyond the rivers of Cush, **chapter 18**; The Oracle of Egypt, **chapter 19**; Isaiah a sign

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against Egypt and Ethiopia, **chapter 20**; The Oracle of 'the Wilderness of the Sea,' **21:1-10**; The Oracle of Dumah, **21:11-12**; The Oracle 'In Arabia,' **21:13-16**; The Oracle of the Valley of Vision, **22:1-14**; The Fate of Shebna, **22:15-25**; The Oracle of Tyre, **chapter 23**.

Gray comments on **chapters 13-14**, which he entitles "Babylon," that "The 'Oracle of Babylon' consists of

- (1) a poem predicting the capture of Babylon, 'the beauty of kingdoms,' by the Medes, and the complete and permanent desolation of the site of the city, **13:2-22**;
- (2) a section, part poetry, part prose, explaining that the fall of Babylon will be the prelude to Yahweh's restoration of the Israelites to their land, and the subjection to them there of those who at present exact from them the hard service of captives, **14:1-4a**...
- (3) a song of triumph over a cruel and arrogant tyrant who had conquered and held in subjection to them there of those who at present exact from them the hard service of captives, **14:4b-21**; according to section (2) this king was a king of Babylon, **14:4a**;
- (4) a prose re-statement of the theme—Yahweh is about to exterminate the Babylonians and make the site of the city desolate. [We cannot follow Gray's analysis beyond this point. He does not specify the text here.]

"Whoever is answerable for this final form of the oracle quite clearly, whether correctly or not, understood the whole to refer to Babylon. The poem in **chapter 13** was written at a time when Babylon was the commanding city of the entire world (**13:19**), and when it was natural to expect that her supremacy, if wrested from her at all, would be wrested by the Medes (**13:17**); i.e. it was written at some time after the fall of Nineveh in about 606 B.C.E. [long after the historical Isaiah], but before the actual fall of Babylon in 538 B.C.E.; not later than 538 B.C.E., for the fate of Babylon is described in **13:19-22** prophetically, not *ex eventu* ['a prophecy written after the author already had information about the events he was "foretelling"']; the desolation of the site of the city was by no means what the writer depicts. A date about, or a little before, 550 B.C.E. best meets the case...

"Clearly, then, the oracle of Babylon is no earlier than the exile; it is probably later, for **14:1-4a, 22-23** is post-exilic rather than exilic; Babylon to the writer of these verses may be a symbolic name for all those that oppress Israel; the Israelites who are to be restored are to come from many quarters (see **14:1-4a**).

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“We may then attribute the oracle in its present form to a post-exilic editor who wrote **14:1-4a** to connect two poems (**13:2-23** and **14:4b-21**) which he understood, and in the case of the first at least correctly, to refer to the fall of Babylon.” (Pp. 232-33)

Gray adds that “For some two thousand years and more the singularly unfortunate guess of some editor who thought that the entire oracle was a prophecy of Isaiah’s (**13:1**) led to the unquestioning acceptance of Isaiah’s authorship of **13:1-14:23**...That the section **13:1-14:23** cannot in its entirety be the work of Isaiah follows so obviously from the historical situation presupposed in **13:2-22**.” (P. 234)

Motyer entitles **chapters 13-14** “Babylon: appearance and reality in world history.”

He states that “This oracle is a mosaic of seven pieces:

1. The title, giving subject and author (**13:1**)
2. The day of the Lord, with no overt reference to Babylon. This is an oracle datable to any point in Isaiah’s ministry (**13:2-16**)
3. The overthrow of Babylon by the Medes (**13:17-22**)
4. A connecting piece, possibly an editorial composition designed to provide a new integration for the other units in the complex. Its opening ‘For’ explains the Lord’s motivation in history (**14:1-4a**)
5. A mocking song, introduced by **verses 3-4a**, about the king of Babylon and a meditation on human vanity (**14:4b-21**)
6. Divine hostility to Babylon, matching section 3...(14:22-23)
7. The overthrow of Assyria ‘in My land,’ an interim fulfilment exemplifying Divine sovereign rule (**14:24-27**)

Watts entitles **chapters 13-14** “Burden: Babylon.”

He comments that “The outer limits of the scene are marked by the superscription in **13:1** and by the reference to the death of Ahaz in the heading of the last speech (**14:28**)...”

“The first three episodes belong most obviously under the theme burden of Babylon, while the two closing episodes interpret the plans of Yahweh and speak doom for the Philistines...The titles and extent are as follows:

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|-----------|--|
| Episode A | The Burden of Babylon (13:2-22a) |
| Episode B | Babylon’s Fate / Jacob’s Hope (13:22b-14:7) |
| Episode C | Taunt over a Fallen Tyrant (14:18-21) |
| Episode D | Three Statements of Yahweh’s Plans (14:22-27) |
| Episode E | Burden over the Philistines (14:28-32) |

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He comments that “The name ‘Babylon’ conjures up for the Israelite and the reader of scripture memories of the Tower of Babel (**Genesis 11:1-9**). The story is consistent with the city’s claim to a prestigious antiquity. The name means ‘Gate of God.’ Its influence through the centuries had a religious base.

“The great Hammurabi used Babylon as his capital in the eighteenth century B.C.E. Other rulers over Mesopotamia treasured the right to ‘seize the hands of Bel [Baal] in the annual Babylonian enthronement ceremonies which gave them a legitimacy in the eyes of the citizens that nothing else could effect. The Assyrian rulers from Tiglath-Pileser III to Sennacherib did this. Of course Nabopolssar and Nebuchadnezzar II did this. And the Persians, from Cyrus to Xerxes, did this. Most of these added the title ‘King of Babylon’ to their names and other titles.

“So the city had special meaning for that time in relation to political religion and in relation to monarchy in theory and practice. The [**Book of Isaiah**] features the role of Babylon in full awareness of the significance it carried in the eighth, as well as in the sixth-fifth centuries.” (Pp. 184-87)

Watts, who holds that the date of composition of the **Book of Isaiah** was 435 B.C.E., makes the role of Babylon a central theme in the long section beginning at **13:1** and continuing through **chapter 48**. He states that “By the time the [**Book of Isaiah**] was written, three more Persian emperors had included [the title ‘King of Babylon’] in their own title. Babylon continued to be a rebellious problem for its rulers. Xerxes was forced to put down a rebellion about 480 B.C.E...”

“The references to Babylon in the [**Book of Isaiah**] are, therefore, intended to be understood as follows:

13:17-22 and **14:22-23**: Under Ahaz, about 720 B.C.E. after the revolt of Merodach-Baladan.

21:9: Under Hezekiah, about 710 B.C.E.

23:13: Under Hezekiah after 710 (or 689) B.C.E.

Chapters 45-48: 540 B.C.E., prior to Cyrus’ conquest.

The King of Babylon in **14:4a** for whom the taunting poem set in the reign of Ahaz was deemed appropriate must have been Merodach-Baladan.

“The destructions or falls of Babylon which are predicted in the [**Book of Isaiah**] were fulfilled:

13:19-22 and **14:22-23** in about 710 B.C.E. by Sargon.

21:9 and **23:13** in about 710 B.C.E. by Sargon or 703 B.C.E. by Sennacherib...

“**Chapters 46-47** show the capitulation of the city to Cyrus in 539 B.C.E.

(Perhaps there are overtones of the destruction of the city by Xerxes in

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480 B.C.E.)

“Long passages on Babylon serve as a kind of ‘enclosure’ around a large central section or sections of the **Book**. The ‘Burden’ in **chapter 13** includes a description of world judgment and an oracle against Babylon promising defeat and destruction. **Chapter 14** begins with hope for Israel and continues (**verses 4b-21**) with a powerful taunt to be sung over the king of Babylon. The chapter then has a closing oracle against Babylon (**verses 22-23**) before a reconfirmation of God’s purpose to remove the Assyrian from His land (**verses 24-27**).

“The last passages about Babylon appear in **44:28-48:20**. Cyrus is identified as Yahweh’s appointed servant [‘My messiah’] to return Israel and rebuild the temple (**44:28-45:7**) but Babylon is not mentioned. **46:1-2** announce the humiliation and captivity of Babylon’s Gods, while **chapter 47** is a major taunting song against ‘daughter Babylon.’ **48:14** announces that Yahweh’s purposes will be fulfilled through His chosen one and calls on Israelites to leave Babylon (**verse 20**). Between these are notices of Babylon’s misfortunes in **21:1-10; 23:13**, and of her continued intrigues and conspiracies in **chapter 39**...

“Babylon also illustrates the pride of humanity (**13:11b**) that must find judgment under Yahweh...

“The entire section (**chapters 13-48**) is a defense of the Divine strategy (**14:24**) that Isaiah had announced, i.e., that God was sending the Assyrian to do His will in punishing the nations and to bring about a change to a new order...

“By the fifth century B.C.E. God had ‘finished all His work against Mount Zion and Jerusalem’ (**10:12**). He had also ‘punished the Assyrian’ and removed him from Canaan. And he was ready to fulfill His Own strategy to bring back the exiles and rebuild Jerusalem (**chapters 44-45**). The entire [Book of Isaiah] is an exposition of that strategy, of Israel’s and Judah’s resistance to it, and of the continued necessity of judgment in carrying it out.

“To the reading or hearing audience, about 435 B.C.E., these echoes of Babylon’s involvement with Jerusalem’s fate in the eighth century and the sixth century were filtered through their knowledge of the destruction of Babylon in 480 B.C.E. by Xerxes. They could not help but view it as another fulfillment of God’s curse of **chapters 13-14**.” (Pp. 188-89)

Oswalt gives five titles to the materials that follow:

13:1-35:10 “God: Master of the Nations.”

13:1-23:18 “God’s Judgment on the Nations.”

13:1-14:27 “Judgment on the Mesopotamian Powers.”

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13:1-18 “Introduction: God’s Destruction of Human Pride”
13:1-5 “Mustering God’s Army”

He comments on **13:1-5** that “Few modern studies of the **Book of Isaiah** make any attempt to analyze the present form of the prophecy. This is so, because it has been concluded that this form is merely the result of historical accident, betraying the hand of many redactors [Redaction is a form of editing in which multiple source texts are combined (redacted) and altered slightly to make a single document], all working out differing purposes and visions of reality. As in the present case, however, the materials are much more coherent than is usually granted...

“The chapters...here call for such an interpretation, for the relationships among them are too clear and too powerful to have been arrived at merely by chance...One central theme runs through **chapters 7-39**—the trustworthiness of God...They are united by this common theme: the God of Israel is the Lord of the nations. Their fate is in His hands (**chapters 13-23**); He is the Sovereign Actor on the stage of history, not they (**chapters 24-27**); trusting the nations instead of the King is foolishness (**chapters 28-33**); the ultimate results are: trust the nations, a desert; trust God, a garden (**chapters 34, 35**)...

“This analysis means that **chapters 36-38** are not a historical appendix to the previous materials. They are, in fact, the living out of the truths taught in **chapters 13-35**. Ahaz failed the test, but Hezekiah has learned the lessons and at least initially passes the test with high marks...

“[These chapters] are related in such a way as to form a coherent and compelling statement which demands our attention and response today as much as it did then. We must trust either in the nations or in God, and no book on earth will ever make the case for trusting God more forcefully.

“**Chapters 13-23** form one of the most easily recognized units in the **Book of Isaiah** because of the recurrence of the word...’burden’...’oracle’ throughout (see **13:1; 14:28; 15:1; 17:1; 21:1, 11, 13; 22:1; 23:1**)...

“Delitzsch is undoubtedly correct when he sees these chapters as following naturally upon the vision of Immanuel as ruler of the kingdoms. Young is also correct when he observes that the thought is generally an expansion of **10:5-34** with its attack on the pride of Assyria. But perhaps Erlandsson gives the most perceptive key when he comments that these oracles are not so much an announcement of doom upon the nations as they are an announcement of salvation to Israel if she would trust her Lord. Without doubt the nations never heard these words or, if so, only second-hand, but Israel heard them first-hand.

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“Thus, they are an answer to questions raised in **chapters 7-11**. Can God deliver Israel from the pomp and power of the world? Will He be able to restore her as **chapter 11** promises? The answer is a resounding yes. Furthermore, these chapters demonstrate the folly of trusting in nations whose doom is already settled...

“Furthermore, the section continues the treatment of pride which appears in the first chapters of the **book**. It is the arrogance of the nations that will finally bring them down (**13:11, 19; 14:11; 16:6; 23:9**)...

“Observation of the segment suggests that this element of pride provides the key to the organization. **Chapters 13** and **14**, which open the unit are clearly an attack not so much upon the historical Babylon (compare **21:10** for that) as they are upon that which Babylon has always represented: human glory...Similarly the oracle against Tyre that closes the unit is expressed in highly charged images which suggest that much more than historical Tyre is being attacked. Instead, it is the commercial conquest upon which human wealth and glory have always rested that is condemned...

“It is interesting that the imagery applied to Babylon in the **Book of Revelation** is particularly drawn from the description of Tyre here (**Revelation 17:1-6**). The recognition that Babylon was at the eastern end of the civilized world while Tyre was at the west[ern end], along with the highly symbolic language applied to each, suggests a bracketing effect which underlines the point of the unit: all human pride and accomplishment are under God’s judgment. Thus an Israel trusting in these is without hope (**22:1-25**), but an Israel trusting in God has nothing to fear from the nations of mankind (**14:1-4a**).

“The development of the unit seems to proceed as follows: judgment upon pride symbolized by the eastern power (**13:1-14:27**); judgment upon neighboring nations, who threaten Judah but with whom Judah sought to ally herself against the eastern power (**14:28-17:6**); a restatement of the need for dependence on God and of the results of the absence of such dependence (**17:7-18:7**); judgment upon Egypt in whom Judah was tempted to trust (**19:1-20:6**); judgment upon the Chaldeans and their allies who called for revolt against Assyria (**21:1-17**); judgment upon sightless Judah (**22:1-25**); judgment on pride symbolized by the western power, Tyre [and Sidon, **23:1-18**].

“In **13:1-14:27**, the opening segment of the judgments upon the nations, the focus is upon Babylon (**13:1, 19; 14:4, 22**), an emphasis which seems odd to the reader having just come from **chapters 7-12**, where all the attention is on Assyria. Furthermore, there is no oracle in the entire unit (**chapters 13-23**) against Assyria. The brief words in **14:24-27** seem to be a postscript to the Babylon oracle. These two factors—the sudden appearance of Babylon, which was not an empire in its own right until nearly a century after Isaiah, and the absence of a reference to Assyria—have led many scholars to believe that the segment at least must be dated no earlier than the exilic times when Babylon’s downfall was imminent.

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Skinner gives four reasons for such a conclusion: (1) Babylon was not a world power in Isaiah's day; (2) **14:1-3** has Israel in exile in Babylon; (3) Isaiah expected the overthrow of Assyria to be followed by the setting up of the messianic kingdom; (4) the forceful, vindictive style is not Isaianic. Lindblom argues that all references to the conversion and / or destruction of the nations are a result of the teaching of the exile and the preaching of 'Deutero-Isaiah.'

"This point of view is not necessary, however. There is every reason to believe that Babylon, the center of culture and trade in the world long before the rise of the Neo-Babylonian empire, is being used in [a] symbolic way...to introduce this unit which portrays God's overthrow of nation pomp and pride...

"The cultural dominance of Babylon is indicated by the degree of independence granted to it by Assyria until its final revolt was quelled in 689 B.C.E. Even Tiglath-Pileser III felt it necessary to be crowned king of Babylon...In the same way, the Medes are used to represent fierce, implacable [relentless, unstoppable] destruction (**13:17-18**). Many years before the Medo-Persian army of Cyrus accepted the surrender of Babylon in 539 B.C.E., the Medes had been recognized as a scourge by the Assyrians. (In fact, it was the Persians, who had defeated the Medes, who peacefully took over Babylon in 539 B.C.E. It is difficult to imagine a contemporary of those events not referring to the Persians instead of the Medes.)" (Pp. 297-301)

We are thankful to Oswalt for this extended treatment of the overall meaning of these chapters, and agree with him that such treatment is rare in modern commentaries.

Kaiser entitles **chapters 13-23** "The Oracles of the Nations."

He comments that these oracles "are introduced by a saying against the capital of the world empire, as the embodiment of world power, **chapter 13**, and against the world ruler, **14:4ff.**, and are concluded by a saying against the trading city of Tyre, **chapter 23**...

"It is a mistake to imagine too great a break after **chapter 23**. This misrepresents the structure of the work, which consciously passes from the judgment upon the nations in the final age to the eschatological judgment on Jerusalem in the tempest of the nations, in **chapter 28**." (P. xi)

"Because Babylon was responsible for the fate of Jerusalem and of the Jews, it became the symbol of the world power hostile to God, and its king became the world ruler who was equally hostile to God. Thus at the beginning of the prophecy we have the promise that on the day of Yahweh the world power and the world ruler which are God's enemies will be destroyed." (P. 2)

²Alexander comments on **chapter 13** that “After a title, the prophecy opens with a summons to the chosen instruments of God’s righteous judgments upon Babylon, who are described as mustered by the Lord Himself, and then appearing, to the terror and amazement of the Babylonians, who are unable to resist their doom (**verses 1-9**)...

“The great catastrophe is then described in a series of beautiful figures, as an extinction of the heavenly bodies, and a general commotion in the frame of nature, explained by the prophet himself to mean a fearful visitation of Jehovah, making men more rare than gold, dispersing the strangers resident at Babylon, and subjecting the inhabitants to the worst afflictions at the hands of the Medes, who are expressly mentioned as the instruments of the Divine vengeance, and described as indifferent to gain and relentless in their cruelty (**verses 10-18**)...

“From this beginning of the process of destruction, we are then hurried on to its final consummation, the completeness of which is expressed by a comparison with the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah, and by a prediction that the site of Babylon shall not be frequented, even by the wandering Arab, or by shepherds and their flocks, but only by solitary animals, whose presence is itself a sign of utter desolation (**verses 19-22**).” (P. 268)

Gray comments on **chapter 13** that “The poem describes the summoning of Yahweh’s warriors (**verses 2-3**), their assembling and advance (**verses 4-5**), and the terror of the people against whom they march (**verses 6-8**); the effect on heaven and earth (**verses 9-13**); the flight of the foreign people in the threatened city to their own lands and the slaughter of those who remain (**verses 14-16**). In **verse 17** it is first stated that it is the Medes who are to be Yahweh’s warriors, and in **verse 19** that Babylon is the threatened city. The poem closes with a description of the complete and eternal desolation of the site of Babylon.

“The poem is itself, substantially as it stands, or it rests upon, a poem which was the work of a Jew living during the exile, watching the movements of the Medes, and anticipating that the proud city and empire of Babylon would be overthrown by them; it must have been written about 550 B.C.E. [and we wonder, how could a Jew in Babylonian exile ‘watch the movements of the Medes’ more two millennia before the advent of television or radio newcasts?].

“There is a clearly-marked change in the dominant rhythm which formally distinguishes **verses 1-8** from **verses 9-22**...Whereas in **verses 17-19** The poem is quite clearly concerned with actual conditions, and possibilities closely related to them; in other places there appears the vagueness of an eschatological poem [a poem dealing with the final end]; the opening verses might well refer to superhuman armies of Yahweh, and by no means obviously suggest a single specific nation—the Medes. So again the darkness (**verse 10**) and the universal commotion are eschatological features, and in **verse 11** it is not Babylon, but the whole world that is to be punished.” (Pp. 237-38)

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אֲשֶׁר חִזָּה יִשְׁעֶיהָ בֶּן-אֲמוֹן:

Oracle / utterance / burden³ (for) Babylon,⁴

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Watts comments that **chapter 13** is “a complex, carefully balanced composition which builds dramatically from the Theophanic views of the Divine Warrior preparing for battle (**verses 2-16**) to an explanation of the events in historical terms. Yahweh is

acting to subdue and destroy Babylon by subverting her traditional allies, the Medes, against her...The dramatic format sets the scene in the heavenly council...The ‘Call to Arms’ (**verses 2-3**) is a familiar form in Divine Warrior literature...The dramatic presentation of the sights and sounds of mobilization (**verses 4-5**) fits the same category. Two ‘Day of Yahweh’ passages follow...**Verses 6-8** follow the genre ‘Summons to a People’s Lament.’ The reason for the call is the threat posed by the approaching Day of Yahweh...The announcement of God’s action against Babylon, which call the nation by name (**13:17-22**), is parallel to the similar word against Assyria (**10:12**) and that against Edom (**34:5-7**).” (Pp. 195-96)

³Slotki’s translation is “burden,” and he comments that “this is the literal meaning of the Hebrew word מַשָּׂא [massa’]. It signifies ‘a lifting up’ (of the spirit, or voice), hence ‘a prophecy, oracle, or vision.’” (Pp. 61-62)

Alexander states that there are two interpretations of מַשָּׂא, “both very ancient. The one makes it simply mean a declaration...or more specifically, a prophecy, oracle, or vision. The Greek translations are ὄρασις, ὄραμα [both meaning ‘vision’] and sometimes λήμμα [‘something received’]...The other explanation gives the word the sense of a minatory [threatening] prophecy...This word occurs in the titles of all the distinct prophecies of this [part of **Isaiah**, the prophecies to the nations].” (P. 268)

Motyer comments that “An oracle...means a ‘lifting up (of the voice),’ a declaration. ([It can also] mean ‘burden’ (**Exodus 23:5**) but there seems to be no thought of a prophet ‘burdened’ with a message here.” (P. 136)

Watts observes that “Gehman...thinks of מַשָּׂא as an oracle or prophetic speech, especially a severe prophecy to be laid on an individual or a nation. Scott...identifies it as a threatening oracle accompanied by lifting the hand as a gesture for an oath or curse. It is a ‘grim vision’ or a ‘harsh oracle’...

“The role of the superscription [**13:1**] has frequently been understood as indicating a major division in the book...The superscription applies to all of **chapters 13-14**.” (P. 190)

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which Isaiah, son of Amots saw:⁵

13:2⁶ עַל הַר־נְשֻׁפָּה שְׂאוֹנֵי־נֹס

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⁴Watts comments on the mention of Babylon, that “The name of the fabled city occurs here for the first time in the [Book of Isaiah]. The scene speaks of many other things, but the references to Babylon (13:19; 14:22) and to Babylon’s king (14:4) catch the ear and earn the headline. Its appearance is surprising. It is the only city or country in this part of the [Book of Isaiah] which is not directly involved in the events of eighth-century Palestine. Its role may be explained by the suggestive influence of **chapter 39.**” (P. 191)

⁵Alexander translates / comments on **verse 1**: “*The burden of Babylon* (or threatening prophecy respecting it), *which Isaiah, the son of Amoz saw* (received by revelation).” **Rahlfs** has ὄρασις ἣν εἶδεν Ησαίας υἱὸς Ἀμὼς κατὰ Βαβυλῶνος, “A vision which Isaiah son of Amos saw against Babylon.” The Latin Vulgate has “burden.”

Oswalt comments that “In an unmistakable way, this verse links the oracle, and those that follow, to Isaiah...If, in fact, Isaiah did not speak these words, the editor has resorted to a falsehood to prove a truth, something patently contradictory in a religion which stressed truthfulness as much as the Hebrew religion did.” (P. 301)

But the question easily arises, Why would Isaiah write such poetry concerning Babylon, when the chief enemy of Judah in his day was Assyria? Surely this oracle against Babylon would be more at home in the writing of Jeremiah or Ezekiel than in that of Isaiah! Could it be that a century-later disciple of Isaiah has taken a sermon of Jeremiah’s and added it to the **Book of Isaiah**, claiming that it was an integral part of Isaiah’s vision? We think that is entirely possible. But regardless of what we may speculate concerning its author, the passage says what it says—and it is our job to seek to listen to its message.

⁶Motyer entitles **13:2-16** “The day of the Lord: universal purpose declared.”

He comments that “Isaiah stands within the Amos tradition of the day of the Lord (**Amos 5:18-20**), and what he depicts matches what he says elsewhere...[Isaiah depicts] the culmination of history [which] rests on the principles of **Isaiah 10:5-15**...

“There is a description of the summons to a holy war (**verses 2-3**) and the mustering of a world-wide army (**verses 4-5**), the terror this inspires (**verses 6-8**) and the moral purpose in it all (**verses 9-13**). It will be a day without escape (**verses 14-16**).” (Pp. 136-37)

Thus **Isaiah 13:2-16** for Motyer is not about the destruction of Babylon, but rather of a universal, final day of judgment, “the culmination of history” [what many have

(continued...)

הַרְיִמוּ קוֹל לָהֶם
הַנִּיפּוּ יָד
וַיָּבֹאוּ פִתְחֵי נְדִיבִים:

⁶(...continued)

called “the end of time”] which is to be exemplified in the fall of Babylon, described in **verses 17-22**.

But where in the text is anything said about “the culmination of history”? **Amos 5** is warning Northern Israel of their coming destruction by Divine judgment because her worship is disconnected from the justice YHWH demands from His people--but says nothing of the “culmination of history,” unless that is understood as the “end” of Northern Israel as a nation, as stated in **Amos 8:2**, “the end has come upon My people israel!” We think Motyer is reading this theological conviction of his into the text. What do you think?

Slotki comments on **verses 2-4** that they depict “The muster of the hosts [armies].” (P. 62) Watts likewise states “The call to arms of dedicated and loyal troops is ordered by Yahweh. Messengers are sent out to gather the armies for the battle.” (P. 196)

Oswalt comments on **verses 2-3** that “The oracle begins with a picture of a call to arms...A signal flag is run up on a barren hilltop where it can be seen by all around... The army is called to enter the gates of the nobles, or perhaps, ‘the noble gates.’ In either case, the allusion is to the haughty and elegant. The function of this army will be to cast down the proud...But this is not just any army. It has been called and assembled by God. So these are God’s warriors, consecrated to Him to carry out His judgments and to exult in His being lifted up (**verse 3**).” (P. 302)

Alexander comments on **verse 2** that “The attack of the Medes and Persians upon Babylon is now foretold, not in the proper form of a prediction, nor even in that of a description, which is often substituted for it, but in that of an order from Jehovah, to His ministers to summon the invaders, first, by an elevated signal, and then as they draw nearer, by gestures and the voice. *Upon a bare hill* (i.e. one with a clear summit, not concealed by trees) *set up a signal, raise the voice*, (shout or cry aloud) *to them* (the Medes and Persians), *wave the hand, and let them enter the gates of the* (Babylonian) *nobles.*” (Pp. 268-69)

Alexander twice mentions “and Persians,” although the Persians are not mentioned in the text. By adding in the “Persians,” Alexander makes the passage related to the fall of Babylon to Cyrus the Persian in 539 B.C.E. [see **Isaiah 45**]. But the failure of the text here in **chapter 13** to mention the Persians or Cyrus leads to the view expressed by Oswalt that Babylon here is the commercial city as a symbol of wealth and financial power, not the specific Babylon that fell to Cyrus.

Upon a bare hill,⁷ raise (plural imperative) a sign / signal!⁸

Raise high a voice to them!

Wave a hand!

And let them come / enter⁹ (the) gates of nobles!¹⁰

⁷Slotki's translation is "upon the high mountain," and he comments that this is "So that the signal could be seen from afar." But he suggests that "An alternative translation is 'bare mountain,' so that no trees would obstruct the view." (P. 62)

The phrase in Hebrew is **עַל תֵּרֶם-נִשְׂפָּה**, using the niph'al masculine singular participle, which can be translated as "made smooth" or "swept bare." **Rahlf's** translates by ἐπ' ὄρους πεδινού, "upon a flat / level mountain," or possibly "upon mountain of a plain."

⁸Slotki's translation is "an ensign," meaning "a signal for the armies to assemble for the advance against Babylon." (P. 62)

⁹Where our Hebrew text has the plural verb **וַיָּבֹאוּ**, "and they will come," or "and let them come," 1QIs^a has the singular verb **וַיָּבֹא**, "and he will come," or "and let him come," perhaps referring to Cyrus.

¹⁰Slotki states that the phrase "gates of the nobles" is "suggestive of the name of Babylon, which is derived from Babel (*Bab-ilu*), 'gate of the God.' The traditional Hebrew etymology of the name is 'confusion' (compare **Genesis 11:9**)." (P. 62)

Gray states that "The term **נְדִיבִים** is applied to men of rank and position on whom society and government rest; it is parallel to 'king' in **Job 34:18**; to 'princes'...in **Numbers 21:18** and **Proverbs 8:16**." (P. 238)

Watts comments that the use of the word *nobles* here "reflects the Song of Deborah (**Judges 5:2, 9**) where another form of the root describes 'volunteers' for battle." (P. 196)

Rahlf's translation of **verse 2** is:

ἐπ' ὄρους πεδινού ἄρατε σημεῖον
ὑψώσατε τὴν φωνὴν αὐτοῖς μὴ φοβεῖσθε
παρακαλεῖτε τῇ χειρὶ
ἀνοίξατε οἱ ἄρχοντες

Upon a mountain of a plain / upon a flat / level mountain, raise a sign!
Raise the voice to them, Don't be afraid!

(continued...)

13:3¹¹ אֲנִי צִוִּיתִי לְמַקְדָּשֵׁי

גַּם קִרְאתִי גְבוּרֵי לְאַפִּי

עֲלֵיזֵי גְאוּתִי:

I, I commanded to My set-apart ones,¹²

¹⁰(...continued)

Encourage with the hand!
Open, you rulers!

¹¹Slotki observes that in this verse we hear the “voice of God.” (P. 62)

¹²Slotki states that “My consecrated ones” (our “My set-apart ones”) means “the Medes, who were ‘consecrated’ by God to carry out His will against Babylon.” (P. 62)

Gray likewise states that “*Consecrated ones* [means] soldiers...War was a sacred institution, and therefore those who fought were consecrated and subject to strict laws of purity and taboo.” (P. 238)

Watts has “dedicated (holy, sanctified) ones.”

Yes...and it should be emphasized that the it is non-Jewish “foreign” armies that are here identified by YHWH as “My set-apart / consecrated / holy ones,” and “My mighty ones.” That means that not only does Israel belong to YHWH, but so also does the “foreign” country of Media—and if Media, so also all other “foreign” countries! YHWH is the universal God, the God of all peoples and nations—not the exclusive God of Israel! YHWH’s mighty works in history are not confined to Israel and her history. Compare **Amos 9:7**,

Are you people not like the people of Ethiopia to Me, O people of Israel?
–It is a saying of YHWH!
Did I not bring up Israel from the Land of Egypt--
and the Philistines from Crete,
and Syria from Qir?

Do you agree with Isaiah and Amos? Or is your God only active among Jews or only among Christians, or only among Americans?

Alexander comments that “It is best to understand the words indefinitely [that is, with reference to the ones addressed], as addressed to those whose proper work it was to do the thing commanded. Jehovah being here represented as a military leader, the order is of course to be conceived as given to His heralds or other officers. They are not commanded to display a banner as a sign of victory...but to erect a signal for the purpose of collecting troops...

(continued...)

also I called to My mighty men¹³ for My anger,¹⁴
exultant ones of My majesty.¹⁵

13:4¹⁶ קוֹל הַמְּזוּן בְּהַרִים

¹²(...continued)

[Alexander translates / comments:] “The enemies thus summoned are described as chosen, designated instruments of the Divine vengeance, and as already exulting in the certainty of their success. *I (Myself) have given command (or a commission) to My consecrated [ones] (chosen and appointed instruments). Yes (literally, also), I have called (forth) My mighty ones (or heroes) for (the execution of) My wrath, My proud exulters.*” (P. 269)

Motyer comments that “*My holy ones* refers not to sanctity of character but to status, as set apart for a Divine service, the ‘holy war’...The Lord calls them *My* not because He approves their arrogance but because, in all their arrogance, He owns them and directs the overflowings of their arrogance to His Own ends.” (P. 137)

¹³Watts translates by “My heroes.” He comments that they would be “heroes for My wrath’ as the Assyrians were ‘rods of God’s anger’ (10:5). **Rahlfs** has γίγαντες, “giants.”

¹⁴Where our Hebrew text has לְאַפִּי, “to / for My anger,” **Rahlfs** has ἔρχονται πληρῶσαι τὸν θυμὸν μου, “they are coming to fulfill the wrath of Mine.”

¹⁵Watts translates this line by “those rejoicing in My sovereignty.” We do not think “My sovereignty” is a good translation of גִּבּוֹרֹתַי, “My majesty / pride,” but is an attempt to read theological ideas into the statement.

The Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) has nothing resembling this phrase, but instead depicts the soldiers as χαίροντες ἅμα καὶ ὑβρίζοντες, “rejoicing together and mistreating / insulting.” They are not being depicted as “nice guys”!

Watts comments that “No names are given for those who are called out. The ancient pattern of Holy War would have mentioned the tribes of Israel (**Judges 5**). Here only descriptive titles are given.” (P. 196)

¹⁶Oswalt comments on **verses 4-5** that “These verses convey the sense of swiftly gathering doom (compare **5:26-30**). The *mountains* referred to may be the Zagros chain which parallels the Tigris River and forms the eastern boundary of Mesopotamia ...Here the enemy has surmounted the barriers and masses for the final attack. Nor is this merely a local skirmish. This army has come from all over the earth, even as far as the end of the heavens, the place where the earth and sky meet at the horizon...

(continued...)

דְּמוֹת עַם־רַב
 קוֹל שְׂאוֹן
 מִמְּלָכוֹת גּוֹיִם נֹאסְפִים
 יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת
 מִפְּקֵד צְבָא מִלְחָמָה:

A voice / sound of a crowd / tumult in the mountains—¹⁷

¹⁶(...continued)

“Once again, the stress is upon this army as God’s instrument. Who is coming? The Lord and the ‘vessels’ of His wrath. This is truly the Master of history. How foolish to put one’s trust in a host [army] rather than in the Lord of Hosts.” (Pp. 302-03)

Slotki comments on **verse 4** that “The prophet can already hear the noise and tumult of the gathering legions.” (P. 62)

Alexander comments on / translates, “The prophet, in his own person, now describes the enemies of Babylon, who had just been summoned, as actually on their way. He hears a confused noise, which he soon finds to be that of confederated nations forming the army of Jehovah against Babylon. *The voice (or sound) of a multitude on the mountains! The likeness of much people! The sound of a tumult of kingdoms of nations gathered (or gathering themselves)! Jehovah of Hosts mustering (i.e. inspecting and numbering) a host of battle (i.e. a military host)! The absence of verbs adds greatly to the vividness of the description. The sentence really consists of a series of exclamations, describing the impressions made successively upon the senses of any eye and ear witness.*” (P. 270)

¹⁷Slotki states that the phrase “the mountains” means “the land of the Medes north-east of Babylonia beyond the Zagros range. ‘This was the quarter from which the Medo-Persian foes of Babylonia, under the banner of Cyrus, attacked the empire of Nabonidus [i.e., Babylon] and brought about its overthrow in 538-36 B.C.E.’ (quoting O.C. Whitehouse, Christian hebraist, in the **Century Bible**).” (P. 62)

Alexander states that “By the mountains some suppose Media to be meant...and the other hilly countries from which Cyrus drew his forces...But it seems more natural to understand it...of the actual advance of the invaders. The mountains then will be those dividing Babylonia from Media or Persia.” (P. 270)

Motyer, quite differently, states that the “mountains” are to be understood “as the mountains surrounding Jerusalem, where the sound of the gathering forces would be heard.” (P. 137) But we ask, where is anything said concerning Jerusalem in the text?

(continued...)

likeness of a great people;
a voice / sound of an uproar—
kingdoms¹⁸ of nations gathering together!¹⁹
YHWH of Armies is mustering an army for war,

13:5²⁰ בָּאִים מֵאַרְצֵי מְרֻחָק

¹⁷(...continued)

This has come from Motyer's assumption that the text is describing the last and final battle in history, which will be centered in an attack on Jerusalem—but he is reading all of this into the text.

In fact, the text does not identify the location of the mountains, and it seems that the mountains meant are mountains surrounding Babylon, from which her enemies will come at the command of YHWH.

¹⁸Where our Hebrew text has קוֹל שֹׁאֵן מִמְּלְכוֹת גּוֹיִם, literally, “a voice / sound uproar, kingdoms of nations,” **Rahfs** has φωνὴ βασιλέων καὶ ἔθνων, “a voice of kings and of nations.”

¹⁹Alexander states that “It is commonly agreed that there is here a direct reference to the mixture of nations in the army of Cyrus. Besides the Persians and the Medes, Xenophon speaks of the Armenians.” (P. 271) He refers to **Jeremiah 50:9** and **51:27** as adding the names of other nations; the latter passage mentions Ararat, Minni and Ashkenaz as included.

Informed by history, Alexander adds that instead of depicting specific attacks on Babylon, the passage should be understood as “a generic picture of the whole series of events which ended in the downfall of Babylon.” That is different from his earlier mention of “the army of Cyrus,” and such an understanding is required by the fact that Babylon was not destroyed by the armies of Cyrus, as this passage can easily be understood to imply.

²⁰Slotki comments on **verses 5-8** that in them, “The avenging hosts are commanded by the Lord Himself [and] Babylon's feeling of terror and helplessness is described.” (P. 62)

Gray entitles **verses 5-8** “Terror at the approach of Yahweh and His warriors.”

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 5**: “*Coming from a distant land* (literally, *a land of distance*), *from the* (visible or apparent) *end of the heavens—Jehovah and the instruments* (or weapons) *of His wrath—to lay waste* (or destroy) *the whole land* (of Babylonia).”

(continued...)

מִקְצֵה הַשָּׁמַיִם
יְהוָה וְכָלֵי זַעֲמוֹ
לְחִבַּל כָּל-הָאָרֶץ:

coming from a land far away,
from (the) end of the heavens--²¹

²⁰(...continued)

Motyer takes the verse quite differently: “This **verse [5]** includes both the notions of the world-embracing sway of the Lord and also of world involvement in the last battle, the gathering to the battleground of every force the world knows...This is no national disaster [i.e., like the fall of Babylon], but one embracing the whole world.” (P. 137)

But Motyer is reading most of this into the text. Yes, YHWH holds a “world-embracing sway,” but where in the text is anything said about the “last battle,” or “the gathering to the battleground of every force the world knows”? The forces being called by YHWH to destroy Babylon are coming from a land far away--the far reaches of the earth--or “from the end of the heavens--but “every force the world knows”? We think

Motyer has been reading sensationalist descriptions of “the end of time,” and “the battle of Armageddon,” etc., and is reading these ideas into the text of **Isaiah 13!** What do you think?

²¹Watts notes that **Rahlfs** has ἀπ’ ἄκρου θεμελίου τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, “from (the) outermost foundation of the heaven,” so as to “imply that they did not come from heaven itself.” (P. 193)

Alexander comments that “The end of heaven is of course regarded by Gesenius as a proof of ignorance in the writer. Others more reasonably understand it as a strong but natural hyperbole...

“The best explanation is...[to] suppose the prophet to refer to the horizon or bounding line of vision. He is not deliberately stating from what region they set out, but from what point he sees them actually coming, viz. from the remotest point in sight. This view of the expression, not as a geographical description, but as a vivid representation of appearances, removes the necessity of explaining how Media or Persia could be called a distant land or the extremity of heaven.” (P. 271-72)

We understand it as a “strong but natural hyperbole,” expressed at a distant point in time when modern geographical understanding was not existent, without need for rationalizing the statement away as Alexander attempts to do. What do you think?

YHWH and instruments of His indignation,²²

to destroy all the land / earth!²³

13:6²⁴ הַיְלִילֹתַי

²²Slotki's translation has "the weapons of His indignation," and he comments that "They are the striking forces about to execute the Divine purpose determined by God's anger against Babylon." (P. 62)

Where our Hebrew text has וְכִלְיֵי זַעֲמֹוֹ, "and instruments of His indignation," **Rahlfs** has καὶ οἱ ὀπλομάχοι αὐτοῦ, "and the ones fighting in heavy arms."

²³Slotki's translation has "the whole earth," and he comments that in this context the phrase means "Babylonia, which was presumed to compass the whole civilized world." (P. 62)

Gray comments that *All the earth* [is] rhetorical for the entire Babylonian empire... or eschatological (he places a question mark at the end of this statement)...Possibly the verse was interpolated so as to generalize a prophecy of the overthrow of Babylon by the Medes into a prophecy of the final and universal judgment." (P. 239) At least this is the way Motyer interprets it!

Watts comments that "Whether this refers to a limited geographical area (Palestine in **10:23**; the lower Euphrates in **13:5**), or to the whole world must remain open. Perhaps the ambiguity is deliberate. All the descriptions of the 'Day of Yahweh' in **Isaiah** imply a universal application as well as a specific target area." (Pp. 196-97)

But of course—since YHWH is the God of all the earth, His "Day" of judgment on evil is universal—coming throughout history on the wicked, oppressive nations of the earth.

²⁴Oswalt entitles **verses 6-18** "The day of the Lord against the proud." He comments that "This passage begins fittingly with the word 'Howl,' for the following verses describe a scene of terror—the Day of the Lord (**verses 6, 9**; compare also **Joel 1:5, 13, 15**). It is a day when human strength will be helpless, when creation itself will tremble, when the almost boundless capacity for human cruelty will be unleashed...

"Nor is it that the tyrant God can brook no rival. The human grasp for supremacy flies in the face of the natural order and uncages all these results just as the breaking of a physical law produces pain and disorder." (P. 305)

Watts comments on **verses 6-8** that "A third response to Yahweh's mobilization is more emotional: a call to *wail* in mourning because of the expected terror of Yahweh's day...In the dramatic scene the [mourning] genre reinforces the impression of the awesome and terrible prospect." (P. 107)

כִּי קָרוֹב יוֹם יְהוָה

כְּשֶׁד מִשְׁדַּי יָבֹוא׃

Howl (plural imperative)!

Because YHWH's day is near!^{25, 1}

Like destruction from Shaddai it is coming!²⁶

²⁵Alexander comments that “This day is said to be *near*, not absolutely with respect to the date of the prediction, but relatively, either with respect to the perceptions of the prophet, or with respect to what had gone before. For ages Babylon might be secure; but after the premonitory signs just mentioned should be seen, there would be no delay. The words of the verse are supposed to be uttered in the midst of the tumult and alarm of the invasion.” (Pp. 272-73)

We are reminded of the problems with which **New Testament** students are confronted in statements attributed to Jesus concerning the kingdom of God being “near,” and the claims of Albert Schweitzer that Jesus was a mistaken “radical eschatologist.”

See our end-note 1 for a paper by the modern Anglican bishop N. T. Wright on this subject, with which we are in agreement—although some of his language and references are difficult to understand by those unacquainted with the 20th century literature concerning Jesus.

Motyer, who interprets **verses 2-16** as describing “the culmination of history,” and the “last battle” in human history, states that “*Near* (קָרוֹב) is ‘close by’ rather than ‘imminent.’ It speaks not of necessary proximity in time or necessary tarrying but of the total preparedness of that day to dawn whenever the Lord declares that the time has come.” (Pp. 137-38)

We hold that the “Day of YHWH” means the time when YHWH visits the earth to punish its iniquity—something that has occurred numerous times in the past (for example in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, or the “end” that came upon Israel as announced by **Amos 8:2**, when the Assyrians carried many of the northern Israelites into exile far to the east, or when Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians in 587 B.C.E., or again when Jerusalem fell to the Romans in 70 C.E., or, jumping 2,000 years, when Hitler and the Third Reich met their end, etc. etc.) Such coming of YHWH's day is always “near,” because YHWH is always “near”!

²⁶Slotki's translation has “As destruction from the Almighty shall it come.” He comments that “The Hebrew, **keshod mi-shaddai**, is an alliteration that cannot be reproduced in translation. Apart from the introductory word, the verse is identical to

(continued...)

עַל-כֵּן כָּל-יְדֵיִם תִּרְפִּינָה 13:7²⁷

וְכָל-לִבָּב אֲנוֹשׁ יִמָּס:

²⁶(...continued)

Joel 1:15.” (P. 63) Watts attempts to reproduce the alliteration with his “like destruction from the Destroyer.”

Watts comments that the Hebrew שַׁדַּי, **shadday** “is the Divine name...which is common as אֱלֹהֵי שַׁדַּי, **el shadday** ‘El Shaddai’ in the patriarchal section of **Genesis** and in **Job**. The usage here in **verse 6** would support an understanding of שַׁדַּי which derives it from the root שָׁדַד ‘to destroy.’ Discussion of the meaning of the name has been extensive...Ancient interpreters [of the name] were not of one mind about [its] meaning.” (P. 197)

Gray states that “The coiner of the...phrase associated the Divine name שַׁדַּי, **shadday** with the root שָׁדַד...must have understood it to mean the ‘Waster,’ or ‘Devastator.’ The actual etymology and original meaning of the term is altogether obscure; [Rahfs] frequently renders it by παντοκράτωρ, ‘Almighty’; the later Greek versions by ἰκανός, ‘Sufficient One.’” (P. 239)

Motyer holds that “the title refers to the God Who can do whatever He wills.” (P. 138)

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 6**: “*Howl* (ye Babylonians, with distress and fear), *for the day of Jehovah* (His appointed time of judgment) *is near*. *Like might* (i.e. a mighty stroke or desolation) *from the Almighty it shall come.*” (P. 272)

Oswalt states that “As destruction from the Almighty” is “a wordplay on שָׁדַד, the root of both *destruction* and *Almighty*...The blow will be one that only God could have delivered it.” (P. 305) Yes, but it is not certain that שַׁדַּי means “Almighty.”

²⁷Oswalt comments on **verses 7-8**: “These verses amplify the universal nature of the Lord’s judgment. Once again, it is the pride of humanity which provokes this disaster (**verse 11b**)...On the earth, the immediate result of the lust for pomp and power is a devastating depopulation. The terrible death toll of World War I, when virtually an entire generation of European men was wiped out, and the frightening prospect that a nuclear war could leave the entire northern hemisphere uninhabitable, must take the statements of **verses 9** and **12** out of the realm of hyperbole and put them in the realm of principle.” (Pp. 305-06)

For this reason all hands²⁸ sink,²⁹
and every heart of (weak) man melts.³⁰

13:8 וְנִבְּהָלוּ

צִרִים וְחַבְלִים יֶאֱחֹזֵן

כִּי־לָדָה יִחִילוּן

אִישׁ אֶל-רַעְהוֹ יִתְמָהוּ

פְּנֵי לְהַבִּים פְּנִיָּהִם:

And they will be disturbed;

pains³¹ and agony (synonym) will take strong hold,
like a woman giving birth they will writhe (with pain).³²

²⁸The Hebrew word for “hands” is יָדַיִם, and Watts notes that is is a “dual” noun, meaning “every pair of hands.” (P. 193)

²⁹Slotki’s translation has “Therefore shall all hands be slack,” and he comments that “So terror-stricken will the Babylonians be that they will lose the power to resist attack.” (P. 63)

³⁰Watts comments on **verses 7-8** that they “portray the panic and impotence of the victims. The theme is common in descriptions of Holy War when Yahweh goes ahead of the armies terrifying the enemy.” (P. 197)

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 7**: “Therefore (because of this sudden and irresistible attack) *all hands shall sink* (fall down, be slackened or relaxed), *and every heart of man shall melt.*” (P. 273)

Gray comments, “The Babylonians become paralyzed with fear.” (P. 240) And Motyer states that “Paralyzed by the terrors of the day, people will neither be able to act (the hands) nor plan (the heart / mind).” (P. 138)

³¹Rahlf’s translates צִרִים, “pangs” or “writings,” by οἱ πρέσβεις, the elders / officials,” perhaps thinking of another root which has the connotation of “messengers.”

³²Motyer states that “The picture of a woman in labor is not a simile of fruitful pain here but of that which is sudden, inevitable and inescapable; the end result of a process that cannot now be stopped.” (P. 138)

(continued...)

Each person to his neighbor will look in astonishment--³³
faces of flames their faces!³⁴

³²(...continued)

See **1 Thessalonians 5:1-3**,

- 1 But then concerning the times and the seasons, brothers,
you do not have need (for me) to write to you.
- 2 For you yourselves know well / accurately,
that (the) day of (the) Lord, like a thief in (the) night, is coming in this way:
- 3 When they are saying, Peace and security / safety,
then sudden destruction comes upon them,
just like the labor pain (comes) to the pregnant woman,
and they do not escape.

³³Alexander comments that “The expression *wonder at each other* occurs once in historical prose.” (P. 273) See **Genesis 43:33**, where the seating of Joseph’s brothers is described, before he revealed himself to them:

And they sat before him,
the first-born according to his first-born right,
and the smallest, according to his smallness.
And the men were astonished,
each one (looking) at his neighbor.
(That is, we think, wondering how the Egyptians could have known in which
order to seat them.)

Here, Alexander states, “It seems...to denote not simply consternation and dismay, but stupefaction at each other’s aspect and condition.” (P. 273)

Motyer comments that “It does not mean...’aghost with fear,’ but bereft [deprived of, lacking] of all certainty, in a state of confusion and indecision, they are baffled to know where to turn.” (P. 138)

³⁴Slotki comments that the faces of the terrified Babylonians will be “burning with shame or with impotent rage.” (P. 63)

Gray has “*Their faces are aflame* in feverish excitement.” Compare **Nahum 2:11** and **Joel 2:6**, where the phrase “their faces grow pale” occurs.

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 8**: “*And they* (the Babylonians) *shall be confounded—pangs and throes shall seize* (them)—*like the travailing* (woman) *they shall writhe—each at his neighbor, they shall wonder—faces of flames* (shall be) *their faces...*

(continued...)

13:9³⁵ הִנֵּה יוֹם־יְהוָה בָּא

אֶכְזָרִי וְעִבְרָה וַחֲרוֹן אַף

לְשׁוֹם הָאָרֶץ לְשִׁמָּה

וַחֲטָאִיָּה יִשְׁמֵד מִמֶּנָּה:

³⁴(...continued)

“The translation fear or tremble, is too weak for נִבְהַלּוּ, which includes the ideas of violent agitation and extreme perplexity.” (P. 273)

Brown-Driver-Briggs defines this verb by “to be disturbed, dismayed, terrified.” **Holladay** has “be terrified,” “out of one’s senses.”

³⁵Slotki comments on **verses 9-16** that they contain “a fuller description of Babylon’s day of doom.” He comments on **verses 9-12** that they depict “The terror of destruction, and the extermination of wickedness and arrogance.” (P. 63)

Watts comments on **verses 9-16** that “These speeches pick up the themes of **verses 2-5** from which **verses 6-8** turned aside. The mobilization of an ‘attack force’ (**verse 4**) is pointedly...related to the larger cosmic events of Yahweh’s day, as in **verse 17** it will point to the historic stirring of Median warriors.” (P. 197) This understanding fits in with Motyer’s interpretation.

Gray entitles **verses 9-13** “Darkness and universal commotion accompanying Yahweh’s judgment of the world for its wickedness.” (P. 240) His translation easily fits into Motyer’s view of the passage as describing the final battle at the culmination of history.

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 9**: “*All this must happen at at a set time—for behold the day of Jehovah cometh—terrible—and wrath and heat of anger—to place (or make) the land a waste—and its sinners he (or it, the day) will destroy from it (or out of it).*”

Motyer states, “The words speak of a pitiless infliction of an overflowing anger that cannot any longer be contained, expressive of a burning personal passion.” (P.138)

Oswalt comments that “*sinners* is placed in an emphatic position. The word conveys the idea of an archer who misses the target. So it is with sin, whether conscious or unconscious. It is to miss the goal God has envisioned for us. The inevitable result is devastation and destruction.” (P. 306)

Look–YHWH’s day came / is coming--³⁶
 cruel, and fury and heat of anger--
 to make the earth / land³⁷ into a waste,³⁸
 and its sinners He will exterminate from it!³⁹

13:10⁴⁰ כִּי־כּוֹכְבֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם וְכִסְלֵיהֶם

³⁶Watts comments that “בָּא [ba] is a form which may be an active participle or a perfect [that is, ‘is coming’ or ‘came’]. Wildberger [Watts’ German teacher to whom his commentary is dedicated]...insists that it is a prophetic perfect...[But Watts holds that] it is a participle emphasizing the dramatic event that is unfolding in their very sight.” (P. 197)

We are reminded of the depiction in the **Gospels** of Jesus’ teaching that the kingdom of God is both within people and coming in the future. For the **Hebrew Bible**, the “Day of YHWH” has come oftentimes in the past, is coming in the present, and will come in the future.

³⁷Watts comments that “הָאָרֶץ ‘the earth’ may point to the world or to a particular land. The setting seems to lean toward a universal meaning...It is the end of an age that is described, however, not the end of the cosmos as such.” (Pp. 197-98)

We think it is used here in terms of Babylon’s empire, which was considered to be the whole known earth. And we think that it is the end of the Babylonian empire, not the end of an age as Watts holds. Use of the word “age” in Christian theology is very confusing, as it is often used as a synonym for “world,” and “end of the age” is taken to mean the “end of the world.”

³⁸Alexander comments that “Most interpreters, from Jarchi [Rashi] downwards, understand הָאָרֶץ [the earth / land] to be Babylonia; but the **Septuagint [Rahlfs]** makes it mean the earth or world.” (P. 275)

The phrase in **Rahlfs** is τὴν οἰκουμένην ὅλην, “the whole inhabited earth, a phrase that occurs in Isaiah at **10:14; 13:5, 9** (here); **14:17, 27** and **37:18**. Later, in **verse 11**, the Hebrew noun תְּבִלָּה, “world,” is given a similar Greek translation. The Greek translation fits well into Motyer’s view of the passage.

³⁹From this statement we should conclude that the devastating judgment of destruction is not universal, but selective, coming only upon the sinners. As Alexander comments, “The moral causes of the ruin threatened are significantly intimated by the prophet’s calling the people of the earth or land *its sinners*.” (P. 275)

⁴⁰Alexander comments on / translates **verse 10**: “The day of Jehovah is now described as one of preternatural [beyond what is normal or natural] and awful

(continued...)

לֹא יִהְיוּ אֲזָרוֹת
חֲשֵׁךְ הַשָּׁמַיִם בְּצֵאתוֹ
וְיָרַח לֹא יִגְיֶה אֲזָרוֹ:

Because the heavens' stars and their constellations⁴¹
will not flash forth their light;⁴²

⁴⁰(...continued)

darkness, in which the very sources of light shall be obscured. This natural and striking figure for sudden and disastrous change is of frequent occurrence in scripture (see **Isaiah 24:23; 34:4; Ezekiel 32:7, 8** [a passage predicting the fall of Pharaoh's Egypt before the armies of Babylon]; **Joel 2:10** [a passage describing a locust invasion]; **3:15; Amos 8:9** [a passage depicting the fall of Northern Israel to Assyria]; **Matthew 24:29**)...

“Well may it be called a day of wrath and terror—for the stars of the heavens and their signs (or constellations) shall not shed their light—the sun is darkened in his going forth—and the moon shall not cause its light to shine.

Oswalt states that “One of the features of the day of the Lord will be darkness. The heavenly bodies will cease to shine and the world will be plunged into a terrible darkness...The central figures in the pantheons of the idolatrous cults were the heavenly bodies: sun, moon, and stars...Isaiah announces the extinguishing of the heavenly lights in God's great day. There is no universal power in the stars that human beings can capture for themselves.” (P. 306)

⁴¹Slotki comments that “their constellations” is literally “their Orions.” (P. 63)

Compare **Amos 5:8**, where YHWH is described as:

He Who makes Pleiades and Orion;
and Who overturns death-shadow into the morning,
and Who causes day to be darkened (into) night;
He Who calls to the waters of the ocean,
and He poured them out upon the face of the earth.

Alexander states that “It is commonly agreed that the word which occurs elsewhere only in the singular (**Job 9:9; 38:31; Amos 5:8**), is here used in the plural to give it a generic sense—*Orions*, i.e. Orion and other brilliant constellations.” (Pp. 275-76)

⁴²Where our Hebrew text has לֹא יִהְיוּ אֲזָרוֹת, “they will not flash,” 1QIs^a has לֹא יִאִירוּ, “they will not give light.”

the sun was dark in its going forth,

and (the) moon does not cause its light to shine.⁴³

13:11⁴⁴ וּפְקַדְתִּי עַל-תְּבִיל רָעָה

⁴³Slotki comments that “Frequently in the prophets the day of doom is pictured as enshrouded in complete darkness.” (P. 64) Compare:

Isaiah 5:30,

And He growled against him in that day, like a sea’s growling;
and he / one looked to the land / earth, and look–darkness of an enemy;
and light was / grew dark in its clouds.

Isaiah 8:22,

And he will look to (the) land / earth,
and look–a tight place and darkness,
gloom, distress,
and darkness (synonym), thrust out!

Joel 2:10, speaking of the invading locust-hordes on the day of YHWH:

In front of him earth trembled;
heavens shook;
sun and moon became dark
and the stars draw back their shining.

⁴⁴Slotki comments on **verses 11-12** that here “God speaks” (compare **verse 3**). The widespread wickedness will be the cause of a co-extensive extermination and therefore practically complete.” (P. 64)

Oswalt states that in verses 11-12 “the sin of pride is directly identified as the cause of God’s wrath...

“Instead of the earth being full of the presence and glory of humankind, it will be emptied by humanity. This is always the result of that which is attempted in defiance of God: the opposite of what was intended. A case in point would be Hitler’s thousand-year Reich which ended in complete destruction hardly more than ten years after he proclaimed it.” (P. 307)

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 11**: “The prophet, according to his custom (see...**1:22; 5:7; 11:9**), now resolves his figures into literal expressions, showing that the natural convulsions just predicted are to be understood as metaphorical descriptions of the Divine judgments. And I will visit upon the world (its) wickedness (i.e. manifest My presence for the purpose of punishing it)—and upon the wicked their

(continued...)

וְעַל־רָשָׁעִים עֹנָם
וְהַשְׁבַּתִּי גְאוֹן זָרִים
וְגִאֲוַת עֲרִיצִים אֲשַׁפִּיל:

And I will visit (in punishment) upon a world's⁴⁵ evil,
and upon wicked people their iniquity.
And I will cause to cease (the) exaltation of insolent people,
and (the) majesty / pride of terror-striking people I will abase!⁴⁶

⁴⁴(...continued)

iniquity—and I will cause to cease the arrogance of presumptuous sinners—and the pride of tyrants (or oppressors) I will humble.” (P. 276)

Motyer comments that ‘The day is not an indiscriminate outpouring of wrath; each has been tried and judgment pronounced in the light of the evidence.’ (P. 139)

⁴⁵Slotki comments on the Hebrew word תְּבִל (תְּבִלָּה) that it is “a variation of *the earth* in **verses 5** and **9**, and again signifying Babylon.” (P. 64)

Alexander states that it (תְּבִל) is no doubt a poetical equivalent to אֲרֶץ [earth / land], and is here applied to the Babylonian empire, as embracing most of the known world. Thus the Roman empire...was called *universus orbis Romanus* [the whole Roman world].” (P. 276)

Gray comments that תְּבִל is never, like אֲרֶץ, limited to a single country. The entire world is to be punished for its wickedness and violence.” (P. 241) Motyer likewise states that “The *world* (תְּבִל) is the inhabited world, the world of human beings and affairs (compare **Psalm 24:1b**).” (P. 138)

This, of course, fits in with Motyer’s insistence that **verses 2-16** are describing a universal “Day of the Lord,” at the culmination of history. However, we think it is used here to describe the Babylonian empire, as it was a “world-wide” empire at the time, in control of almost all of the known world.

⁴⁶Watts comments that in **verses 11-13** “it is arrogance in man that is the particular target of Divine retributions.” (P. 198)

13:12⁴⁷ אֹקִיר אֲנוֹשׁ מִפֶּז

וְאָדָם מִכֶּתֶם אוֹפִיר:

I will make a (weak) human more rare than fine gold,⁴⁸

and a human being (synonym) (more rare) than gold of Ophir!⁴⁹

13:13⁵⁰ עַל-כֵּן שָׁמַיִם אֶרְגִּיז

⁴⁷Alexander comments on / translates **verse 12**: “To the general description in the foregoing verse [the prophet] now adds a more specific threatening of extensive slaughter, and a consequent diminution of the population, expressed by a strong comparison. *I will make man more scarce (or rare) than pure gold, and a human being than the ore of Ophir.*” (P. 276)

Motyer states that “This is a fearful image of extermination: people with the same scarcity value as the most precious metal.” (P. 139)

⁴⁸Alexander states that “פֶּז and כֶּתֶם are either poetical synonyms of זָהָב, or emphatic expressions for the purest, finest, and most solid gold.” (P. 276)

But **Rahlfs** has τὸ χρυσίον τὸ ἄπυρον, “the gold, the unsmelted.” Watts holds that this mean “unrefined gold.” (P. 194)

⁴⁹Slotki comments that “Ophir [is] probably to be located in South Arabia; a place famed for its gold (compare **1 Kings 10:11; Psalm 45:10**).” (P. 64)

Alexander states that “The disputed question as to the location of Ophir, although not without historical and archaeological importance, can have no effect upon the meaning of this passage. Whether the place meant be Ceylon, or some part of continental India, or of Arabia, or of Africa, it is here named simply as an *Eldorado* [mythical city of gold], as a place where gold abounded.” (P. 276)

Watts observes that the imperfect verb “אֹקִיר ‘I will make rare,’ is a rare word probably chosen in alliteration to אוֹפִיר, ‘Ophir’...Ophir has been thought to be southwest Arabia, northeast Africa, or even northwest India, but the concept ‘gold from Ophir’ was a real part of ancient Near Eastern commerce.” (P. 198)

⁵⁰Slotki comments on **verses 13-16** that “In the panic all foreign residents will flee to their own countries; while the native population, even women and children, will be mercilessly exterminated.” (P. 64)

Alexander comments on / translates **verse 13**: “The figurative form of speech is here resumed, and what was before expressed by the obscuration [making indistinct;

(continued...)

וְתִרְעַשׂ הָאָרֶץ מִמְּקוֹמָהּ
 בְּעִבְרַת יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת
 וּבְיוֹם חֲרוֹן אַפָּי:

Therefore⁵¹ I (YHWH) will cause heavens to shake,⁵²
 and the earth / land will quake (synonym) from its place,⁵³

⁵⁰(...continued)

darkening] of the heavenly bodies is now denoted by a general commotion of the frame of nature. *Therefore I will make the heavens tremble, and the earth shall shake (or be shaken) out of its place in the wrath of Jehovah of hosts and in the day of the heat (or fierceness) of His anger.*” (P. 277)

Motyer states that **verse 13** “forms the summary and conclusion [but the section continues through **verse 16**]. Because the Lord has set His hand to a moral judgment that is cosmic (**verse 10**) and world-wide (**verse 11**) in extent *the heavens tremble and the earth will shake*. The ordered movement of the heavens and the stability of the earth, all that was achieved by creation, will be undone in judgment.” (P. 139)

We insist that this language is hyperbole, not to be taken literally, as if it means the end of creation, of the heavens and the earth. The reason for holding that it is hyperbole is that such language is used again and again in depicting the fall of nations, following which nature continues on its orderly way. Such a fall is being predicted for mighty Babylon in this chapter—but it doesn’t mean the “end of the world”!

⁵¹Alexander states that “*Therefore* may either mean because of the wickedness mentioned in **verse 11**, or for the purpose of producing the effect described in **verse 12**.” (P. 277)

⁵²Slotki comments that the heavens will be caused to tremble “by the downfall of the guardian angel of Babylon.” (P. 64)

The text says nothing about any “guardian angel of Babylon.”

⁵³Slotki’s translation has “And the earth shall be shaken out of her place,” and he comments that this means “by Babylon’s overwhelming disaster.” (P. 64)

Of course, this should only be understood as hyperbole, overstatement not intended to be taken literally.

We remember how at the close of World War II America and our allies rejoiced tremendously—but the sun, moon and stars stayed in their orbits, and the earth continued on in its course.

(continued...)

by YHWH of Armies' fury,

and in a day of His anger's burning!

13:14⁵⁴ יהיה כעבי מדה

⁵³(...continued)

In the first church I served after graduating from Christian College, on New Year's eve there was a terrifying automobile accident taking the life of eight of our youth—and the next day I went out to the site of the crash, with the parents.

Just a few yards from where the crash occurred was a mesquite tree in which the sparrows were chirping and going about their business—paying no attention to our broken hearts. We were profoundly shaken—but Mother Nature paid little if any attention, and went on her way. The “world” of those families was shaken and seemingly destroyed. But they would live to see a better future, in spite of their devastating loss.

⁵⁴Oswalt comments on **verses 14-18**: “In these verses, there is a turn toward more this-worldly imagery with a special emphasis upon the savagery with which the proud city will be thrust down...The building of human pride must eventually pit individual against individual, nation against nation in such a way that the most terrible savagery is the ultimate result. God wills this only in the sense that He has made a world of cause and effect where the denial of Him and His ways must lead us to destroy ourselves.” (P. 307)

Gray entitles **verses 14-16** “Flight from Slaughter and Violation.”

He comments that “All foreigners in Babylon...will attempt to flee (**verse 14**), but if found they will share the fate of the Babylonians, who will perish one and all...The Jewish aspiration for violence lies behind the description: may the Babylonians be served as they served us!” (Pp. 241-42)

Motyer comments on **verses 14-16** that “the picture of gathering armies with which the poem of the day of the Lord began (**verses 2-5**) is balanced by the concluding picture of people scattering from the disaster—and being overtaken by it... Finding the Lord as their enemy and losing Him as their shepherd, humankind is indeed helpless and hopeless, with everything to flee from and nowhere to flee to. They gathered with ‘exultant arrogance’ (**verse 3**) but now all they can think to do is head for home, to their *own people* and their *native land*.” (P. 139)

And we wonder—If Motyer’s interpretation is right, and the text is depicting the “culmination of history,” and what has been called “the end of the world,” how would there still be people, and countries, to which the refugees could flee?

Our answer is, the text is depicting the destruction of Babylon, the city renowned for its grandeur and commercial success, which has attracted so many foreigners to

(continued...)

וְכִזְאוּן וְאִין מְקַבֵּץ
 אִישׁ אֶל-עַמּוֹ יִפְנוּ
 וְאִישׁ אֶל-אֶרְצוֹ יָנוּסוּ:

And it will be like a chased / hunted gazelle,⁵⁵
 and like a flock, and there is no one gathering (them),⁵⁶
 each one will turn to his (own) people,

⁵⁴(...continued)

come to it. As they witness its approaching fall, they return to their former dwelling places, where their own people live in their native land. It is not a depiction of the “end of the world,” or of the “culmination of history”!

Watts states that **verses 14-15** “describe the horrible consequences as **verses 7-8** had done before. Each to his own people presumes a population that has migrated to the great [city] in search of jobs or buyers of goods or as mercenaries. They return to their villages in times of trouble. It may also picture exiles from other countries who have been deported to the region.” (P. 198)

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 14**: “*And it shall be (or come to pass, that) like a roe (or antelope) chased (or driven by hunters) and like sheep with none to gather them (literally, like sheep, and there is no one gathering)—each to his people, they shall turn—and each to his country they shall flee.*” (P. 277)

Oswalt comments on **verse 14**: “This verse describes the flight which occurs when an army moves to attack a great city. Its glory and offers of wealth attracted many people from the surrounding region. In the Near East they would have come from the many small states and numerous ethnic groups. As the city disintegrates about them, they quickly realize that its offers were empty and their only real refuge is with their own people.” (P. 307)

⁵⁵Alexander states that “The **זָבִי**, according to Bochart and Gesenius, is a generic term including all varieties of roes [deers of England and Europe] and antelopes. The points of comparison are their timidity and fleetness.” (P. 278)

See the **National Geographic** pictures of the gazelle on the Internet, “Thomson’s Gazelle.”

⁵⁶Alexander comments that “The figure of scattered sheep, without a gatherer or shepherd, is a common one in scripture.” (P. 278)

and each will flee to his (own) land.⁵⁷

13:15⁵⁸ כָּל־הַנִּמְצָא יִדְקָר

וְכָל־הַנִּסְפָּה יִפּוֹל בַּחֶרֶב:

Everyone who is found will be pierced,
and everyone swept away⁵⁹ will fall by the sword.

⁵⁷Slotki comments that this verse is depicting the actions of “the foreign merchants and residents [in Babylon]. As an important center of trade, merchants in large numbers came to Babylon.

If we understand this prediction of the fall of Babylon as referring to its fall to the Medo-Persian armies of Cyrus, it is a gross over-statement, especially as concerns the Jewish exiles living in Babylon. Even though invited to return home by Cyrus, the majority of the Jews living in Babylon refused to return to Jerusalem, and chose rather to stay in Babylon, which in future generations would become the greatest center of Jewish scholarship and learning in the world, with its Jewish academies.

This fact enables us to see that the prediction of Babylon’s fall was not given “ex eventu” (“after the event”) as has been claimed concerning many prophecies in the **Hebrew Bible**. If it had been given after the fall of Babylon, it would have been much more closely aligned with the facts—which were not at all as catastrophic as this chapter describes.

⁵⁸Oswalt comments on **verses 15-18**: “The refugees fill the road because they are all too well aware of what a marauding army can do to them.” (P. 307)

Alexander comments on / translates **verse 15**: “The flight of the strangers from Babylon is not without reason, for every one found (there) shall be stabbed (or thrust through), and every one joined (or joining himself to the Babylonians) shall fall by the sword. All interpreters agree that a general massacre is here described.” (P. 278)

Motyer comments that “Whether in the battle, or as a survivor, or in flight, one fate awaits all.” (P. 139) What do you think? Is the text saying that everyone will perish, whether in the city of Babylon or not? We think not.

⁵⁹The phrase וְכָל־הַנִּסְפָּה is given varying translations: from “and every one that is joined *unto them*,” to “All who are caught,” to “all those captured,” to καὶ οἵτινες συνηγμένοι εἰσὶν, “and those who are gathered together.”

Slotki states that this is referring to ‘The natives who failed to escape from the doomed city.’ (P. 65) We agree.

13:16⁶⁰ וְעַל־לֵיהֶם יִרְטָשׁוּ לְעֵינֵיהֶם

יִשָּׁסוּ בְתֵיהֶם

וְנִשְׂיָהֶם (תִּשְׁגַּלְנָה) [תִּשְׁכַּבְנָה]:

And their children will be dashed to pieces before their eyes;
their houses will be plundered;

⁶⁰Alexander comments on / translates **verse 16**: “The horrors of the conquest shall extend not only to the men, but to their wives and children. And their children shall be dashed to pieces before their eyes, their houses shall be plundered and their wives ravished. The same thing is threatened against Babylon in **Psalm 137:9**, in retaliation for the barbarities practiced in Jerusalem.” (P. 278)

Psalm 137:9,

How blessed one who will take strong hold,
and will shatter your (feminine singular) children to / against the rock!

2 Chronicles 36:17,

And He [YHWH] brought up against them (the) king of (the) Chaldeans;
and he killed / slaughtered their choice young men with the sword in (the)
house / temple of their set-apart place;
and he did not spare a choice young man or a virgin, an old man or an aged /
decrepit man.
The whole (people) He gave into his hand.

Lamentations 5:11,

Women, they humbled / raped in Zion;
virgins in (the) cities of Judah!

Motyer, with his view concerning the day of the Lord as the universal culmination of history, i.e., the “end of the world,” states that there will be “No protection (**verse 14**), no escape (**verse 15**) and now, no mercy. Should any reach home it will be only to see all they held dear destroyed: the children they begat, the homes the built, the wives they loved.” (P. 139)

We think Motyer is mistaken—this devastating judgment is one that falls on the city of Babylon, and those found there—not on those who have fled from Babylon to their native homelands.

and their wives will be ravished / raped!⁶¹

13:17^{62, 2} הַנְּנִי

⁶¹The Masoretes offer two readings: first, the *kethibh*, ‘what is written,” תִּשְׁגַּלְנָה, “to be ravished / raped,” and second, the *qere*, “to be read,” תִּשְׁכַּבְנָה, “to be laid.” Watts comments that “the meaning is the same but avoids the ‘unclean’ expression שָׁגַל.” (P. 194)

Slotki comments on **verse 16** that “The Medes were fully capable of the barbarities here mentioned, but there is no confirmation that the capture of Babylon by Cyrus was actually accompanied by such atrocities.” (P. 65)

⁶²Motyer comments on **verses 17-22** that “The day of the Lord has many interim fulfilments. **14:24-27** will find one such in the overthrow of Assyria. Further on in history, it will be foreshadowed again in the fall of Babylon. In this way **verses 17-22** are related to **verses 2-16**. It is not that Isaiah is here naming retrospectively the warriors who were summoned in **verses 2-5**; that summoning awaits the day which, even in our time, is yet to come. But the same principles that operate in the climactic day of history operate throughout.” (P. 140)

But where in the **Bible** is anything said about “interim fulfilments”? We say the “Day of YHWH” is an eternal day, which comes again and again throughout history, as wicked nations are overthrown and destroyed. It is not one day at the end of time, which has “interim fulfilments” throughout history, as Motyer holds.

Slotki comments on **verses 17-19** that “The invaders hitherto spoken of in general terms are now specified as the cruel Medes; and Babylon, the object of their attack, is named.” (P. 65)

He comments on **verse 17's** mention of the Medes, that “This people, which occupied the district southwest of the Caspian Sea, could not have become a real menace to Babylon before the reign of Cyrus, though it was one of the leading powers in Asia since 606 B.C.E. when, together with the Chaldeans, it conquered and divided the spoils of the Assyrian empire. The Medes and the Persians formed a united kingdom of Persia under Cyrus when, in 549 B.C.E., he overthrew the Median dynasty. The date of this prophecy cannot be determined.” (P. 65) For a **Wikipedia** article on the Medes, see our end-note 2.

Gray entitles **verses 17f.** “The Medes.” He states that here, “Yahweh speaks again, revealing the instruments of His indignation—the Medes—and (**verse 19**) the object of it, Babylon. Whether the Divine speech extends to the end of the poem, and if not how far, is uncertain.” (P. 242)

(continued...)

⁶²(...continued)

Watts comments on **verses 17-18** that “As the macabre [gruesome, grisly] scene resulting from the cosmic quake passes, the finger points to the historical movement. Yahweh calls attention to stirrings among the feared Medes for which He claims responsibility.” (P. 198)

Alexander comments on / translates **verse 17**: “The prophet now, for the first time, names the chosen instruments of Babylon’s destruction. *Behold I (am) stirring up against them Madai (Media or the Medes) who will not regard silver and (as for) gold, they will not take pleasure in it (or desire it).*”

“Here, as in **Jeremiah 51:11, 28**, the Medes alone are mentioned, as the more numerous and hitherto more powerful nation, to which the Persians had long been subject, and were still auxiliary. Or the name may be understood as comprehending both...[which is] the usage of the classical historians ...Herodotus, Thucydides, and Plutarch...

“As the Medes did not become an independent monarchy till after the date of this prediction, it affords a striking instance of prophetic foresight...It is chiefly to evade such proofs of inspiration that the modern [19th century] Germans assign these chapters to a later date.” (P. 279)

Gray states with regards to **Jeremiah 51:11** that “The historical situation in both passages is the same; Babylon still occupies a supreme position in the eyes of the world; but the Medes are threatening their supremacy. This historical situation can be closely defined: it existed not earlier than 561 B.C.E., and it ceased to exist with the capture of Babylon by Cyrus in 538 B.C.E...”

“From the mention of the Medes only without reference either to the Persians or Cyrus, some infer that the prophecy was written before 549 B.C.E., in which year Cyrus overthrew the Median empire of Astyages.” (Pp. 242-43)

Oswalt comments on **verse 17**: “The *Medes* were a people of what is now central Iran, east of Mesopotamia. They inhabited the Zagros Mountains and the high plateaus east of the mountain range. As early as 837 B.C.E. the Assyrians referred to them as adversaries. Although the Assyrians boasted of overcoming the Medes, they never occupied the Median capital of Ecbatana, and it was the Medes, along with the Babylonians, who destroyed the last vestiges of Assyria in 609 B.C.E. Because it was the Medes and Persians who overthrew Babylon in 539, many scholars believe that this reference is to that event and must therefore have been written about that time...”

“However, it is equally significant to note that Isaiah makes no mention of the Persians, who were the main factor in the defeat in 539 B.C.E. It seems unaccountable that anyone writing in the sixth century could have made such a glaring omission. On the other hand, it is quite possible that Isaiah of Jerusalem, writing in the late 700s, knew something of the Medes’ fearsome reputation and used them as a figure of the

(continued...)

מַעִיר עֲלֵיהֶם אֶת-מְדֵי
 אֲשֶׁר-כֶּסֶף לֹא יַחְשְׁבוּ
 וְזָהָב לֹא יַחְפְּצוּ-בּוֹ:

Look at Me--

stirring up against them (the) Medes,⁶³
 who do not consider silver / money,
 and gold—they do not delight in it.⁶⁴

⁶²(...continued)

pitiless destruction characterizing the Day of the Lord, without intending any specific prediction.” (Pp. 307-08)

Motyer comments on **verse 17** that “The reference to *the Medes* as the destroyers of Babylon is at first sight surprising since we are accustomed to ascribe the conquest to Cyrus the Persian [**Isaiah 45** certainly does]. However, phrases which give the Medes priority over the Persians (e.g. ‘The law of the Medes and Persians,’ **Daniel 6:8, 12, 15**; compare **Esther 10:2** [which refers to the ‘Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Media and of Persia’]) and the mysterious description of Babylon’s conqueror as ‘Darius the Mede’ (**Daniel 5:30**) at least indicate that the Medes were by no means shadowy adjuncts to a Persian victory.” (P. 140)

⁶³Alexander comments that “מְדֵי” is properly the name of the third son of Japhet from whom the nation descended. At the date of this prediction, they formed a part of the Assyrian empire, but revolted at the time of the Assyrian invasion of Syria and Israel. Their first king Dejoces was elected about 700 years before the birth of Christ. His son Phraortes conquered Persia, and the united Medes and Persians, with the aid of the Babylonians, subdued Assyria under the conduct of Cyaxares I. The conquest of Babylon was effected in the reign of Cyaxares II by the Median army, with an auxiliary force of thirty thousand Persians, under the command of Cyrus, the king’s nephew.” (P. 279)

⁶⁴Slotki comments that the motive of the Medes in their conquests was “not the desire for plunder, but sheer lust for destruction.” (P. 65)

Alexander holds that “The most natural interpretation is...that the thirst of blood would supersede the thirst of gold in the conquerors of Babylon, so that no one would be able to secure his life by ransom.” (P. 279) Babylon, the commercial center of the ancient Near East, has thought that “money controls everything.” But her conquerors, Isaiah says, will be those for whom money has little interest!

13:18⁶⁵ וְקִשְׁתּוֹת נְעָרִים תִּרְטַשְׁנָה

וּפְרֵי-בֶטֶן לֹא יִרְחֲמוּ

עַל-בָּנִים לֹא-תַחֲוֶס עֵינָם:

And (the) bows of young men will dash in pieces,

and they will not have compassion (on the) fruit of womb(s);
over children they will not show pity.⁶⁶

⁶⁵Alexander translates / comments on **verse 18**: “*And bows shall dash boys in pieces, and the fruit of the womb they shall not pity; on children their eye shall have not have mercy...*[Rahfs] has the bows of the young men (τοξέματα νεανίσκων [which is an exact translation of the Hebrew]), which is inconsistent with the form of the original... [Along with other interpreters, Alexander holds that] there is special allusion to the large bows and skillful archery of the ancient Persians, as described by Herodotus, Xenophon, and Ammianus Marcellinus...

“[Instead of understanding the text as meaning the Medes are shooting children from their bows instead of arrows, the opinion of Kimchi]...there is more probability in the opinion, that they are represented as employing their large massive bows instead of clubs...The cruelty of the Medes seems to have been proverbial in the ancient world.” (P. 280)

Gray states that “The opening words of **verse 18** can be rendered *and bows shall dash youths in pieces*, but the text is certainly corrupt.” (P. 243)

The verb here is תִּרְטַשְׁנָה, the 3rd person feminine plural piel imperfect (“bows” is feminine plural), meaning “dash in pieces.” But as Motyer observes, “It is an odd verb to use of the effect of bow-shot.” (P. 140)

Should we agree with Alexander that the large bows of the warriors could be used as clubs as well as for shooting arrows?

Watts translates by “Bows of youths are dashed in pieces,” and comments that “‘Young bowmen dash in pieces’ is a literal translation, but does not seem to make sense. ‘Bowmen’ do not ‘dash in pieces.’” (P. 194)

⁶⁶Motyer comments that “The sequence of *young men, infants* / ‘fruit of the body’ and *children* / ‘sons’ heaps up words to create a picture of remorseless slaughter. In the battle itself the Medes give no quarter and are devoid of human feeling.” (P. 140)

13:19⁶⁷ וְהִיתָה בְּבָלָא צְבִי מִמְּלָכוֹת

תְּפֹאֶרֶת גְּאוֹן כְּשָׂדִים

כְּמַהֲפֹכֶת אֱלֹהִים אֶת־סֹדֶם וְאֶת־עֲמֹרָה:

And Babylon, (the) honor of kingdoms,

⁶⁷Gray entitles **verses 19-22** “The eternal desolation of Babylon.” He comments that “Babylon, still as yet glorious and supreme, will be overthrown as completely as Sodom and Gomorrah: its site will be for ever uninhabited; even nomads will avoid it; it will be given up to solitude-loving and demonic beasts.” (P. 243)

Oswalt comments on these verses that “In this segment, Isaiah draws the powerful contrast (as in **chapters 24** and **34**) between the temporary results of human pride and the ultimate results...Babylon in the late 700s B.C.E. was the showcase of the ancient world. She had emerged as the cultural and economic superior to the Assyrian cities in the north and was bidding for political sovereignty as well. Thus Babylon was the ideal image for the prophet to utilize as he sought to demonstrate how futile the greatest of human glory is against the Holy One of Israel...

“Isaiah’s prophecy has been fulfilled with a vengeance, but the fulfillment is more that of a principle than in a specific event. For these truths apply to Nineveh and Asshur equally as much as to Babylon. That monument to human glory and achievement, the sprawling imperial city, has no permanence in itself, and the day will come when the very weight of its glory will crash back in upon it and leave it desolate. Only when the glory is a gift of God will there be continuing fruitfulness and joy (**Isaiah 35:1, 2; 70:1-22**, especially **verses 1-3, 13, 19**).” (P. 309)

Alexander comments on / translates **verse 19**: “From the very height of splendor and renown, Babylon shall be reduced not only to subjection but to annihilation. *And Babylon, the beauty (or glory) of kingdoms, the ornament, the pride of the Chaldees, shall be like God’s overthrowing Sodom and Gomorrah—i.e. shall be totally destroyed.*” (P. 280)

Oswalt states that “For Isaiah, Sodom and Gomorrah were the paradigm for what he perceived to be happening in the world. Like Sodom and Gomorrah in their pride and sophistication, the cultures of his day would also be like them in experiencing Divinely sent destruction (**Isaiah 1:9, 10; 3:9**)...

“The **New Testament** follows this lead especially in relation to the end time [a non-biblical phrase; for the phrase ‘time of the end,’ see **Daniel 8:17, 19; 11:35, 40; 12:4, 9**] (**Luke 17:28-29; Romans 9:29; 2 Peter 2:6-10; Jude 7; Revelation 11:8**).” (P. 309)

(the) beautiful pride of Chaldeans,^{68, 3}
(will be) like God's overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah!⁶⁹

⁶⁸Watts comments that "The target of their agitation is finally named (only in the superscription has it appeared so far): *Babylon, jewel of kingdoms, glory of Chaldean pride*. The *Chaldeans* were a group of tribes in the lower delta of the twin rivers below the most southerly Babylonian cities...They are called כַּשְׂדִיִּים [kasdiym] in **Ezra** and **Daniel**, [and here in **Isaiah**] but the *Kaldai* in cuniefom writings. About 722 B.C.E. the Chaldean leader of the Bit Yakin tribe, Marduk-apla-iddina (called Merodach-Baladan in Hebrew), conquered Babylon, making it his capital. A century later they would recapture the city and establish the neo-Babylonian empire of Nebuchadnezzar. For a people of village tribesmen, the legendary city was indeed their *pride* and *glory*.

Motyer comments that "The Babylonians (Hebrew כַּשְׂדִיִּים, 'Chaldeans' [Rahlf's has *Χαλδαίωv*, **Chaldaion**] were a long-established south Mesopotamian people, central to the rise of Babylon to dominance, as Isaiah rightly foresaw here." (P. 141) See our end-note 3 for a **Wikipedia** article on Chaldea.

⁶⁹Slotki notes that the phrase "God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah is "a proverbial expression for utter ruin." (P. 65) See **Genesis 19:24-25**.

Alexander comments that the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah "is a common formula in scripture for complete destruction, viewed as a special punishment of sin...

"It is certain, however, that the destruction of the city [of Babylon] was by slow degrees, successively promoted by the conquests of Cyrus, Darius Hastaspes, Alexander the Great, Antigonus, Demetrius, the Parthians, and the founding of the cities of Seleucia and Ctesiphon...

"From this apparent disagreement of the prophecy with history, Cocceius seems disposed to infer that it relates not to the literal but spiritual Babylon. The true conclusion is that drawn by Calvin, that the prophecy does not relate to any one invasion or attack exclusively, but to the whole process of subjection and decay, so completely carried out through a course of ages, that the very site of ancient Babylon is now disputed." (P. 281)

For a poetic description of the fall of a mighty (Egyptian) empire, see Shelley's "Ozymandias":

I met a traveler from an antique land
Who said: "Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read

(continued...)

⁶⁹(...continued)

Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
 The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed:
 And on the pedestal these words appear:
 'My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
 Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!
 Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
 Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
 The lone and level sands stretch far away.

Shelley's poem could well be applied to the site of ancient Babylon today.

⁷⁰Slotki comments on **verses 20-22** that they depict "Babylon's complete and eternal desolation. It shall be the haunt of wild creatures and other denizens [inhabitants, occupants] of the desert." Compare **Jeremiah 50:39-40**,

- 39 Therefore wild beasts will dwell with jackals,
 and daughters of (the) ostrich will dwell in it (Babylon);
 and it / she shall not again be sit / dwell to the perpetuity;
 and it will not settle / dwell until generation and generation.
- 40 Like God's overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah, and its neighbors--
 (it is) a saying of YHWH--
 a man shall not dwell there,
 and a son of a human shall not dwell temporarily in it!

Watts states that in **verses 20-22** "The depopulated city is a virtual ghost-town. The ruins are empty. The cries of desert-animals hint at ghosts and demons in the eerie place." (P. 199)

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 20**: "*It shall not be inhabited for ever* (i.e. it shall never again, or no more, be inhabited) *and it shall not be dwelt in from generation to generation* (literally to generation and generation)—*neither shall the Arab pitch tent there—neither shall shepherds cause* (their flocks) *to lie there...*

"The conversion of a populous and fertile district into a vast pasture-ground, however rich and well frequented, implies extensive ruin, but not such ruin as is here denounced. Babylon was not even to be visited by shepherds, nor to serve as the encamping ground of wandering Arabs...

"So fully has this prophecy been verified that the Bedouins, according to the latest travelers [mid-1800's], are even superstitiously afraid of passing a single night upon the site of Babylon." (P. 281)

So, if you understand the prophecy as predicting the fall of Babylon to Cyrus, it seems obvious that the prophecy was not fulfilled, unless it is understood as mistakenly

(continued...)

וְלֹא תִשְׁכַּן עַד-דָּוָר וְדָוָר
וְלֹא-יִהְיֶה שָׁם עֶרְבֵי
וְרָעִים לֹא-יִרְבְּצוּ שָׁם:

It / she will not sit / dwell for perpetuity,
and it / she will not settle / dwell until generation and generation!
And an Arabian⁷¹ will not pitch a tent⁷² there;
and shepherds will not cause (their flocks) to lie down there!⁷³

⁷⁰(...continued)

over-stated hyperbole. But if you understand it as referring to the numerous occasions of Babylon's being attacked and conquered in the course subsequent history, then the prophecy has been literally fulfilled. What do you think?

⁷¹Slotki comments that "Even the wandering tribes of the desert will avoid it." (P. 66)

Watts states arbitrarily that "The reference is not ethnic but speaks of the life-style of the nomad." (P. 194)

We say, Of course the reference is "ethnic"—"racial," and it is silly to deny this, even though we might think it is inappropriate.

Alexander states that "There can be no doubt, however, that Arabians, properly so called, do actually overrun the region around Babylon with their flocks and herds, although...they refuse to take up their abode upon the doomed site of the vanished city." (P. 282)

And we wonder why this is. Has knowledge of Isaiah's prediction caused the superstitious Arabians to refuse to pitch their tents there? What do you think?

I would think that the Japanese would refuse to "pitch their tents" on the sites of the atomic bomb explosions in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but such is not the case—the cities have been beautifully rebuilt. See the pictures of the modern cities on the Internet, under "Hiroshima Today."

⁷²The Hebrew verb is יָהַל, 3rd person masculine singular piel imperfect (contracted from יֵאָהֵל, with the *aleph* missing) "pitch one's tent" like a nomad."

⁷³Oswalt comments that "Like **verse 12**, this **verse [20]** speaks of the lack of human population. The point would not be disproven if from time to time bedouin tents

(continued...)

13:21⁷⁴ וְרִבְצוּ-שָׁם צִיִּים

וּמְלֵאוּ בְּתֵיהֶם אֲחִים
וּשְׁכְנוּ שָׁם בָּנוֹת יַעֲנָה
וּשְׁעִירִים יִרְקְדוּ-שָׁם:

And wild beasts / desert dwellers will lie down there,
and owls will fill their houses.⁷⁵

And a daughter of (the) ostrich⁷⁶ will settle there,

⁷³(...continued)

were set up within the confines of what was once Babylon. The point is that humanity cannot sustain itself by itself. It cannot expect in its own strength to produce more and more of everything until it fills the earth. There has come the day, again and again, in war, in famine, or in pestilence when a self-sufficient portion of humanity has been brought face to face with its insufficiency.” (Pp. 309-10)

⁷⁴Alexander comments on / translates **verse 21**: “Having excluded men and the domesticated animals from Babylon, the prophet now tells how it shall be occupied, viz. by creatures which are only found in deserts, and the presence of which is the sign of desolation...*But there* (instead of flocks) *shall lie down desert creatures—and their houses* (those of the Babylonians) *shall be filled with howls or yells—and there shall dwell the daughters of the ostrich—and shaggy beasts* (or wild goats) *shall gambol* [run or jump about playfully] *there...*As if he had said, flocks shall not lie down there, but wild beasts shall; man shall not dwell there, but the ostrich shall. The meaning evidently is, that the populous and splendid city should become the home of animals found only in the wildest solitudes.” (P. 282)

Compare **Jeremiah 50:39**,

Therefore wild beasts will dwell with jackals,
and daughters of (the) ostrich will dwell in it (Babylon);
and it / she shall not again sit / dwell to the perpetuity;
and it / she will settle / dwell until generation and generation.

⁷⁵Watts states that “The animals are difficult to identify.” (P. 194) We agree.

⁷⁶Alexander comments that “The *daughter of the ostrich* is an oriental idiom for ostriches in general, or for the female ostrich in particular. The old translation *owls* seems to be now universally abandoned.” (P. 283)

and wild goats⁷⁷ will leap there.

⁷⁷Slotki's translation of the Hebrew שְׂעִירִים is "satyrs," which in Greek mythology, refers to lustful, drunken woodland Gods. In Greek art they were represented as a man with a horse's ears and tail, but in Roman representations as a man with a goat's ears, tail, legs, and horns. However, **Brown-Driver-Briggs** defines the noun as meaning "male goats," "bucks," perhaps "hairy male goats." **Holladay** has "(hairy) demon (in the shape of a he-goat)."

Gray states that "We must think of demonic animals, howling after the wont of demons and jinn [supernatural creatures in early Arabian and later Islamic mythology and theology]." (P. 244)

Alexander comments that "The most interesting point in the interpretation of this verse has reference to the word שְׂעִירִים...It has never been disputed that its original and proper sense is 'hairy,' and its usual specific sense *he-goats*. In two places (**Leviticus 17:7**; **2 Chronicles 11:15**), it is used to denote objects of idolatrous worship, probably images of goats, which according to Herodotus were worshiped in Egypt...[In both of these passages, **Rahlfs**] renders it ματαίους, "to vain things," i.e. false Gods, idols. But the [Aramaic] Targum on **Leviticus** explains it to mean demons ...and the same interpretation is given [here in **Isaiah 13:21**] by [**Rahlfs**] ([σειρηνες και] δαίμονια, ["mythical deceitful women and] demons"...

"From this traditional interpretation of שְׂעִירִים, here and in **chapter 34:14**, appears to have arisen, at an early period, a popular belief among the Jews, that demons or evil spirits were accustomed to haunt desert places in the shape of goats or other animals. And this belief is said to be actually cherished by the natives near the site of Babylon at the present day [mid-19th century]...

"To Jerome, the combination of the two meanings, *goats* and *demons*, seems to have suggested the Pans, Fanns, and Satyrs of the classical mythology, imaginary beings represented as a mixture of the human form with that of goats, and supposed to frequent forests and other lonely places. This idea is carried out by Calvin, who adopts the word satyri in his version, and explains the passage as relating to actual appearances of Satan under such disguises. Luther, in like manner, renders it Feldgeist [‘field spirits’—see the images of German field spirits on the Internet, "Feldgeist"]...

"The usage of שְׂעִירִים, as the name of an animal, is perfectly well defined and certain. Even in **Leviticus 17:7** and **2 Chronicles 11:15**, this...is the only natural interpretation." (Pp. 283-84) See his entire discussion for arguments in favor of the mythological interpretation.

(continued...)

13:22⁷⁸ וְעֵנָה אֵיִם בְּאַלְמְנוֹתָיו

וְתַנִּים בְּהֵיכְלֵי עֲנָג

וְקָרֹב לְבוֹא עֲתָה

וַיָּמִיָּה לֹא יִמְשְׁכוּ:

And hyenas will sing among its widows / in its widows / citadels,⁷⁹

and jackals in its palaces of delight.

And her time is close to coming,⁸⁰

⁷⁷(...continued)

Motyer states that “Wild goats would be better translated ‘goat-demons’...**Bible** writers often use such heathen superstitions without extending credence to them, simply for effect.” (P. 141)

⁷⁸Alexander translates / comments on **verse 22**: “*And wolves shall howl in his (the king of Babylon’s) palaces, and jackals in the temples of pleasure. And near to come is her (Babylon’s) time, and her days shall not be prolonged...*”

“Whatever may be the species [of ‘jackal’] here intended, the essential idea is the same as in the foregoing verse, viz. That Babylon should one day be inhabited exclusively by animals peculiar to the wilderness, implying that it should become a wilderness itself. The contrast is heightened here by the particular mention of palaces and abodes of pleasure, as about to be converted into dens and haunts of solitary animals.” (P. 285)

⁷⁹The Hebrew phrase בְּאַלְמְנוֹתָיו, is literally “in / among its widows.” Slotki holds that the phrase should be בְּאַרְמְנוֹתָיו, “in its citadels.”

Alexander comments that “The meaning of אַלְמְנוֹת, in every case where it occurs, is *widows*, in which sense some rabbinical and other writers understand it here. But as it differs only in a single letter from אַרְמְנוֹת, *palaces*, and as ל and ר are sometimes interchanged [we wonder how often this is true—we do not remember witnessing its occurrence], it is now commonly regarded as a mere orthographical variation, if not an error of transcription. It is possible however, that the two forms were designedly confounded by the writer, in order to suggest both ideas, that of palaces and that of widowhood or desolation.” (P. 285)

⁸⁰Slotki comments on **verse 22** that “her time...her days” means her time / days “of the fulfilment of the prophecy.” (P. 66)

(continued...)

and its day will not be drawn out.⁸¹

⁸⁰(...continued)

Watts entitles **13:22b-14:7** “Babylon’s Fate–Jacob’s Hope.” He comments on the last two lines of **verse 22** that Babylon’s “*time* and *her days* refer to the events of the end of Babylon just predicted. The **Old Testament** teaches that everything has its own time (**Ecclesiastes 3:1-8**...) Babylon’s fate cannot be rushed. One must wait for it...Babylon’s time, like the Day of Yahweh (**13:6**) is near and calls for ‘wailing’ and distress.” (P. 202)

Motyer comments that “*Her time* (עֵתָהּ) is not the date on the calendar but the season appropriate for such an event...This prediction looks far ahead in history. The Assyrians destroyed Babylon in 689 B.C.E. (see **chapter 21**), after which it was restored. Cyrus took the city in 539 B.C.E., but left it intact. Its continued turbulence led to a determined attack by Darius Hystapes in 518, after which it declined to desolation.” (P. 141)

⁸¹Alexander comments that “The last clause of this verse may be strictly understood, but in application to the Jewish captives in the Babylonian exile, for whose consolation the prophecy was partly intended. Or we may understand it as denoting proximity in reference to the events which had been passing in the prophet’s view. He sees the signals erected—he hears a noise in the mountains—and regarding these as actually present, he exclaims, *her time is near to come!* It may, however, mean, as similar expressions do in other cases, that when the appointed time should come, the event would certainly take place, there could be no postponement or delay.” (P. 285)

1. The Historical Jesus and Christian Theology

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The quest for the historical Jesus began as a protest against traditional Christian dogma, but when the supposedly “neutral” historians peered into the well, all they saw was a featureless Jesus. Even when scholars decided that other biblical figures—John the Baptist, the evangelists, Paul, the “Q” people [meaning those who heard the teachings of Jesus found in common in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, but not found in Mark], and so on—were at home in a richly-storied and symbolic world, Jesus himself was not allowed to act symbolically, to criticize his contemporaries, to think theologically, to reflect on his own vocation, or to evoke any of the various meta-narratives with which his Jewish world was replete. At this point objectivist historiography begins to eat its own tail; it has now decided that it dislikes the taste, which is hardly surprising.

So what are we doing now, talking about the historical Jesus and Christian theology? We are taking Hermann Reimarus’s challenge seriously: Investigate Jesus and see whether Christianity is not based on a mistake.¹ We are taking Albert Schweitzer’s challenge seriously: put Jesus within apocalyptic Judaism and watch bland unthinking dogma shiver in its shoes.² If this is too dangerous, escape routes are available. First, Wilhelm Wrede: **Mark** is theological fiction, and Jesus is a non-apocalyptic, teasing teacher.³ This is alive and well over one hundred years later.

Second, Martin Kähler: the true Christ is a Christ of faith detached from the Jesus of history.⁴ This, too, is alive and well today. The church may urge this latter escape route, part of the academic guild may urge the former. Both should be resisted. Instead, we should accept both Reimarus’s challenge and Schweitzer’s proposal.

Schweitzer’s account of apocalyptic must, however, be seriously modified. First-century Jewish apocalyptic, is not the same as “end-of-the-world.” Instead, it invests major events within history with their theological significance. It looks, specifically, for the unique and climactic moment in—not the abolition of—Israel’s long historical story. We must: renounce literalism, whether fundamentalist or scholarly. Apocalyptic is the symbolic and richly-charged language of protest, affirming that God’s kingdom will come on earth as it is in heaven—not in some imagined heavenly realm to be created after the present world has been destroyed. In particular, apocalyptic is the language of revolution: not that YHWH will destroy the world, but that he will act dramatically within it to bring Israel’s long night of suffering to an end, to usher in the new day in which peace and justice will reign.⁵

“Apocalyptic” therefore is the natural context for a truly subversive “wisdom.” Wisdom and folly within this worldview are not abstract or timeless. They consist in recognizing (or failing to recognize) that the long-awaited moment is now arriving. Apocalyptic and wisdom fit snugly together, and are mutually reinforcing. One of the major critical tools proposed by Wrede’s contemporary successors is, therefore, shown

to be blunt beyond all usefulness.

When we make the adjustments required by this historical redefinition of “apocalyptic,” the major division in contemporary Jesus studies is clear. The current debate, though far more complex, is essentially comprehensible as a re-run of Wrede’s “consistent skepticism” against Schweitzer’s “consistent eschatology.” John Dominic Crossan and the Jesus Seminar offer a non-apocalyptic Jesus: not just a Jesus who did not expect the end of the space-time universe, but a Jesus who did not think that Israel’s long and checkered story was now reaching its dramatic and decisive climax.⁶ I take the other view, claiming descent from Schweitzer. While agreeing that Jesus did not expect the end of the space-time world, I insist, like E. P. Sanders and many others, that Jesus was not a religious reformer but an eschatological prophet.⁷ Like other first-century eschatological prophets--and messianic or quasi-messianic figures--Jesus really did believe that Israel’s God was acting through him and his movement to do for Israel at last what the prophets had promised.

What, more precisely, was that? With the Exodus as their symbolic and narrative backdrop, the prophets declared that Israel would be released from the bondage that had begun with Babylon and that continued into Jesus’s own day. Nobody in Jesus’s day would have claimed that the visions of Isaiah, Jeremiah, or Ezekiel had yet been fulfilled. The Babylons of this world would be defeated, and Israel would be free. And this real “return from exile”--that is, this complete liberation--would, of course, involve the return of YHWH to Zion. Prophet after prophet says so; nowhere in Second-Temple literature does anyone claim that it has actually happened. The prophets, moreover, interpreted the exile as the punishment: for Israel’s sin; the end of exile would, therefore, be “the forgiveness of sins.” It would mean Israel’s redemption, evil’s defeat, and YHWH’s return. All of this can be summed up in a single phrase: “the kingdom of God.”⁸

Where does Jesus belong on this map, and what effect does this have on Christian theology? I have set out elsewhere a worldview model focusing on praxis, story, symbol, and question, leading to aims and beliefs.⁹ When we apply this to Jesus, it produces the following analysis.

First, Jesus exemplified the praxis of a prophet. He was known as a prophet; he spoke of himself as a prophet. He was both an oracular prophet and a leadership prophet. His movement grew out of that of John the Baptist, who was also a prophetic figure. Both men were clearly eschatological prophets. They were not merely visionary teachers. They were not merely advocating subversive wisdom or behavior. They were announcing, in symbol and narrative, that Israel’s story was reaching the point for which Israel had longed.

Second, Jesus’ stories—not just his parables but his whole announcement--consisted at bottom of this: the time had arrived. To say “the kingdom of God is at hand” (**Matthew 4:17**) was to supply the missing line in the story that many wanted to hear. To speak of the return of a disgraced young son (**Luke 15:11-32**), and to use that as the validation of open and celebratory commensality [a social group that eats

together] (**Luke 15:1-2**), was to claim that table-fellowship as the embodiment of the real return from exile. To speak of the fall of the house (**Matthew 7:26-27**) evoked the theme of evil's defeat. To speak of the master returning after a long absence (**Luke 19.11-27**) hinted strongly at YHWH's return to Zion. These were among Jesus' characteristic kingdom-stories.

The stories did, however, have a twist for which Jesus's listeners were unprepared. Like all kingdom-stories of the time, they invited Herod and Pilate, Caesar, and Caiaphas to tremble in their beds. If Israel's God was going to become king, all other rulers would be demoted. Like most kingdom-stories of the time, moreover, they also offered a critique of other kingdom-stories. If the Pharisees' kingdom-story was correct, the Essenes' was not, and vice versa. Jesus's kingdom-story, like all others, was doubly subversive: subversive of the great empires and their representatives, but subversive also [of] alternative Jewish kingdom-stories.

Still within Jesus' narrative world, there are two other points to be made. First, Jesus invited his hearers to become part of the story. His radical narrative summoned all and sundry to celebrate with him the real return from exile, the real forgiveness of sins. He was offering the latter precisely because he was enacting the former. This is eschatology, not reform. Jesus's so-called "ethics" belong just here: they were part of the story, the story of what God's renewed Israel would look like. Like other Jewish leaders before and since, Jesus was urging his contemporaries to follow...in the subversive way of peace. He was radically opposed to the way of ultra-orthodoxy, of violent nationalist revolution. This was not, of course, because he was supporting the status quo (or was "non-political"), but precisely because he was not.

Second, Jesus warned his contemporaries that failure to come his way would result in ruin. He stood in the great tradition of Israel's prophets, notably Elijah and Jeremiah. His story had two possible endings between which his hearers had to choose. If they followed his way, the way of peace, they would be the light of the world, the city set on a hill that could not be hidden. If they went the other way, as Jesus saw many of his contemporaries eager to do, they would call down on themselves the wrath of Rome. Jesus, like Amos or Jeremiah, warned that Rome's wrath would constitute God's wrath. To follow his teachings, his subversive wisdom, would be the only way to build the house on the rock. To follow the...prophets who were leading Israel into nationalist revolution would cause the house to fall with a great crash.

After praxis and story, symbol. Consider Jesus' work in relation to the regular Jewish symbols one by one.

Family: Jesus regarded his followers as a fictive kinship group, subverting normal family loyalty, which was ultimately loyalty to the people.

Land: Jesus urged his followers to abandon their possessions, which in his world mostly meant land.

Torah: Jesus acted and spoke with a sovereign authority, and challenged in particular the two symbols--Sabbath and food--which distinguished Galilean Jews

from their pagan neighbors.

Temple: Jesus symbolically enacted its destruction, recognizing that its guardians, and the people as a whole, had refused his way of peace.

He constructed his own alternative Jewish worldview (as, *mutatis mutandis* [the necessary changes having been made], the Essenes had done) around key symbolic actions and styles. In his case these were: healings, which were seen by [some] as subversive and “magical”; open and restive table-fellowship; the call of the twelve; the offer of the eschatological gift of forgiveness; the redefined family; and, of course, his own agenda and vocation. Jesus’s critique of his contemporaries’ use of traditional symbols came together in his action in the Temple (**Mark 14:12-25**) and the symbols of his own work in the Last Supper. These two actions belong together and interpret each other.

Does all this mean that Jesus was in some sense anti-Jewish? Of course not. Was Elijah anti-Jewish for telling his contemporaries that they were under judgment? Were the Essenes anti-Jewish for denouncing the present Temple and its rulers, or for attacking the Pharisees? The debate, like some tragic current debates, is essentially “inner-Jewish.” Once again, Jesus’ critique was based not on religion but on eschatology. Jesus did not “speak against the law”-- as though he were a Lutheran born out of due time. He did not regard the symbols of Israel’s worldview as bad, shabby, offensive, strange, or representative of a wrong sort of religion--as though he were a nineteenth- or twentieth- century liberal. Nor did he simply offer a new option to be chosen by those who fancied it--as, though he were a postmodernist. He claimed that the day had arrived in which the God-given Mosaic dispensation was being overtaken [by] the *eschaton* [final end or goal], and this was highlighted for him by the fact that he saw the God-given symbols of Temple, Torah, land, and family being used to undergird the ultra-orthodox zeal for revolutionary violence, [in terms of his own vocation]. Jesus’ work aroused opposition, not in the form of an intra-Pharisaic dialogue about the finer points of Torah, but in the form of a radical clash, of agendas. We of all people ought not to be surprised if zealous students of Torah turn violent against someone who advocates peace at the cost of ancestral land.

Jesus’ praxis, stories, and symbols thus indicate his answers, implicit and sometimes explicit, to the five major worldview questions. Who are we? Jesus and his followers form the real return-from-exile people, the remnant, the seed, the little flock. Where are we? We are in the land, though still slave, but our God will make us inherit the earth. What time is it? The hour of crisis, the great tribulation through which the kingdom will come, the long-awaited moment when the Exodus will be re-enacted, when exile will end, evil will be defeated, and YHWH will return to Zion. What is wrong? Evil is rampant not merely within paganism but within Israel: from the oppressive regime of the chief priests to the populist revolutionary movements, the world’s evil has radically infected Israel also. What is the solution? Everything we know about Jesus suggests that in his heart of hearts he gave the answer: “I am.”

But how? Without in any way psychologizing Jesus, we can as historians attempt to understand the network of motivation--and even of vocation--that seems to

have been present to him. We can move, in other words, from a worldview to specific aims and beliefs.

First, Jesus believed he was Israel's messiah, the one through whom YHWH would restore the fortunes of his people. The word "messiah" had, of course, nothing to do with trinitarian or incarnational theology. Simon [of Perea, a Jewish slave who rebelled and was killed by Herod the Great in 4 B.C.E.], Athronges [an humble shepherd who led the Jews in an insurrection under Herod Archelaus; see Josephus, **Jewish Antiquities 17.278-284**] had been hailed as messiah when Jesus was a boy. The Sicarii [a splinter group of Hebrew zealots, heavily resisting Roman occupation of Israel] regarded Menahem as messiah until a rival group killed him. Simeon ben Kosiba was hailed by Akiba as "[Bar Kochba] son of the star." Presumably, they all regarded themselves as messiah. People in our world today mostly do not think like that, but Jesus was a first century Jew and not a twentieth-century liberal. Anyone doing and saying what Jesus did and said must have faced the question? Will I be the one through whom the liberation will come? All of the evidence—not least the Temple-action and the title on the cross—suggests that Jesus answered, "Yes."

Second, Jesus's radical and counter-cultural agenda, subverting both the political status quo and the movements of violent revolution, was focused in his awareness, of vocation, John the Baptist re-enacted the Exodus in the wilderness; Jesus would do so in Jerusalem. Jesus's gospel message constantly invokes **Isaiah 40-55**, in which YHWH returns to Zion, defeats Babylon, and liberates Israel from her exile. At the heart of that great passage there stands a job description. Schweitzer argued a century ago that Jesus saw the Great Tribulation, the Messianic Woes, coming upon Israel and believed himself called, like the martyrs, to go ahead of Israel and take them upon himself. This would be the victory over evil; this would be the redefined messianic task. Jesus had warned that Israel's national ideology, focused then upon the revolutionary movements, would lead to ruthless Roman suppression; as Israel's representative he deliberately went to the place where that suppression found its symbolic focus. He drew his counter-Temple movement to a climax in Passover week, believing that as he went to his death Israel's God was doing for Israel (and hence for the world) what Israel as a whole could not do. Schweitzer divided the "lives of Jesus" into those that had Jesus going to Jerusalem to work and those that had him going there to die. Schweitzer chose the latter. I think he was right.

Third, Jesus believed something else, I submit, that makes sense (albeit radical and shocking sense) within precisely that cultural, political, and theological setting of which I have been speaking. Jesus evoked, as the overtones of his own work, symbols that spoke of Israel's God present with God's people. He acted and spoke as if he were in some way a one-man, counter-Temple movement. He acted and spoke as if he were gathering and defining Israel at this eschatological moment--the job normally associated with Torah. He acted and spoke as the spokesperson of Wisdom. Temple, Torah, and Wisdom, however, were powerful symbols of central Jewish belief: that the transcendent creator and covenant God would dwell within Israel and order Israel's life. Jesus used precisely those symbols as models for his own work. In particular, he not only told stories whose natural meaning was that YHWH was returning to Zion, but he acted--dramatically and symbolically--as if it were his vocation to embody that event in

himself.

I suggest in short, that the Temple and YHWH's return to Zion are the keys to gospel Christology. Forget the titles, at least for a moment; forget the pseudo-orthodox attempts to make Jesus of Nazareth conscious of being the second person of the Trinity; forget the arid reductionism that is the mirror-image of that unthinking would-be orthodoxy. Focus instead, if you will, on a young Jewish prophet telling a story about YHWH returning to Zion as judge and redeemer, and then embodying it by riding into the city in tears, by symbolizing the Temple's destruction, and by celebrating the final Exodus. I propose, as a matter of history, that Jesus of Nazareth was conscious of vocation, a vocation given him by the one he knew as "Father," to enact in himself what, in Israel's scriptures, Israel's God had promised to accomplish. He would be the pillar of cloud for the people of the new Exodus. He would embody in himself the returning and redeeming action of the covenant God.

This bald, unsubstantiated summary of several lengthy historical arguments will not, perhaps, convince by itself. The main argument in its favor is double similarity and double dissimilarity with Jesus's Jewish world and with the early church. The picture I have drawn is not obviously what the early church believed, but we can see how early Christian beliefs might have grown out of it. It is thoroughly credible within first-century Judaism while not being at all what most first-century Jews were thinking. It is not the featureless Jesus of modernist reconstruction. Then again, why should not Jesus have been just as much aware of symbol, story, theology, and vocation as the other figures whom we enthusiastically ascribe them?

Thus far, so much we may say of the history--which is, of course, completely theological, both in itself and in our reading of it. I turn, in conclusion, to three wider remarks, again about history and theology.

First, Schweitzer was right to see that his eschatological Jesus would shake comfortable Western orthodoxy to its foundations. I have modified his scheme by interpreting apocalyptic historically, but the Jesus that I discover remains shocking. Western orthodoxy has for too long had an overly lofty, detached, and oppressive view of God. It has approached Christology by assuming this view of God, and has tried to fit Jesus into it. Hardly surprisingly, the result has been a docetic Jesus; this in turn generated Reimarus's protest, not least because of the social and cultural nonsense which the combination of deism and docetism reinforced. That combination remains powerful and still needs a powerful challenge. My proposal, then, is not that we assume that we know what the word "God" means, managing somehow to fit Jesus into that. Instead, I suggest that we think historically about a young Jew, possessed of a desperately-risky--indeed, apparently crazy--vocation, riding into Jerusalem in tears, denouncing the Temple, dining once more with his friends, and dying on a Roman cross, and that we somehow allow our meaning for the word "God" to be re-centered around that point,

Second, the story of Jesus does not generate a set of theological propositions, a "New Testament Theology." It generates, as Schweitzer saw with prophetic clarity, a

set of tasks. The great exegetical mistake of the century (perpetrated by Schweitzer himself)—the idea that first-century Jews (including Jesus) expected the end of the world and were disappointed has so occupied the minds of scholars that the real problem of delay has gone almost unnoticed, and people now come upon it as though it were a novelty. If for Jesus, and indeed for the whole early church for which we have any real evidence, the God of Israel defeated evil once and for all on the cross, then why does evil still exist in the world? Was Jesus, after all, a failure? The New Testament answers this question with one voice. The cross and resurrection won the victory over evil, but it is the task of the Spirit, and those led by the Spirit, to implement that victory in and for all the world. This task demands a freshly-drawn worldview: new praxis, stories, symbols, and answers. These come together into a fresh vision of God in which—precisely because of this re-discovery of who God is—history, theology, spirituality, and vocation recover their proper relationship. For Jesus’s followers, finding out who Jesus was in his historical context meant and means discovering their own task within their own contents.

Third, and last. Several first-century Jews other than Jesus held and acted upon remarkable and subversive views. Why should Jesus be any more than one of the most remarkable of them? The answer must hinge upon the resurrection. If nothing happened to the body of Jesus, I cannot see why any of his implicit or explicit claims should be regarded as true. What is more, I cannot as a historian see why anyone would have continued to belong to his movement and regard him as its messiah. There were several other messianic or quasi-messianic movements within a hundred years on either side of Jesus. Routinely, they ended with the leader being killed by the authorities or by a rival group. If your messiah is killed, naturally you conclude that he was not the messiah. Some of those movements continued to exist; where they did, they took a new leader from the same family. (Note, however, that nobody ever said James, the brother of Jesus, was the messiah.) Such groups did not suffer from that blessed twentieth-century disease of cognitive dissonance. In particular, they did not go around saying that their messiah had been raised from the dead. I agree with Paula Fredriksen: the early Christians really did believe that Jesus had been raised bodily from the dead.¹⁰ What is more, I cannot make sense of the whole picture, historically or theologically, unless I say that they were right.

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¹ See Charles H. Talbert, ed., *Reimarus: Fragments*, Ralph S. Fraser, trans. (London: SCM Press, 1971), 146-51. It provides two extracts from Hermann Samuel Reimarus’s *Apologie oder Schutzschrift für die verüffneten Verehrer Gottes*. Reimarus (1694-1768) refrained from publishing the *Apologie* during his lifetime, but after his death these and other parts of it were published in 1774-78 by G. E. Lessing under the general title *Wolfenbüttel Fragments*.

² Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of Its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede*, W. Montgomery, trans. (New York: Macmillan

Publishing, 1910, 1960), 330-403. Originally published as *Von Reimarus zu Wrede: Eine Geschichte der Leben Jesu-Forschung* (Tübingen, Germany: J.C.B. Mohr, 1906).

³ Wilhelm Wrede, *The Messianic Secret*, J.C.G. Grieg, trans. (Cambridge, England: James Clarke, 1971). Originally published as *Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien: Zugleich ein Beitrag zum Verständnis des Markusevangeliums* (Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1901).

⁴ Martin Kähler, *The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historical Biblical Christ*, Carl E. Braaten, trans. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964). Originally published as *Der Sogenannte historische Jesus und der geschichtliche, biblische Christus* (Leipzig, Germany: A. Deichert, 1892)

⁵ See the seminal discussion in G.B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1980), 243-71, see further N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, vol. 1 (Minneapolis: Fortress; London: SPCK, 1992), 280-338.

⁶ John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: Harper-Collins, 1995).

⁷ E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (London: SCM; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 237-41. See also C. H. Dodd, "Jesus as Teacher and Prophet," in *Mysterium Christi: Christological Studies by British and German Theologians*, G. K. A. Bell and Gustav Adolph Deissmann, eds. (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1930), 53-66; Martin Hengel, *The Charismatic Leader and His Followers*, James C.G. Grieg, trans. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1981), 33-83.

⁸ Wright, *New Testament and People of God*, 284-6

⁹ Wright, *New Testament and People of God*, 122-39.

¹⁰ Paula Fredrikson, *From Jesus to Christ: The Origins of the New Testament Images of Jesus* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), 133.

2.

Medes

“The Medes, Old Persian Māda-, Ancient Greek: Μηδοί, Hebrew: מְדִי were an ancient Iranian people who lived in an area known as Media (northwestern Iran) and who spoke the Median language. Their arrival in the region is associated with the first wave of migrating Iranian peoples into Iran from around 1000 B.C.E. to around 900 B.C.E.

“This period of migration coincided with a power vacuum in the Near East with the Middle Assyrian Empire (1365–1020 BC), which had dominated northwestern Iran and eastern Anatolia and the Caucasus, going into a comparative decline. This allowed new peoples to pass through and settle. In addition Elam, the dominant power in Iran, was suffering a period of severe weakness, as was Babylonia to the west.

“From the 10th to the late 7th centuries B.C.E., the western parts of Media fell under the domination of the vast Neo-Assyrian Empire based in northern Mesopotamia, but which stretched from Cyprus to Iran, and from the Caucasus to Egypt and the Arabian Peninsula. Assyrian kings such as Tiglath-Pileser III, Sargon II, Sennacherib, Esarhaddon, Ashurbanipal and Ashur-etil-ilani imposed Vassal Treaties upon the Median rulers, and also protected them from predatory raids by marauding Scythians and Cimmerians.

“During the reign of Sinsharishkun (622–612 B.C.E.) the Assyrian empire, which had been in a state of constant civil war since 626 B.C.E., began to unravel. Subject peoples, such as the Medes, Babylonians, Chaldeans, Egyptians, Scythians, Cimmerians, Lydians and Arameans quietly ceased to pay tribute to Assyria.

“An alliance between the Medes and rebelling Neo-Babylonian Empire, Scythians, Chaldeans, and Cimmerians, helped the Medes to capture Nineveh in 612 B.C.E., which resulted in the eventual collapse of the Neo-Assyrian Empire by 605 B.C.E. The Medes were subsequently able to establish their Median kingdom (with Ecbatana as their royal center) beyond their original homeland and had eventually a territory stretching roughly from northeastern Iran to the Kızılırmak River in Anatolia. After the fall of Assyria between 616 B.C.E. and 605 B.C.E., a unified Median state was formed, which together with Babylonia, Lydia, and ancient Egypt became one of the four major powers of the ancient Near East.

“The Median kingdom was eventually conquered in 550 BC by Cyrus the Great, who established the Achaemenid Empire. However, nowadays there is considerable doubt whether a united Median empire ever existed. There is no archaeological evidence and the story of Herodotus is not supported by sources from the Neo-Assyrian Empire nor the Neo-Babylonian Empire. (**Wikipedia**, 7/13/2016)

Watts has an excursus on the Medes, pp. 198-99, in which he states:

“The Medes are attested as an ancient people in **Genesis 10:2**. They inhabited the high country of northwestern Iran between the Elburz Mountains [mountain range at the southern end of the Caspian Sea, just to the north of Teheran], the Salt Desert

[Dasht-e Kavir], Persia, and the lowlands of Mesopotamia. Elam lay to the south and Assyria directly east.

“In the eighth century Assyria had to deal with the Medes repeatedly, as indeed Shamanezer III had done in the ninth. Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 B.C.E.), Sargon II (722-705 B.C.E.), and Sennacherib (705-681 B.C.E.) campaigned against them repeatedly.

“From Sargon’s time for about three-quarters of a century, Media was subject to Assyria...Some Israelites were deported to ‘cities of the Medes’ (**2 Kings 17:6; 18:11**).

“Media would normally have been separated from Babylon by Elam, which was Babylon’s ally against Assyria...**Isaiah 21:2** speaks of both Elam and Media as attackers of Babylon. This implies a situation when Media and Elam support Assyria’s campaign against Babylon. Such a situation could well account for Merodach-Baladan’s defeat about 710 B.C.E.

“Media, allied with Persia, is much better known in the **Old Testament** for the empire of the sixth and fifth centuries, and for the occupation of Babylon in 539 B.C.E. But there is no reason to look beyond the eighth century for the intended setting of **chapter 13**.

“The threat posed by the Medes is obvious. For independence Babylon had to rely on Elamite support. A threat of Elamite military invasion of Babylon would neutralize that support. Since Media was subject to Assyria throughout this period, it takes little imagination to see how the plans were effectively laid to bring Babylon back under Assyrian power. Wildberger...sees the Medes as the ‘dedicated ones’ of **verse 3** whom Yahweh has ‘called.’ Yet the chapter has set the isolated event of Media’s move against Babylon (**verses 17-19**) in the larger frame of Yahweh’s Day with its cosmic and historical aspects. The Medes may well be seen as only one aspect of the broader picture. Within that broader setting, attention is focused on stirrings among one people, the Medes. God will use them as Isaiah views his using the Assyrians and Cyrus. They are impervious to bribes. Their famous bow and arrow will overcome all.” (Pp. 198-99)

3.

Chaldea

“Chaldea, also spelled Chaldaeae, was a small Semitic nation that emerged between the late 10th and early 9th century B.C.E., surviving until the mid 6th century B.C.E., after which it disappeared as the Chaldean tribes were absorbed into the native population of Babylonia. It was located in the marshy land of the far southeastern corner of Mesopotamia, and briefly came to rule Babylon.

“During a period of weakness in the East Semitic speaking empire of Babylonia, new tribes of West Semitic-speaking migrants arrived in the region from the Levant between the 11th and 10th centuries B.C.E. The earliest waves consisted of Suteans and Arameans, followed a century or so later by the Kaldu, a group who became known later as the Chaldeans or the Chaldees. The **Hebrew Bible** uses the term כַּשְׁדִּיִּם (Kasdim) and this is translated as Chaldaeans in the Septuagint, although there is some dispute as to whether Kasdim in fact means Chaldean. These migrations did not affect Assyria to the north, which repelled these incursions.

“The short-lived 11th dynasty of the Kings of Babylon (6th century BC) is conventionally known to historians as the Chaldean Dynasty, although the last rulers, Nabonidus and his son Belshazzar, were known to be from Assyria.

“These nomad Chaldeans settled in the far southeastern portion of Babylonia, chiefly on the right bank of the Euphrates. Though for a short time the name later commonly referred to the whole of southern Mesopotamia, this was a misnomer, as Chaldea proper was in fact only the plain in the far southeast formed by the deposits of the Euphrates and the Tigris, extending about four hundred miles along the course of these rivers, and averaging about a hundred miles in width.” (**Wikipedia**, 7 / 17 / 2016)

