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A taunt over the king of Babylon. The marriage supper of the Lamb.

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Transcript

Isaiah chapter 14. hard service with which you were made to serve, you will take up this taunt against the king of Babylon. How the oppressor has ceased! The insolent fury ceased! The Lord has broken the staff of the wicked, the sceptre of rulers that struck the peoples in wrath with unceasing blows, that ruled the nations in anger with unrelenting persecution.

The whole earth is at rest and quiet. They break forth into singing. The Cypresses rejoice at you, the cedars of Lebanon, saying, Since you were laid low, no woodcutter comes up against us.

Sheol beneath is stirred up to meet you when you come. It rouses the shades to greet you, all who were leaders of the earth. It raises from their thrones all who were kings of the nations.

All of them will answer and say to you, You too have become as weak as we. You have become like us. Your pomp is brought down to Sheol, the sound of your harps.

Maggots are laid as a bed beneath you, and worms are your covers. How you are fallen from heaven, O Daystar, sun of dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low! You said in your heart, I will ascend to heaven. Above the stars of God I will set my throne on high.

I will sit in the mount of the assembly, in the far reaches of the north. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds. I will make myself like the Most High.

But you are brought down to Sheol, to the far reaches of the pit. Those who see you will stare at you and ponder over you. Is this the man who made the earth tremble, who shook kingdoms, who made the world like a desert and overthrew its cities, who did not let his prisoners go home? All the kings of the nations lie in glory, each in his own tomb.

But you are cast out, away from your grave, like a loathed branch, clothed with the slain, those pierced by the sword, who go down to the stones of the pit, like a dead body trampled underfoot. You will not be joined with them in burial, because you have destroyed your land, you have slain your people. May the offspring of evildoers never more be named.

Prepare slaughter for his sons because of the guilt of their fathers, lest they rise and possess the earth and fill the face of the world with cities. I will rise up against them, declares the Lord of hosts, and will cut off from Babylon name and remnant, descendants and posterity, declares the Lord. And I will make it a possession of the hedgehog and pools of water, and I will sweep it with the broom of destruction, declares the Lord of hosts.

The Lord of hosts has sworn, as I have planned, so shall it be, and as I have purposed, so shall it stand, that I will break the Assyrian in my land, and on my mountains trample him underfoot, and his yoke shall depart from them, and his burden from their shoulder. This is the purpose that is purposed concerning the whole earth, and this is the hand that is stretched out over all the nations. For the Lord of hosts has purposed, and who will annul it? His hand is stretched out, and who will turn it back? In the year that King Ahaz died came this oracle.

Rejoice not, O Philistia, all of you, that the rod that struck you is broken, for from the serpent's root will come forth an adder, and its fruit will be a flying fiery serpent, and the firstborn of the poor will graze, and the needy lie down in safety. But I will kill your root with famine, and your remnant it will slay. Wail, O gate! cry out, O city! melt in fear, O Philistia, all of you! For smoke comes out of the north, and there is no straggler in his ranks.

What will one answer the messengers of the nation? The Lord has founded Zion, and in her the afflicted of his people find refuge. Isaiah chapter 14 continues the prophet's burden against Babylon. As in the case of the preceding chapter, we need to consider

whether this relates to Babylon at some period during Isaiah's own day, or to the Babylon of the 6th century.

In Isaiah's day Babylon was defeated around 729 BC by Tiglath-Pileser III, who assumed the title of King of Babylon, although he did not annex Babylonia under Assyria. When Sargon II revolted against Shalmaneser V, his brother and Tiglath-Pileser's successor, Babylon rebelled against Assyrian rule. Under Meredack-Baladan, Babylon gained independence of Assyria and Sargon II.

In 710 BC, Sargon successfully overcame Babylon's rebellion and ruled from Babylon for five years, placing Babylonia under more direct Assyrian rule. There was a further rebellion by Meredack-Baladan in 703 BC, around the time that he fomented Judah's rebellion against Assyria too, King Hezekiah looking to Babylon for help against the Assyrians. Assyria regained control of Babylon shortly after, but lost it to another Chaldean ruler around 691 BC.

After a nine month siege, Zennekerib overthrew and sacked Babylon in 689 BC, levelling and then flooding the city, a significant step marking the failure of earlier Assyrian attempts at conciliation. Babylon was a proud centre of Mesopotamian culture and trade, but it would soon be brought down. It could serve both as a symbol of the pride of Assyria and its kings, who governed it at various times and in various manners, and a symbol of its own pride as a rebellious part of the Assyrian Empire and the most serious threat to the empire itself.

Judah was tempted to ally itself with Babylon in this way, and the humbling of Babylon would represent a caution to Judah and its kings. They should not look to Babylon for salvation, but only to the Lord. This would of course be a very important message to the Judah of Isaiah's own day.

Readings that treat Babylon in Isaiah chapters 13 and 14 as the Babylon of Isaiah's day have the strong advantage of relieving the problems associated with the prophet Isaiah addressing a political situation quite distant and different from that of his immediate context, problems that will be felt much more keenly in the latter parts of the book. It also would allow us to situate the prophecy before 710 BC and the death of King Ahaz, mentioned in verse 28 of this chapter. However, we might be left wondering why the Babylon of Meredack Baladan would merit such prominent treatment in the prophecies concerning the nations, especially in contrast to Assyria which was the more dominant power.

Others are unconvinced of attempts to account for the prominent role supposedly played by the Medes in the prophesied downfall of Babylon. Sethur Lansen emphasises the fact that after Tigilath-Pileser III, Assyrian kings claimed the throne and the title of the king of Babylon. He makes the case that despite the address to Babylon and its king, it is principally Assyria that is in view in these verses.

This, he argues, explains why Assyria suddenly comes to the foreground in verses 24-27. It has been central throughout, but it has been treated in terms of Babylon and its king, given the immense cultural, economic and political significance of Babylon in the Assyrian Empire, the Assyrian kings' claiming of the proud title of the king of Babylon and the symbolic and theological importance of the memory of Babel that Babylon represented. Lansen and others see it as appropriate to represent Assyria and its rulers in such a manner.

Such a prophecy would naturally assume a new significance with the rise of the Neo-Babylonian Empire under Nebuchadnezzar at the end of the 7th century, about 100 years later. Gary Smith raises the possibility that there is a telescopic presentation of the downfall of Babylon that could include both its destruction in 689 BC and the final cutting off of its power in 539 BC. At various points we get glimpses of a much further eschatological horizon in such prophecies.

The import of such a message, delivered toward the end of the 8th century, would be a warning against dependence upon the power of Babylon. Only trust in the Lord would provide a reliable basis for Judah's survival. The theories of Lansen and others are not without their problems however, and many commentators believe that these prophecies only make sense referred to the later Babylon of the end of the 7th and throughout most of the 6th century.

The chapter begins with a statement of the reversal of Israel's fortunes and the return of its captives. The Assyrian king Sennacherib claimed to take 200,150 people captive in his campaign against Judah, in which he also overthrew 46 cities. We might also see an anticipation of the later return of captives under Cyrus' decree here.

Israel, according to this prophecy, would again be marked out as the chosen people of the Lord. Israel's captives would be returned to their place by the peoples, former captives would be placed under their rule and foreigners would join Israel, something already foretold in places like chapter 2 verses 1 to 4. These prophecies seem to await a greater salvation than any of the partial realisations of their promises in Isaiah's nearer future would offer. We might also hear some recollections of Exodus here, with deliverance from slavery, the joining of foreigners to Israel, the downfall of a great adversary and the Lord's granting of rest to his people from their labours.

In verses 4 to 21 we have a poetic taunt over Babylon's king. The king here may not be a particular king but a more general symbol of Babylon's power and sovereignty. The king is described as a fierce and cruel oppressor, a description that has strengthened the case of those who identify him with the Assyrian king and what John Oswald describes as their reign through terror.

The humbling of the power of the oppressor gives rest to those who have suffered under his mighty blows. The earlier chapters of Isaiah offer us several instances of the imagery

of the felling of trees as a picture of judgement falling upon land. In chapter 2 verses 12 to 13 for instance, For the Lord of hosts has a day against all that is proud and lofty, against all that is lifted up, and it shall be brought low, against all the cedars of Lebanon, lofty and lifted up, and against all the oaks of Bashan.

Trees were symbols of powerful people and rulers. Tyrannical powers also felled great forests for their military and other projects and as manifestations of their dominance, devastating lands that they conquered. The earth is released from the power of the oppressor, but the underworld rises up to meet him.

Former kings and powerful men welcome him to their now impotent company, all of his pride and might now brought to naught, laid to rest in the earth, with the maggots and worms as his living covering. The descent of the king was from the very heights of the heavens. He was a man who fancied himself as one of the gods, a great luminary and power over the world of his day.

He is compared to the morning star, possibly to be understood as the planet Venus. Many commentators seek to identify the description here with a particular myth, typically of a lesser deity trying to usurp the throne of a higher god. There are important differences between these myths and the account of the proud man here, although it is possible that Isaiah was playing with some of their motifs.

Perhaps the Mount of Assembly in the far reaches of the north for instance is a mythological reference to Mount Zaphon, the mountain of the gods equivalent to Mount Olympus in some Canaanite mythology. This arrogant ruler believed that he could make himself like God, raising his throne above that of God. We might see a parallel here with the story of Babel.

This is a man who as it were wants to be a human tower to heaven. The figure here has often been popularly associated with Satan, who is called Lucifer on the basis of it. But there is no reason to believe that Satan is being referred to here, even though such tyrants might appropriately be viewed as reflecting his character as the great dragon behind all tyrants.

We have a similar lament over the king of Tyre in chapter 28 of the book of Ezekiel. There could be no more pronounced contrast between the ruler's hubristic ambition to rise to the heights of heaven and the depths of his fall to the lowest parts of the abyss of the grave. Down in Sheol, the magnitude of the dread and destruction that he once exerted upon the earth is barely conceivable in the light of his humiliation and the utter stripping of his once terrible powers.

He is described as one who has fallen ignominiously in a losing battle, not being given the honours of a royal burial, like others in the company of the fallen kings. This dishonour corresponds to the wickedness of his behaviour during his life. Even his own

people would not rally to recover him and honour him in his death.

The name of his house would be extinguished to ensure that none of his descendants came to exercise power in the likeness of their evil father. The Lord seals the fate of Babylon in language that recalls that of the end of the preceding chapter in verses 19-22. Both the king of Babylon and his city would be brought to nothing.

The place of the oracle against Assyria in verses 24-27 raises questions about the relationship between it and the preceding material that focuses upon Babylon. Given the temptation of looking to Babylon for assistance against Assyria, perhaps the point of the prophecy here is to show that the Lord will bring down Assyria by his own means and that Judah ought not to try to achieve this by an imprudent alliance with Babylon. The prophecy of the Lord's breaking of the Assyrian in his land might refer to Sennacherib's failure to take Jerusalem in 701 BC.

We read in chapter 37 verses 36-37 The Lord's declaration of the downfall of Assyria repeats prophecies from earlier in the book, for instance in chapter 10 verse 27. At the end of chapter 14 we move into material concerning neighbouring nations to Judah. If Babylon wasn't able to help, Philistia, Moab, Syria and others might be looked to for aid against the Assyrian threat.

The prophecy was delivered in the year of the death of Historically this has led many to believe that the rod that struck Philistia that was broken in verse 29 is a reference to the rod of Judah and its Davidic kings, perhaps especially Ahaz. However during his reign the Philistines were more of a threat to Ahaz than he was to them. Considering this many have seen this as a reference to the perceived removal or withdrawal of the Assyrian threat following the death of Shalmaneser and the rise of Sargon However that seeming reprieve would be short lived.

Under later kings such as Sennacherib and Esauhaddon, far from being broken, Assyrian power would rise to new heights. This account would help to make sense of the threat coming from the north in verse 31. These verses contrast the security of Judah as the flock of the Lord in Zion and the insecurity that Philistia will experience.

Perhaps we should see this as a promise that if Philistia would join themselves to Judah, they too could know the Lord's gift of aid and security in their distress. A question to consider. David Dorsey has argued that there are contrasts between the king of Babylon described in this chapter and the suffering servant in the later part of Isaiah.

What possible contrasts can you see between these figures? Revelation chapter 19 verses 1 to 16 After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying out, Hallelujah, salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for his judgments are true and just, for he has judged the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality and has avenged on her the blood of his servants. Once more

they cried out, Hallelujah, the smoke from her goes up forever and ever. And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshipped God who was seated on the throne, saying, Amen, Hallelujah.

And from the throne came a voice saying, Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, small and great. Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, Hallelujah, for the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and his bride has made herself ready.

It was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure, for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. And the angel said to me, Write this, Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he said to me, These are the true words of God.

Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, You must not do that. I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God, for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, the one sitting on it, is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is the Word of God.

And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty.

On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Babylon the Great fell in chapter 17, and the kings of the earth, the merchants and the sailors, shipmasters and seafarers lamented over it in chapter 18. Chapter 18 contains lamentations over the great fallen city.

Chapter 19 opens with rejoicing over it. If alas, alas was the dominating expression of chapter 18, hallelujah is that of chapter 19. Chapter 19 opens with a rejoicing multitude in heaven, contrasting with the silenced multitude of the devastated city of Babylon the Great.

The rejoicing is taken up by a number of heavenly voices. It starts out with the loud voice of the multitude in verses 1 and 2, followed by them crying out for a second time in verse 3. The 24 elders and the four living creatures add their voices in verse 4. In verse 5

there is a voice from the throne. Then in verse 6 the voice of the multitude returns for a third time.

The multitude are presumably those mentioned in chapter 15 verse 2. They now seem to be taking a lead in the worship of heaven. They praise the Lord for the truth and justice of his judgments and his faithful vindication of his servants by judging their adversaries. Behind the worship here we might hear the words of the song of Moses prior to his death in Deuteronomy chapter 32 verse 43.

Rejoice with him O heavens, bow down to him all gods, for he avenges the blood of his children and takes vengeance on his adversaries. He repays those who hate him and cleanses his people's land. Also of Psalm 79 verse 10.

Why should the nations say where is their God? Let the avenging of the outpoured blood of your servants be known among the nations before our eyes. At a number of points in the book of Revelation we have seen the importance of the Lord's avenging of his people. The saints cry out for their blood to be avenged upon those who took their lives and here God is praised for his avenging of his servants.

The judgment of Babylon has a finality to it. Using language taken from Isaiah chapter 34 and the destruction of Edom, the worshipping multitudes speak of the smoke of the overthrown city going up forever, like a permanent testimony to its destruction. Isaiah chapter 34 verses 9-10 read And the streams of Edom shall be turned into pitch, and her soil into sulfur.

Her land shall become burning pitch. Night and day it shall not be quenched, its smoke shall go up forever. From generation to generation it shall lie waste.

None shall pass through it forever and ever. The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures respond to the multitude, ratifying their praise with an Amen, Hallelujah. The voice from the throne that comes in verse 5 summons the entire company to join together in praise.

In verses 1 and 2 the reason for the praise was the overthrow of the harlot. In verses 6 and following the reason given is that the Lord has begun to rain, and that the wedding of the Lamb has come. The claim that the Lord has begun to rain takes up language that we earlier heard at the blowing of the seventh trumpet in chapter 11 verses 15-18.

Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall rain forever and ever. And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshipped God, saying, We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was. For you have taken your great power and begun to rain.

The nations raged, but your wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, and for

rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear your name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth. With the wedding coming, all must get ready. The motif of the eschatological wedding is a prominent one in the Johannine literature especially.

Revelation has used imagery from the Song of Songs at several points. Jesus, in chapter 1, was presented as the heavenly bridegroom. In the Gospel of John, themes of the eschatological wedding abound.

Christ is depicted as the bridegroom, and John the Baptist is the friend of the bridegroom. Jesus begins his ministry at a wedding feast. Like the patriarchs' first encounters with their wives, he meets a woman at a well.

Allusions to the Song of Songs are found in the washing of his feet at Bethany, and in his burial, and his meeting with Mary Magdalene in the garden. To get herself ready, the bride, of whom we are first hearing, is given fine linen garments with which to clothe herself. There have been several instances of garment-related themes in the book to this point.

Garments have been washed in the blood of the Lamb, in chapter 7 verse 14 for instance. Here the garments are described as the righteous deeds of the saints, but also described as clothes that have been given. As Peter Lighthouse notes, in considering the way that the garments can be the saints' own righteous deeds, while also being given to them and washed in the blood of the Lamb, we might begin to develop a richer understanding of the way that our good works can be integral to an account of salvation, without undermining either the priority or the sufficiency of grace.

The angel speaking to John expresses the blessedness of those invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb, to which John surprisingly responds by falling down at his feet to worship him, at which he is rebuked and charged to worship God alone. Angels, although they can be powerful and dazzling in their splendour, are not worthy of worship, they are not divine, rather they are fellow servants, and in the book of Revelation, servants that will increasingly take a lower status as the bride is elevated to reign with Christ. Angels have in common with faithful saints, their holding to the testimony of Jesus, the witness that Jesus bore through his life and death.

By holding to this testimony, their lives are governed by the same principles and lived in continuity with his. This testimony is established by the spirit of prophecy, who establishes the continuing witness of Christ within his servants. Heaven is opened and a rider on a white horse comes.

The rider on the white horse picks up a number of the descriptors of Jesus from earlier in the book. For instance, he is the faithful and true, as Jesus was described as the faithful and true witness in chapter 3 verse 14. His flaming eyes recall chapter 1 verse 14, and

the sword coming from his mouth recalls that of chapter 1 verse 16.

Many diadems are on his head. To this point, the diadems that we saw belong to the dragon and to the beast. The diadems are crowns of authority which he has won from his foes.

He is now the mighty and victorious emperor of the world, as it were, the king of kings and lord of lords. This, we should bear in mind, is the child who was destined to rule in chapter 12, and now he will with his rod of iron. He is followed by the armies of heaven, arrayed in the fine linen garments described earlier in this chapter.

They are, as Peter Lighthouse notes, a bridal army, much as we saw with the 144 virgins earlier in the book. While the garments of the saints have been washed clean with the blood of Jesus, Jesus' garments are stained with blood. G.B. Caird argues that blood on Jesus' robes is not the blood of his enemies, nor even his own blood, but the blood of the faithful saints and martyrs.

The victory of Jesus and his bride occur through the shedding of their blood in martyrdom. What seems like their complete destruction, as they are trodden like grapes outside of the city, is actually their preparation through harvest. The rider on the white horse has a name written that no one knows but himself.

This might remind us of chapter 2 verse 17, where the one who overcame in Pergamum was promised a white stone with a new name written on it that no one would know save the one receiving it. The name received by Jesus is the name above every other name, as Philippians 2 declares, a name expressive of his proven divinity. He is also here referred to as the Word of God, the name by which he is spoken of in the first chapter of John's Gospel.

The Word of God fights and strikes down the nations with the sharp sword of his mouth. The rider on the white horse also takes up the prophecy of Isaiah chapter 11 verses 1 to 4. There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his root shall bear fruit. And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.

And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth. And he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.

The rod then by which Jesus rules is probably like the sword to be considered as a rod of his mouth. The Word rules through his word. The description here might be drawn in part from Isaiah chapter 63 verse 1 to 6 where we see the imagery of treading down the

winepress again.

Who is this who comes from Edom, in crimson garments from Basra, he who is splendid in his apparel, marching in the greatness of his strength? It is I, speaking in righteousness, mighty to save. Why is your apparel red, and your garments like his who treads in the winepress? I have trodden the winepress alone, and from the peoples no one was with me. I trod them in my anger, and trampled them in my wrath.

Their lifeblood spattered on my garments, and stained all my apparel. For the day of vengeance was in my heart, and my year of redemption had come. I looked, but there was no one to help.

I was appalled, but there was no one to uphold. So my own arm brought me salvation, and my wrath upheld me. I trampled down the peoples in my anger, I made them drunk in my wrath, and I poured out their lifeblood on the earth.

The rider on the white horse here treads down, most likely the martyrs, preparing the wine of God's furious wrath, with which he will make the nations drunk. A question to consider. Looking at the New Testament in contrast to the Old, what are some of the most striking changes that we can see in the way that the reign of God is expressed on the earth? How can this chapter help us to understand these?