

A KING AND A CITY

Isaiah 13:1–14:27

This oracle is about a city and a king. The king's name is Sennacherib and he reigned over the Assyrian Empire from 705-681 B.C. Sennacherib was a contemporary of Isaiah the Prophet (740-680 B.C.). At this time, Assyria was the dominant world power. Assyria ruled over several kingdoms including the kingdom of Babylon. In fact, "King of Babylon" was one of Sennacherib's titles.

In 701 B.C. King _____ attempted and failed to conquer the city of Jerusalem. Unlike King Ahaz before him, King Hezekiah, the King of Judah, cried out to God for deliverance. God destroyed the Assyrian army as recorded in 2 Kings 19:35-36. This defeat of the Assyrian army was predicted in this oracle (Isaiah 14:24-25).

Even though he bore the title "King of Babylon", King Sennacherib had a lot of trouble with the Kingdom of Babylon. The Babylonians were a cultured people. Their achievements in mathematics, astronomy, literature, art and architecture exceeded that of other kingdoms such that the Babylonians were viewed as the cultural center of the Assyrian Empire. In addition, the city of Babylon was the most magnificent city in the known world. The Babylonians were proud of their culture and chafed under Assyrian rule. Three times they rebelled against King Sennacherib. Finally, in 689 B.C., fed up with the Babylonians', King Sennacherib destroyed the _____.

This destruction of the city of Babylon by King Sennacherib is the subject of Isaiah 13. Sometime before the failed siege of Jerusalem in 701 B.C., God revealed through the Prophet Isaiah this cataclysmic destruction of the city of Babylon. God used King Sennacherib to punish the Babylonians for their arrogance and pride. Divine punishment on this scale is called **the day of the Lord**. The day of the Lord came upon the city of Babylon in 689 B.C. at the hand of King Sennacherib. *The apocalyptic language of this prophecy also anticipates the day of the Lord that will come upon the whole earth in the Great Tribulation (ex. Matthew 24:29; Revelation 18).* Here, in Isaiah 13:6-16, God reveals the day of the Lord coming upon the city of Babylon. That this is directed at Babylon is seen in verse 19 and in 14:22-23.

Again, it seems this prophecy was fulfilled in 689 B.C. by King Sennacherib's destruction of the city of Babylon. Babylon was destroyed and the statue of their god, Marduk, was carried back to Nineveh as a war trophy. King Sennacherib no longer had to worry about who was ruling in Babylon or what trouble they might cause because the city no longer existed. He may have thought that now Babylon could cause him no further problems but, if so, he was mistaken. The people of Assyria were outraged at Sennacherib's destruction of the great city and, further, by his sacrilege in plundering the temples and taking the statue of Marduk as a prize. The Assyrians and Babylonians revered many of the same gods – even though they often had different names – and this insult to Marduk, the god who had brought order out of chaos, was intolerable.

Historians believe it was the destruction of the city of Babylon that led to King Sennacherib's assassination in 681 B.C. at the hands of two of his sons. This assassination and the death of King Sennacherib were predicted in Isaiah 14 and recorded in 2 Kings 19:37.

Isaiah 14 predicted the death and humiliation of Sennacherib over twenty years before it happened. It seems best to understand the king of Babylon in Isaiah 14 to refer to King Sennacherib. Remember, verses 14:24-27 predicted the destruction of the Assyrian Army which was fulfilled in 701 B.C. with Assyria's failed attempt to conquer Jerusalem. At that time, Judah was temporarily relieved from oppression by King Sennacherib, king of Assyria and king of Babylon. God revealed in verses 3-4 that not only will they gain relief from Sennacherib, they will also eventually be able to rejoice in his demise.

They will rejoice because King Sennacherib's death will bring rest and quiet to their world (14:5-8).² King Sennacherib's death will not only bring rest and quiet to the world, it will cause quite a stir in Sheol, the underworld, the place of the dead. _____ is pictured as a great throne room where the leaders and kings of the earth go when they die. During his reign, Sennacherib laid low many kings and kingdoms including Phoenicia, Philistia, Egypt, Moab, Edom, Cilicia, much of Judah, northern Arabia. Having died, King Sennacherib is envisioned as being met by these kings already in the grave. They are amazed at what has become of this great king whose splendor had surpassed theirs.

¹ <https://www.worldhistory.org/article/745/the-mutual-destruction-of-sennacherib--babylon/>

² That this refers to King Sennacherib is further supported by Isaiah 37:21-29 where he is described as cutting down the cypresses of Lebanon.

They are amazed that he had become weak and dead like them. Though he had lived in luxury and pomp, he would now lie in corruption. Maggots and worms would decompose his body in the grave (Isaiah 14:9-11).

In the ancient Near East, kings like Sennacherib had supreme power; many were deified by their subjects. In verses 12-20, the kings taunt Sennacherib for his fall from glory (14:12-20). This taunt compares Sennacherib to a Canaanite myth about a minor god named Helel son of Shachar (14:12-14). Helel tried to take over Zaphon, the mountain of the gods in an attempt to exalt himself over the highest god, El. Helel's coup failed and he was hurled down to the underworld.

Verses 16-23 continue the taunt and conclude with God's commitment to bring a full end to the king of Babylon and his dynasty.

Through this oracle, God revealed His people would have relief from King Sennacherib and the Assyrians while He also revealed that He will severely judge the pride of humanity. This oracle is predictive prophecy, God revealing before-hand, events that were later fulfilled in history. This is powerful evidence for the supernatural origin of the Bible.

This oracle also foreshadows *the great day of the Lord* that is yet future to us.

As it does throughout the Bible, in the book of Revelation, the city of Babylon represents the world system pitted against God. Just as God punished the pride and arrogance of Babylon in the days of Isaiah, so also God is going to judge "Babylon", the wicked world system, in the Great Tribulation yet to come. In that day, we, too, like the Jews of old, will have great reason to rejoice.

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