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## Isaiah 13

Regarding the sublime beauty of Isaiah 13 and 14, Lowth says, “The former part of this prophecy is one of the most beautiful examples, that can be given, of elegance of composition, variety of imagery, and sublimity of sentiment and diction, in the prophetic style; and the latter part consists of an ode of supreme and singular excellence.” Isaiah was permitted to see into the future, both the role that Babylon would have in terms of punishing disobedient Israel, as well as the eventual downfall of Babylon. Robert W. Rogers, after writing about the great history of Babylon concludes his book with, “The glory of Babylon is ended. The long procession of princes, priests, and kings has passed by. No city so vast had stood on the world before it. No city with a history so long has even yet appeared. From the beginnings of human history it had stood. It was in other hands now, and it would soon be a shapeless mass of ruins, standing along in a sad, untilled desert.” Babylon represents not only the ancient kingdom that was brought down to her knees, but also the *dark side of the world*. Henderson says, “Babylon was the seat of science, especially astronomy; the center of ancient idolatry; the storehouse of wealth and magnificence; and the asylum of all that was revolting in licentiousness and immorality.” Much is said about Babylon in Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Micah, Zechariah, as well as in the New Testament. The Book of Revelations speaks of Babylon’s eventual fall, “Babylon is fallen, is fallen” (Revelations 14:8b). In D&C we are commanded, “Go ye out from among the nations, even from Babylon, from the midst of wickedness, which is spiritual Babylon” (D&C 133:14). This chapter marks the first of eleven dedicated to the nations. Many of these begin with the words “the burden,” and then address a particular nation. There are nine nations or regions that receive such burdens, beginning with Babylon. Then follow Moab (15:1), Damascus (17:1), Egypt (19:1), the “desert of the sea” (21:1), Dumah (21:11), Arabia (21:13), the “valley of vision” (22:1), and end with Tyre (23:1). Calvin makes some important points about the destruction of Babel: “It may be asked, Was this destruction [that would happen upon Babylon] as cruel as Isaiah here describes it to be? For history gives a different account and Daniel himself, who was an eye-witness of this destruction, relates that the city was only taken, for the Medes and Persians spared the citizens and inhabitants. \* \* \* Now, when he declares that Babylon will be utterly destroyed, it is certain that he does not merely describe a single calamity, but includes the destruction which followed long afterwards. After having been subdued by the Persians, Babylon continued to flourish, and held the name and rank of a very celebrated city. \* \* \* Having been gradually weakened, not long afterwards, Babylon again changed its master, and, after having been governed for a short period by Alexander, king of Macedon, immediately passed under the dominion of Seleucus, who endeavoured by every method to degrade it till it was completely ruined. Thus, so long as God permitted the city to remain in existence, it presented a shameful and revolting spectacle to the whole world, that the accomplishment of the prophecy might be more evident and more impressive. Hence the Prophet Isaiah has good reason for asserting that the anger of God will not be appeased till that den of robbers be utterly destroyed.”

vv. 1-5. The great hosts are being commanded by the Lord of Hosts, and are ready to attack Babylon and destroy her strength. It is the Lord of Hosts who is speaking in verses two and three. All is set up for the great battle between good and evil.

### 1 ¶ THE burden of Babylon, which Isaiah the son of Amoz did see.

The word *burden* (מִשָּׂא) is sometimes translated as *prophecy* or *oracle*.<sup>1</sup> Young explains that the minatory,

<sup>1</sup> Henderson points out that it can sometimes mean *uttering*, such as in the words spoken by King Lemuel, who in turn had been taught by his mother (see Proverbs 31:1). Henderson shows, how in several scriptures, the expression *uttered words* fits the Hebrew expression,

or menacing, nature of the word is not universal. Here we do have a prophecy of a threatening nature, however, such that the word *burden* fits quite well. This prophecy of doom fell upon Babel, or Babylonia, מִשָּׂא בְּבָבֶל. The prophecy was given to Isaiah, the son of Amoz, in the form of a vision: חָזָה יִשְׁעִיהוּ בֶן-אָמוֹז. The Targum reads, “The oracle of the cup of cursing to give to Babylon to drink, which Isaiah the son of Amoz prophesied.” Many modern exegetes, intent in destroying the word of God, would love to assign this prophecy to someone other than Isaiah, for

such as in Zechariah 9:1: “מִשָּׂא דְּבַר-יְהוָה” speaking of the word of the Lord, such as might be translated, the *utterance of the word of the Lord*.

the vision predicts things way into the future. Many in the critical school believe that a prophet is simply a wise man who can discern the signs of the times, rather than one who can peer into the future with the Lord's help. Delitzsch well says, "We may therefore see from this, that the prophecy relating to Babylon was originally complete in itself, and was intended to be issued in that form. But when the whole book was compiled, these headings were retained as signal-posts of the separate portions of which it was composed. Moreover, in the case before us, the retention of the heading may be regarded as a providential arrangement. For if this 'oracle of Babel' lay before us in a separate form, and without the name of Isaiah, we should not dare to attribute it to him, for the simple reason that the overthrow of the Chaldean empire is here distinctly announced, and that at a time when the Assyrian empire was still standing."

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**2 Lift ye up my\* banner upon the high mountain, exalt the voice unto them, shake the hand, that they may go into the gates of the nobles.**

\* A banner in KJV and Book of Mormon, my in JST.

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*Lift ye up my banner upon the high mountain.* These are the words of the LORD, that He speaks through the mouth of Isaiah. As stated by Nyman, "... the Joseph Smith Translation reads 'my banner,' which clarifies that it was the Lord's banner which was to be raised."

Regarding the *high mountain*, הַר־נִשְׁפָּה there are a number of translations. Gesenius explains that נִשְׁפָּה means *bare, bald or naked when used of a mountain*. BDB also suggests that שָׁפִי can mean *bare* as in the *bare treeless height*. שָׁפָה, based on the Arabian, means *to appear, become visible, conspicuous, lofty, prominent, to stand out, and elevated place* (AHCL). When mountains are very high, they certainly do not have vegetation on them, as the Andes mountains, for instance. The scriptures, then, talk about raising a standard or an ensign on a high mountain where it could be seen. Two types of standards are frequently mentioned by Isaiah: one of them to call people to battle; the other to invite people unto Christ. In a spiritual sense, they are the same, "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Ephesians 6:12). Perhaps no more eloquent invitation to leave Babylon and come unto Christ can be found than in the Preface to the Doctrine and Covenants (D&C 1:1 – 39 as well as D&C 133:1-74). From a

historical perspective, most exegetes here speak of the Medes being called to topple Babylon. ¶ *Exalt the voice unto them, shake the hand, that they may go into the gates of the nobles.* The LXX says, "Exalt the voice to them, beckon with the hand." Henderson, instead of the *raising of the voice unto them*, הָרִימוּ קוֹל לָהֶם, can also imagine the voice of a *trumpet* (as does Barnes), קוֹל שׁוֹפָר (or, voice of the shophar, made of a ram's horn, see Jeremiah 4:21). Henderson explains that the לָהֶם, *to them*, "is anticipative, and refers to the warriors under Cyrus, not named but further described [in] verse 3 and expressly stated [in] verse 17, to be the Medes. It can also be understood to be the hosts of God's army. Delitzsch suggests that the conquering armies will enter through the gates reserved for the nobles, "The destination of this army is to enter into a city of princes ... namely, to enter as conquerors; for it is not the princes who invite them, but Jehovah." Several commentators, including Henry, feel that the place is called the *gates of the nobles* on account of the "abundance of nobleman's houses that were in it." Naegelsbach is not sure about the term, but supposed it might mean "the main gates of the hostile city, which alone (in contrast with the small side gates, figuratively called 'needle-eyes' –Matthew 19:24) serve for the entree of princes in pomp, in the present case for the victors. Still the expression occasions surprise." Barnes, leaning on Herodotus, explained: "The walls of Babylon are said by Herodotus to have been eighty-seven feet thick, and 350 high. They were built of brick, or clay dried in the sun, and not burned; and were cemented by a kind of glutinous earth, or bitumen, with which the adjacent region abounded. The whole city was surrounded by an immense ditch, from which this clay had been taken to make the walls of the city, and which, being always filled with water, contributed materially to its defence. There were 100 gates to the city, twenty-five on each side. These gates were solid brass. Between every two of them there were three tower, raised ten feet above the walls." Barnes adds, "If there was any ancient city that appeared to bid defiance to the attacks of enemies, or to the ravages of time, it was Babylon."

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**3 I have commanded my sanctified ones, I have also called my mighty ones, for mine anger, [even] is not upon them that rejoice in my highness.**

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The Targum reads, "I have commanded my appointed ones, yea I have summoned my mighty men, and my glorious warriors shall avenge mine anger upon them." The sanctified ones, or 'my sanctified [or consecrated]—

Henderson; to be set apart, Barnes] ones' לְמִקְדָּשֵׁי (from the verb, קָדַשׁ) in the spiritual sense of this verse, are those who have been called to follow Christ in the last days, or the saints of the most High God. Most commentators speak of the emphatic role of "I" as in *I myself* (אֲנִי) have commanded, speaking of the

LORD. Alexander explains, "The insertion of אֲנִי is not an idiom of the later Hebrew, as explained by Gesenius (Lehrig. P. 801), but as Maurer has correctly stated, an emphatic designation of God as the sole efficient agent, *I myself*, or *I even I*." Calvin applies the label *sanctified* to those through whom the LORD would accomplish His work, that is, the Medes and the Persians: "[God] threatens, therefore, that *Babylon* shall be destroyed by the Medes and Persians, in the same manner as if they obeyed the call of God; for though they were prompted to battle by their own ambition, pride, and cruelty, yet God directed them, without [them] knowing it, to execute judgment."

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**4 The noise of a the multitude in the mountains, like as of a great people; a tumultuous noise of the kingdoms of nations gathered together, the LORD of hosts mustereth the hosts of the battle.**

✓ or, the likeness of

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*The noise of the multitude in the mountains, like as of a great people.* Henderson explains: "The description is truly graphical. First, a tumultuous noise is heard, but not so distinctly as to discover the cause: then the appearance of a vast army presents itself; the din becomes louder and louder; and, at last, the hostile army is found to be so numerous, that it appears as if entire kingdoms had transferred their population, and were assembled for battle." Alexander and some after him have noted that "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 on an eye and ear witness." In terms of the Medes and the Persians, Rawlinson well has, "The mention of 'mountains' here is very appropriate, both Media and Persia being, in the main, mountainous countries." Naegelsbach calls this the Zagros mountains<sup>2</sup> but he rather thinks of this verse in a more spiritual or eschatological fashion, regarding a universal judgment that will fall upon the earth: "The army, then, which Jehovah musters, consists of people that have come

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<sup>2</sup> *Zagrus mons*, now represented by the middle and southern portion of the mountains of Kurdistan.—Translators note to Naegelsbach.

from a far land, and from the end of heaven." ¶ *A tumultuous noise of the kingdoms of nations gathered together, the LORD of hosts mustereth the hosts of the battle.* Henderson says, "To crown the whole [picture], Jehovah is introduced as inspecting the troops previous to the engagement." Delitzsch imagines it, as troops running down the mountains in response to the invitation, "The command of Jehovah is quickly executed. The great army is already coming down from the mountains." In Jeremiah we read, "Set ye up a standard in the land, blow the trumpet among the nations, prepare the nations against her, call together against her the kingdoms of Ararat, Minni, and Ashchenaz; appoint a captain against her; cause the horses to come up as the rough caterpillers. Prepare against her the nations with the kings of the Medes, the captains thereof, and all the rulers thereof, and all the land of his dominion. And the land shall tremble and sorrow: for every purpose of the LORD shall be performed against Babylon, to make the land of Babylon a desolation without an inhabitant." (Jeremiah 51:27-29). Henderson explains that Ararat is not only a mountain, but a region. Also, that the *kings of the Medes* probably refers to "satraps or viceroys ruling in the larger divisions of Media and Persia, who put themselves at the head of the quota of men which they severally brought into the field." Alexander states that the verse is generic rather than specific in relation to a given mountain range as suggested by other commentators. "But these distinctions seem to rest upon a false view of the passage as a description of particular marches, battles, &c., rather than a generic picture of the whole series of events which ended in the downfall of Babylon." And regarding the translation, Alexander adds, "The substitution of the present for the participle in the English Version (*mustereth*) and most others, greatly impairs the force and uniformity of the expression by converting a lively exclamation into a dispassionate assertion." Alexander would be pleased to know that most translators would follow his feelings. The Berkeley edition has, "Listen, an uproar on the mountains as of a great multitude! Listen, an uproar of kingdoms, of nations assembling! The Lord of hosts is mustering a battle-host." (See likewise also, ASV, Moffatt, Tanakh, NASB, NRSV, REB, NAB, NJB, AB, EB, AAT, to name a few.)

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**5 They come from a far country, from the end of heaven, [even] yea, the LORD, and the weapons of his indignation, to destroy the whole land.**

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Several expositors explain that the ends of heaven has to do with where the heavens seem to meet the horizon. So Barns explains, "The expression in the Hebrew,

‘From the end, or extreme part of heaven,’ means, the distant horizon by which the earth appears to be bounded, where the sky and the land seem to meet.” Barnes illustrates the point with Psalms 19 where the apparent circuit of the sun is described, “His going forth is from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it: and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof” (v. 6). While this may well be one meaning, there is no need to limit the *ends of heaven* to this definition as God is able to bring forth reinforcements from whence He pleases. Rawlinson makes this interesting observation, “With a most effective anthropomorphism, Jehovah is made to march with the army that he has mustered (verse 4) against the land that has provoked his wrath—*i.e.* Babylonia.” Likewise, the Lord will gather out of Babylon, or the world, the descendants of Israel from the ends of heaven: “If any of thine be driven out unto the outmost parts of heaven, from thence will the LORD thy God gather thee, and from thence will he fetch thee” (Deuteronomy 30:4). Naegelsbach continues with an eschatological view: “The end that the LORD will accomplish by means of the ‘weapons of His indignation’ is: to overturn the whole earth. ‘The whole *earth!*’ For this judgment on Babylon belongs to ‘the day of the Lord.’ It is thus an integral part of the world’s judgment.”

vv. 6-18. Spiritual Babylon will be destroyed and then a description of physical Babylon’s destruction, and the fierce barbarism of those who would take her, is mentioned. Kay says, “Some of the language employed carries our thoughts far beyond the judgment on any single nation (see vv. 10, 11, 14). It is a world-wide visitation ...”

6 ¶ Howl ye; for the day of the LORD [is] at hand; it shall come as a destruction from the Almighty.

The Targum reads, “Howl ye; for the day which is about to come from before the Lord is at hand; like destruction from before the Almighty shall it come.” ¶ *Howl ye; for the day of the LORD is at hand.* The day of the Lord, יְהוָה יוֹם, is an eschatological expression. It is a frequent expression in the scriptures. We read in Joel, “Alas for the day! for the day of the LORD is at hand, and as a destruction from the Almighty shall it come” (Joel 1:15); in Jeremiah, “For this is the day of the Lord GOD of hosts, a day of vengeance, that he may avenge him of his adversaries: and the sword shall devour, and it shall be satiate and made drunk with their blood: for the Lord GOD of hosts hath a sacrifice in the north country by the river Euphrates,” (Jeremiah 46:10); in Zephaniah, “The great day of the LORD is near, it is

near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the LORD: the mighty man shall cry there bitterly” (Zephaniah 1:14). The term is also used by Amos, Obadiah, and Malachi in the Old Testament in its eschatological character, as well as in the New Testament. But who can escape the day? We read, “Seek ye the LORD, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the LORD’s anger” (Zephaniah 2:3). The word קָרוֹב, which is translated as “at hand” in the KJV, means *near*. ¶ *It shall come as a destruction from the Almighty.* The destruction spoken off comes from the Almighty יְהוָה<sup>3</sup>, and thus it is an exquisite or perfect destruction (see also D&C 19:10-15).

7 Therefore shall all hands be faint, and every man’s heart shall melt;

✓ or, fall down

In the LXX we read, “Therefore every hand shall become powerless, and every soul of man shall be dismayed.” This verse is intended to reflect the absolute fear, panic and devastation in the faces and hearts of all those who are not prepared to meet the Lamb. Regarding former times, Rawlinson suggests that the Babylonians were so afraid that they did not even resist their enemies: “Recently discovered accounts of the capture of Babylon by Cyrus show a great want of activity and vigour on the part of the defenders.

8 And they shall be afraid; pangs and sorrows shall take hold of them; they shall be in pain as a woman that travaileth: they shall be amazed one at another; their faces [shall be as] flames.

✓ wonder                      ✓ every man at his neighbour

✓ faces of the flames

Note: Book of Mormon does not include, “they shall be in pain as a woman that travaileth” but JST does.

In the Targum we have, “And they shall be confounded; distress and pangs shall take hold of them...” In the LXX, “... and shall change their countenance as a flame.” The expression לְהִתְבַּיֵּשׁ פְּנֵיהֶם, *their faces flames*, may well mean the ashen white of consumed wood, or white with fear. The ellipsis suggests: “their faces shall be ashen white as coals consumed by

<sup>3</sup> Gesenius explains, “It is the plural excellentiae, from the singular יָדָה powerful.”

flames.” Great pain and distress is often compared to that of a woman giving birth. Young says, “Theirs is the deepest anguish, for the day of Yahweh is breaking. And this is the forerunner of the great last day of which the apostle writes, ‘For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape’ (1 Thessalonians 5:3).”

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**9 Behold, the day of the LORD cometh, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate; and he shall destroy the sinners thereof out of it.**

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Barnes, speaking about the *cruel* אַכְזָרִי day of the Lord, President Howard W. Hunter explained it this way, “When these experiences humble us and refine us and teach us and bless us, they can be powerful instruments in the hands of God to make us better people, to make us more grateful, more loving, and more considerate of other people in their own times of difficulty... \* \* \* Those problems and prophecies were never intended to do anything but bless the righteous and help those who are less righteous move toward repentance... Our task is to live fully and faithfully and not worry ourselves sick about the woes of the world or when it will end. Our task is to have the gospel in our lives and to be a bright light, a city set on the hill, which reflects the beauty of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the joy and happiness that will always come to every people in every age who keep the commandments.”<sup>4</sup> Delitzsch says regarding the land that would be affected by the desolations, “not only the land [אַרְצָאֵל] of Babylon ... but *the [whole] earth* [תְּהַבֵּל<sup>5</sup>].” Young adds, “Over Babylon the judgment pours out, for it will also pour out over all the earth.” The Celestial destiny of this earth requires harvest of the tares or unwise virgins.

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**10 For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light; the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine.**

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Nyman explains, “Oliver Cowdery apparently was quoting or paraphrasing this verse, along with Isaiah 13:13, when he reported what scriptures the angel Moroni quoted to Joseph Smith in September 1823 and

noted that they were soon to be fulfilled (see *MA*, April 1835, pp. 111-112).” Regarding verses 10 through 13, Elder Bruce R. McConkie said: “From the Inspired Version we learn that the signs promised in Matthew 24:29 are to occur after the abomination of desolation sweeps Jerusalem for the second time. They will thus come almost at the very hour of the Second Coming. From other scriptural accounts of these same signs we learn that ‘the earth shall tremble and reel to and fro as a drunken man’ (D&C 88:87), and ‘shall remove out of her place’ (Isaiah 13:10-13); that ‘the islands shall become one land’ (D&C 133:23); and that ‘the stars shall be hurled from their places.’ (D&C 133:49.) Thus it would seem, when the Lord makes his appearance and the earth is restored to its paradisiacal state, that there will be great physical changes. When the continents become one land and the earth reels to and fro, with all that then occurs, it will surely appear unto men as though the very stars of heaven were being hurled from their places, and so they will be as far as their relationship to the earth is concerned. That there may be other heavenly bodies, having the appearance of stars, that shall fall on the earth may also well be. Truly the scriptures testify of many signs and wonders in the heavens above. (D&C 29:14; Joel 2:31; Revelations 6:12-17.)”<sup>6</sup> But see also Isaiah 13:13.

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**11 And I will punish the world for [their] evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; and I will cause the arrogance of the proud to cease, and will lay low down the haughtiness of the terrible.**

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Those who have refused to turn and follow the Lord will not do so with impunity. The world תְּהַבֵּל refers both to the global nature of the punishment, and is also an allusion to the natural man. “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world” (1 John 2:15-16). At that time the pride of man will be brought low.

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**12 I will make a man more precious than fine gold; even a man than the golden wedge of Ophir.**

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Gold is a precious metal, especially considered so because of the limited quantities available in the earth.

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<sup>4</sup> Howard W. Hunter, *Ensign*, October 1993, An Anchor to the Souls of Men.

<sup>5</sup> See verse 11.

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<sup>6</sup> McConkie, Bruce R. *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*. Salt Lake City, Utah: Bookcraft, 1:678.

There will be so few humans left after the disasters marking the end-of-days, that man will be considered more precious than the finest gold. Also, so can the scriptures be applied to Babylon. Or, one can also think of the individuals who will inherit the earth and the exaltation of the Celestial Kingdom, and apply this verse to that circumstance. Indeed, “Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?” (Isaiah 33:14b). It is precisely this Celestial world view that the Targum seems to address: “I will hold them that fear me more precious than gold wherewith the sons of men adorn themselves, and them that observe the law more than the refined gold of Ophir.” Kay likewise contends, “Of far greater value than all the ‘gold of Ophir’ (1 Chronicles 29:4; 2 Chronicles 3:6), and ‘fine gold’ (2 Chronicles 3:5, 8) which Solomon overlaid the sanctuary, was a sanctified human soul (Psalms 49:8).”

The Lexicons give **זָהָב** as *refined* or *pure gold*, probably derived from **זָהָב** (*refined, or refined gold*, Gesenius,

BDB, NAS Hebrew-Aramaic Dictionary). **קָנָה**, means something *precious* (Gesenius), often *gold* (BDB, HALOT). So it is that ASV rather has, “I will make a man more rare than fine gold, even a man than the pure gold of Ophir.” Barnes explains, “‘Ophir’ was a country to which the vessels of Solomon traded, and which was particularly distinguished for producing gold; but respecting its particular situation, there has been much discussion. The ‘ships of Tarshish’ sailed from Ezion-geber on the Red Sea, and went to Ophir (1 Kings 9:26; 10:22; 22:48). Three years were required for the voyage; and they returned freighted with gold, peacocks, apes, spices, ivory, and ebony (1 Kings 9:28, 10:11, 12; cf. 2 Chronicles 8:18). The gold of that country was more celebrated than that of any other country for its purity.” The exact location of Ophir is disputed.<sup>7</sup>

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**13 Therefore, I will shake the heavens, and the earth shall remove out of her place, in the wrath of the LORD of hosts, and in the day of his fierce anger.**

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Rawlinson states, “In general, this sign is mentioned in connection with the end of the world, when a ‘new heaven and a new earth’ are to supersede the old (65:17; 66:22; Revelations 21:1).” Another way of explaining the falling stars, is that if the earth is moved from this orbit to another location, it would surely seem as if the stars were falling.

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<sup>7</sup> For instance, see ISBE, HBD, and Naegelsbach.

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**14 And it shall be as the chased roe, and as a sheep that no man taketh up; and they shall every man turn to his own people, and flee every one into his own land.**

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The Targum has it, “And it shall come to pass that as the chased roe, and as a sheep that hath no one to gather it, they shall turn every man to his own people, and shall flee every man to his own land.” The LXX, “And they that are left shall be as a fleeing fawn, and as a stray sheep, and there shall be none to gather *them*: so that a man shall turn back to his people, and a man shall flee to his own land.” The DSSB has it, “Like a hunted gazelle and like unherded sheep, all *will* seek their own people and flee to their own land. The Syriac, “And they shall be like gazelles when they flee, and like sheep that have no one to gather them.” While these animals run in herds, when frightened, each turns and runs where they can to escape the perceived danger. Naegelsbach suggests that beginning with verse 14, “The Prophet turns from the universal judgment that comprehends all the several acts of judgment against the world-power from first to last, to portray the special judgment to be accomplished on Babylon as the climax of the world power in its first stage, or as the head of the first world-monarchy.” And more specifically regarding verse 14 and those who would depart from Babylon and flee to their own lands, “When ruin impends over a community, whoever is not bound to it by ties of piety or of possession flees out of it. Thus first of all the foreigners flee. The crowd of such in Babylon will scatter like scared gazelles, like a herd panic-stricken. Babylon was the world’s capital, and consequently a resort for people of all nations. All these, therefore, will seek safety in flight.” Elder Parley P. Pratt suggests an eschatological angle: that the land masses shall move back to their former state, before they were divided, in a quick fashion, with the speed of a chased roe. And then Elder Pratt gives us the following poem: “Behold! the Mount of Olives rent in twain; / While on its top he sets his feet again. / The islands, at his word, obedient, flee; / While to the north he rolls the mighty sea; / Restores the earth in one, as at the first, / With all its blessings, and removes the curse.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Pratt, Parley P. *A Voice of Warning and Instruction to All People Or, an Introduction to the Faith and Doctrine of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* By Elder Parley P. Pratt. New Edition. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1957. Included is the preface to the First American Edition (1837) and the Second European Edition (December 4, 1846), pp. 119-120.

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15 Every one that is found proud shall be thrust through; yea, and every one that is joined [~~unto them~~] to the wicked shall fall by the sword.

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In the Targum we read, “Everyone that is found therein shall be slain, and everyone that entereth into the besieged cities shall be slain by the sword.” Delitzsch has, “By ‘every one that is found,’ we understand those that are taken in the city by the invading conquerors; and by ‘every one that is caught,’ those that are overtaken in their flight.” The corrected expressions, *proud* (well associated with Babylon, as we see in v. 19) and *joined to the wicked*, seem to indicate that the *proud* represent Babylon while the *joined to the wicked* are those who have adopted Babylon, or joined themselves to her. Kay explains that “Foreigners, who had attached themselves to the city and were resolved to abide in her. They must share in her ruin.” Alexander adds, that most “seem agreed that to be thrust through, and to fall by the sword, are one and the same thing.”

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16 Their children also shall be dashed to pieces before their eyes; their houses shall be spoiled and their wives ravished.

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The expression here for *their children* וְעַלְלֵיהֶם is based on the root עַלַּל, and has been variously translated—depending on the context—from a pre-pubescent child to an infant to a stillborn (BDB, DBLH). We read, “O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed; happy shall he be, that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us. Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones” (Psalms 137:8-9). Barnes says, “This is a description of the horrors of the capture of Babylon; and there can be none more frightful and appalling than that which is here presented. That this is done in barbarous nations in the times of war, there can be no doubt. Nothing was more common among American savages, than to dash out the brains of infants against a rock or a tree, and it was often done before the eyes of the afflicted and heart-broken parents.”

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17 Behold, I will stir up the Medes against them, which shall not regard silver and [as for] gold, nor they shall they not delight in it.

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In the Targum we read, “Behold, I will bring against them the Medes, that cannot be bribed with silver, and as for gold, they have not pleasure therein.” Speaking of the end of days punishment that shall come upon the enemies of Israel, Zephaniah writes, “Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the LORD’s wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of his jealousy: for he shall make even a speedy riddance of all them that dwell in the land” (Zephaniah 1:18). Regarding the Medes we read: “The ‘cities of the Medes’ are first mentioned in connection with the deportation of the Israelites on the destruction of Samaria (2 Kings 17:6; 18:11). Soon afterwards Isaiah (13:17; 21:2) speaks of the part taken by the Medes in the destruction of Babylon (comp. Jeremiah 51:11, 28). Daniel gives an account of the reign of Darius the Mede, who was made viceroy by Cyrus (Daniel 6:1-28). The decree of Cyrus, Ezra informs us (6:2-5), was found in ‘the palace that is in the province of the Medes,’ Achmetha or Ecbatana of the Greeks, which is the only Median city mentioned in Scripture.”<sup>9</sup> According to Lowth, the conquerors “shall not be induced, by large offers of gold and silver, for ransom, to spare the lives of those whom they have subdued in battle: their rage and cruelty will get the better of all such motives.” Lowth quotes Xenophon speaking to the Medes as follows, “Ye Medes and others who now hear me, I well know that you have not accompanied me in this expedition with a view of acquiring wealth” (Cyrop. Lib. v.). Rawlinson writes, “The Medes were not a particularly disinterested people: but in the attack on Babylon, made by Cyrus, the object was not plunder, but conquest and the extension of dominion. The main treasures of Babylon—those in the great temple of Belus—were not carried off by Cyrus, as appears both from his own inscriptions, and from Herodotus (i. 181-183).”

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18 [Their] bows also shall also dash the young men to pieces; and they shall have no pity on the fruit of the womb; their eyes shall not spare children.

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The expression *the fruit of the womb*<sup>10</sup> could either mean the unborn child or children in general. Violence against the unborn child was not unheard of (e.g., see 2 Kings 8:12; 15:16; Amos 1:13; Hosea 13:16). Calvin explains that some feel the language is exaggerated in

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<sup>9</sup> Easton’s Bible Dictionary, Media

<sup>10</sup> Regarding *on the fruit of the womb*, וּפְרִי-בֶטֶן, Lowth has found a manuscript that makes the “upon the fruit” more explicit: וְעַל פְּרִי.

this verse, but he rather feels represents the thought “that the cruelty of the Medes will be so great, that they will not spare even infant children, on whom men do not commonly lay hands unless where there is the utmost barbarity; and, in short, that no allowance will be made for age .... But we do not read that the Medes exercised so great cruelty, and Babylon stood and flourished for a very long period after that calamity.... Besides, after the dawn of the following day, no cruelty was exercised but against those who bore arms. Though it was the Prophet’s design to include other judgments of God which awaited the Babylonians, and by which the first calamity was followed long afterwards,<sup>11</sup> yet it is not improperly or unseasonably that he describes the barbarous manners of the nation, that the Jews may be more fully aware that a just reward is prepared for the tyranny of Babylon.” Rawlinson tells it that “both the Medes and the Persians were skilled archers. Herodotus tells us that every Persian youth was taught three things—‘to ride, to draw the bow, and to speak the truth’ (i. 136).” Some exegetes stumble on the bow being mentioned as piercing the youth, rather than the arrow. Just as we might say today that “someone was killed by a gun,” when more properly it may be said that the same was “killed by the bullet,” so it is with the bow, for the mention of the one or the other corresponds to the same meaning.

vv. 19-22. Babylon, the physical nation, despite her grandeur, would become a desert land.

19 ¶ And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees’ excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah.

✓ as the overthrowing

Regarding verses 19 ff., Elder George Albert Smith had this to say: “The Holy Bible is a most wonderful record and if there ever was a time when we should know what it contains it is now. Many would be surprised if they would read it, to discover that some of the predictions that were made by the servants of the Lord thousands of years ago are now in course of fulfilment. It would astonish some people to know that the Prophet Isaiah, seven hundred years before the birth of Christ, predicted His coming. Two hundred years before the fall of Babylon he predicted its destruction, and told in remarkable detail what would follow even down to this

<sup>11</sup> Some historians call this *telescoping*. When a subject is looked upon with telescoping lenses (such as powerful binoculars, or telephoto lenses in a camera), it sometimes appears that two objects are close to each other when in reality vast distances may separate them.

day. He said (Isaiah 13:19-22 is then quoted) ...”<sup>12</sup> The Targum reads, “And Babylon, which was formerly the joy of the kingdoms, the glory of the Chaldeans’ pride, shall be as the overthrow wherewith the Lord overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah.” Alexander would translate as, “And Babylon, the beauty of kingdoms, the ornament, the pride of the Chaldees, shall be like God’s overthrowing Sodom and Gomorrah.” Both of these reference *pride*, and match the LDS scriptural correction to verse 15. Lowth states that “Cyrus took the city by diverting the waters of the Euphrates, which ran through the midst of it, and entering the place at night by the dry channel. The river, being never restored afterwards to its proper course, overflowed the whole country, and made it little better than a great morass: this, and the great slaughter of the inhabitants, with other bad consequences of the taking of the city, was the first step to the ruin of the place.” At the time Lowth wrote these things they had not even found the location of Babylon! Much is known<sup>13</sup> about ancient Babel

בָּבֶל, or Babylon, today.

<sup>12</sup> General Conference, 1940, Elder George Albert Smith.

<sup>13</sup> There are extensive writings on Babylon. I include a minute portion of some of what is found in the ISBE, “**Babel; Babylon** (the city). The mounds covering the ancient city have frequently been explored, but systematic excavations of the city were not undertaken until 1899, when Koldewey, the German excavator, began to uncover its ancient ruins in a methodical manner. In spite of what ancient writers say, certain scholars maintain that they grossly exaggerated the size of the city, which was comparatively small, especially when considered in connection with large cities of the present era. \*\*\* The two sieges by Darius Hystaspes and the one by Xerxes destroyed much of the beauty of the city. Alexander desired to make it again a great center and to build an immense fortress in the city; but in the midst of this undertaking he was murdered, while living in the palace of Nebuchadrezzar. The temple, though frequently destroyed, was in existence in the time of the Seleucids, but the city had long since ceased to be of any importance. **Babylonia** (the region). Babylonia is a plain which is made up of the alluvial deposits of the mountainous regions in the North, where the Tigris and Euphrates have their source. The land is bounded on the North by Assyria and Mesopotamia; on the East by Elam, separated by the mountains of Elam; on the South by the sea marshes, and the country Kaidu (Chaldaeae); and on the West by the Syrian desert. Some of the cities of the lower country were seaport towns in the early period, but now are far inland. This land-making process continues even at the present time at the rate of about 70 ft. a year. This plain, in the days when Babylonia flourished, sustained a dense population. It was covered with a network of canals, skillfully planned and regulated, which brought prosperity to the land, because of the wonderful fertility of the soil. The neglect of these canals and doubtless, also, the change of climate, have resulted in altered conditions in the country. It has become a cheerless waste. During some months of the year, when the inundations take place, large portions of the land are partially covered with swamps and marshes. At other times it looks like a desolate plain. Throughout the land there are seen, at the present time, ruin-hills or mounds of accumulation of debris, which mark the site of ancient cities. Some of these cities were destroyed in a very early era, and were never rebuilt. Others were occupied for millenniums, and their history extends far into the Christian era. The antiquities generally found in the upper stratum of the mounds which were occupied up to so late a period, show that they were generally



*But wild beasts of the desert shall lie there; and their houses shall be full of doleful creatures.* Calvin explains that little is known of the possible origin of the word צִיִּים (see margin), but that “the Prophet means either wild beasts which cannot be tamed, or birds which build their nests in distant forests \* \* \* and that צִיִּים is often used in Scripture for devils; and it is derived from צִיָּה which means *dryness*, or, a desert, as אֵיִם is derived from אִים, which means to *terrify* [and thus are names given to the Devil].” Naegelsbach writes, “צִיִּים (from צִיָּה unused, from which צִיָּה *terra arida*<sup>14</sup>) are dwellers in the desert; whether men or beasts is undetermined. Yet analogy favors the latter; for in what follows only beasts are mentioned.” Alexander states that צִיִּים means “those belonging to or dwelling in the desert. \* \* \* But if צִיִּים has the generic sense which all now give it, the very parallelism of the clauses favors the explanation of אִוִּים [howls and cries of animals] in its original and proper sense of *howls* or *yells*, viz. those uttered by the צִיִּים.” Naegelsbach (as does Alexander) includes quite a complete section on the subject at hand, but concludes that there have been two schools of thought, those who have taken the term in a more literal manner to mean “wild goats, or more generically *hairy*, shaggy animals” or else have taken it to mean demons. Alexander, however, complains that some commentators are too quick to try and expose “mythology in scripture” were none exists. If devils are intended, Alexander contends, this should be taken at face value.<sup>15</sup> ¶ *And owls shall dwell there, and satyrs shall dance there.* The HEB has *daughters of ostriches* instead of owls: בָּנוֹת יַעֲנָה, or as Henderson explains, “*daughters of greediness*, a name given to *ostriches*, on account of their voracious appetite; and frequently used both of the males and the females \* \* \* they are also notorious for the doleful and hideous noise which they make, particularly at night.” Regarding the second term, translated as satyrs in our KJV, Henderson suggests that “It is most natural to suppose that real animals are intended; and as שְׂעִירִים elsewhere signify *goats*,

<sup>14</sup> Latin for *arid land*.

<sup>15</sup> Two interesting scriptures mentioned by Alexander are 1) in Matthew 12:43, regarding evil spirits and desert lands, “When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none,” and 2) Revelations 18:2, with clear allusions to Isaiah, “And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.”

there seems no reason why this sense should be departed from in the present instance \* \* \* by which they obviously meant hairy, shaggy animals, such as *goats*.” Delitzsch describes the animals similarly, as “the full-grown shaggy buck-goat.” Some expositors feel the term is literal and other feel it refers to demons or unclean spirits. Delitzsch shares some descriptions from a missionary traveler, a Joseph Wolf, who saw devil worshippers dancing and carrying on in that vicinity, and was reminded of this scripture.

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22 And the wild beasts ✓ of the islands shall cry in their desolate houses, ✓ and dragons in [their] pleasant palaces; and her time [is] near to come, and her days shall not be prolonged. For I will destroy her speedily; yea, for I will be merciful unto my people, but the wicked shall perish.

✓ leaders, or, great goats ✓ ✓ or, palaces

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*And the wild beasts of the islands shall cry in their desolate houses, and dragons in their pleasant palaces.* At this place Barnes speaks about islands in the same connotation as the word is used in the Book of Mormon to denote the American continent: “The word [rendered ‘islands,’ אִיִּם] denotes islands, or coasts, and as those coasts and islands were unknown and unexplored, the words seems to have denoted unknown and uninhabited regions in general.” And when it comes to the creatures involved, Alexander wisely adds, “But whatever be the species 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.” One may here draw his mind to the wilderness mentioned back in Isaiah 12, with the spiritual and physical wilderness co-existing. ¶ And her time is near to come, and her days shall not be prolonged. For I will destroy her speedily; yea, for I will be merciful unto my people, but the wicked shall perish. The LXX has “It will come soon and will not tarry.” The Syriac, “Its time is soon to come, and its days shall not be prolonged.” The DSSB has, “Its time is drawing near, and its days will not be drawn out any further,” with a note that *any further* appears in 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> but not in the Massoretic Text. Regarding the desolation of Babylon, it would be complete. Kay quotes Mr. Layard, “The site of Babylon [is] a naked and hideous waste.” It did not happen right away, but with time the scripture was completely fulfilled. Kay adds this quotation regarding the fulfillment of scripture: “For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie:

though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry” (Habakkuk 2:3). It is similar to the verse in D&C which says, “What I the Lord have spoken, I have spoken, and I excuse not myself; and though the heavens and the earth pass away, my word shall not pass away, but shall all be fulfilled, whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same” (D&C 1:38). Nyman points us to an interesting verse (2 Nephi 25:15), that states that because physical Babylon would be destroyed, the scattering of Judah would be left to other nations: “Wherefore, the Jews shall be scattered among all nations; yea, and also Babylon shall be destroyed; wherefore, the Jews shall be scattered by other nations.” Nevertheless, as in so many scriptures, the Lord offers the good news next verses, though I only include the next two verses: “And after they have been scattered, and the Lord God hath scourged them by other nations for the space of many

generations, yea, even down from generation to generation until they shall be persuaded to believe in Christ, the Son of God, and the atonement, which is infinite for all mankind—and when that day shall come that they shall believe in Christ, and worship the Father in his name, with pure hearts and clean hands, and look not forward any more for another Messiah, then, at that time, the day will come that it must needs be expedient that they should believe these things. And the Lord will set his hand again the second time to restore his people from their lost and fallen state. Wherefore, he will proceed to do a marvelous work and a wonder among the children of men.” While in the historical context of Babylon she was not subdued quickly, in the latter-day, when the Lord lengthens out his arm once again to punish Babylon, surely her destruction shall be quick.

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