

Lesson 10 Isaiah 13-20 The First Cycle of Oracles

Introduction

Isaiah 7-12 showed us the triumph of God’s grace despite the sinful rebellion of His own people. God’s faithfulness to Israel focused in on a new kind of city ruled over by a new kind of king. We caught a glimpse in these chapters of Gentile inclusion into Zion. That’s a picture that needs developing.

How do the nations of the earth fit into the Jewish vision of redemption? What is the right relationship between God’s people and all people?

The question for us has relevance as we think about our relationship with the world in terms of power, economy, organization, strategy, security. When is it right to adopt good practices and ideas from our culture, and when have we gone too far to the point of adopting human values and human wisdom that contradict the values of God’s kingdom, or that replaced trust in God for security with trust in the world for security?

Understanding the relationship between God’s people and all people starts with understanding God’s relationship to all people. God is sovereign over every nation. Isaiah sees no problem prophesying to other nations. He doesn’t just stick to Judah and Israel. And he will prophesy to regional powers and superpowers.

Isaiah		
Book of the King 1-39		
The Universal Kingdom 13-27		
The First Cycle of Oracles The Reality of the Lord’s Promises 13-20	The Second Cycle of Oracles The World in Shadows 21-23	The Third Cycle Two Cities in Contrast: Endurance through to Glory 24-27
N ↑ 1. Babylon (13:1–14:27) Political overthrow	N ↑ 1. The Desert by the Sea (Babylon) (21:1–10) Religious overthrow	1. The city of emptiness (24:1–20) Broken laws (5) Broken gates (12)
W ← 2. Philistia (14:28–32) A Davidic king will yet reign in Zion	↓ S 2. Silence (Edom) (21:11–12) Indefinite continuance of things as they are	2. Zion’s King (24:21–23) 'After many days'
→ E 3. Moab (15:1–16:14) Moab in need, but through pride refuses shelter in Zion	→ E 3. Evening (Arabia) (21:13–17) Desert tribes in need: no ultimate refuge in mutual security	3. The great banquet (25:1–12) All nations feasted in Zion save Moab, excluded by pride
📍 4. Damascus/Ephraim (17:1–18:7) Strong cities forsaken (9); the forgotten rock (10)	📍 4. The Valley of Vision (Jerusalem) (22:1–25) Strong cities forsaken (9); the forgotten rock (10); the city torn down (10)	4. The city of God (26:1–21) The strong city (1); the everlasting rock (4)
↓ S 5. Egypt (19:1–20:6) Co-equal membership; Egypt, Assyria and Israel (19:24–25)	W ← 5. Tyre (23:1–18) Holiness to the Lord (23:18)	5. The final gathering (27:1-13) The harvest from Egypt and Assyria (27:12–13)

Alec Motyer. *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (InterVarsity Press, 1996).

Isaiah 13-27 organizes together 15 oracles to the nations. These oracles divide into three cycles of five. In the first cycle of oracles, we will consider the reality of the Lord’s promises. These oracles are spoken to clearly identifiable nations, Babylon, Philistia, Moab, Damascus, Egypt. Each passage begins with the phrase, “The oracle concerning Babylon...” or “The oracle concerning Philistia...”. The word “oracle” can also be translated as “burden;” the burden concerning Babylon.

In the second set of five oracles, we will focus on the world in shadows. These oracles mostly use descriptive phrases, rather than the names of nations. But even though the references are less concrete than the references in the first five oracles, the nation under question is identifiable. In the final set of oracles, we will focus on two cities in contrast. These five oracles do not use the word “oracle” and they do not speak of nations in an easily identifiable way. Moving through the three cycles, things become less and less clear, or less and less concrete.

I do not want us to get bogged down in these chapters. So, rather than moving along verse by verse, I'm going to address the whole first cycle in one lesson. So, we are going from chapter 13 to 20 in this lesson. And this will allow us to follow the thematic relationships between these five oracles.

Our overarching theme is the Sovereignty of God over all nations revealed in His just judgment of human pride and in His faithful commitment to preserve a believing remnant.

We begin in Isaiah 13:1 with Babylon.

The Oracle Concerning Babylon

End of Human Pride on the Day of the Lord

The oracle concerning Babylon is both introductory to the first cycle of oracles and the longest in the series, so I'll take a little more time with this first one.

The oracle begins with a phrase we are familiar with in Isaiah. It is the language of the king's standard lifted up to call an army of vengeance down upon a wicked people. This is 13:2, 3 and 5.

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| ² Lift up a standard on the bare hill, | Raise your voice to them, wave the hand |
| | that they may enter the doors of the nobles. |
| ³ I have commanded My consecrated ones, | I have even called My warriors for my wrath |
| | My proudly exulting ones |
| ⁵ They are coming from a far country, | From the farthest horizons, |
| The LORD and His instruments of indignation, | To destroy the whole land. |

God is the King. This is His standard. These are His warriors. That does not mean that they are good. Assyria was arrogant and cruel. And God whistled, and Assyria came to punish Israel. Then they received punishment themselves because they carried out their task with pride and evil intention. God allows His purposes to be fulfilled by wicked human beings when He removes His protecting hand from a nation.

It is hard to identify what army Isaiah envisions here destroying Babylon. There are no specific historical references. And the language is about to take a more apocalyptic turn. In verse 6 he will tell us to wait for the day of the Lord. Is that the day of Babylon's downfall? Or is that the day of judgment at the end of the age? Verse 9 tells us on this day sinners will be exterminated from the land. In verse 10 the stars, sun and moon all go dark. Verse 11 sounds like we are talking about a lot more than just Babylon.

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| ¹¹ Thus I will punish the world for its evil | And the wicked for their iniquity; |
| I will also put an end to the arrogance of the proud | And abase the haughtiness of the ruthless. |

This is not just Babylon. "I will punish the world for its evil." Babylon is symbolic of worldly power and pride. The Old Babylonian Empire reigned for hundreds of years. The New Babylonian Empire is going to reign again after Assyria falls. Babylon remains fixed as the center of Mesopotamian culture no matter who is reigning over the region. For 2000 years conquerors adopt the culture of the conquered. The new leaders became culturally Babylonian.

Isaiah is not living under the domination of Babylon. He lives under the domination of Assyria. Babylon resonates better as a symbol of humanity. It's something like the relationship between Rome and Greece. Like Assyria, Rome exudes strength, and determination, and success. We can understand why Stoic philosophy became popular among Roman officers. But that Stoic philosophy came from Greece. Rome took over the philosophy, poetry, theater, art, sculptures of the conquered. Even the gods of Rome are mostly gods of Greece with Latin names. That's very similar to the Assyrian conquest of Babylon. Though clearly dominant, king Tiglath-Pileser still felt it necessary to conquer the city and declare himself also king of Babylon.

Babylon invokes an enduring combination of empire and culture; of human might and ingenuity; of arrogance, pride, and ruthlessness. Using Babylon symbolically, Isaiah declares that in the day of the Lord, the human spirit, at its height of arrogant self-sufficiency, will be cut down. This is a future tower-of-Babel moment.

Human empires raise themselves up to the level of God and human empires always fall. They cannot last. God will appoint a day for its destruction. That does not happen just at the end of human history, that is the recurring theme of human history. God allows one people to topple another. God's righteousness is revealed as He gives human beings over to themselves. Human armies clash with human armies. Evil on evil. The outcome is horrific. Verse 16,

¹⁶ Their little ones also will be dashed to pieces Their houses will be plundered
before their eyes; and their wives ravished.

This army by be God's consecrated ones, but it is not holy in the moral sense. It is holy only in the sense of being set apart for a particular use. When God calls one wicked people to execute punishment on another wicked people, that army is consecrated in the sense of being given a divine function. If the conquering people does not submit to the authority of God and refuses to live according to His holy character, that people will in turn be punished for the wickedness they do as they carry out the function God called them to serve.

This is one of the challenging truths of the Bible. God remains sovereign and people remain morally responsible. God gives over those who turn from Him.

Fall of the City

The first part of the oracle, 13:1-16, uses Babylon as a symbol of human pride and independence to be judged in the final day. In 17-22, Isaiah provides a specific, historical example of this kind of judgment. Motyer calls this an "interim fulfillment"¹. How can we trust the prophet when he claims God will judge human pride on the last day? You know, something that is thousands of years in the future? The prophet's end times message is given support through predictions that occur much earlier, either in the time of the prophet or in the very near future.

Verses 17-22 predict the judgment of Babylon in a specific concrete instance that foreshadows the judgment of all humanity that will come at the end time. The prediction is pretty dire. Isaiah says that God is going to stir the Medes up against Babylon.

Barbarian peoples lived past the two rivers of Mesopotamia on the northern steppes. The Medes were one of these fierce barbarian people. The Medes would join forces with the Babylonians to topple the Assyrian empire. They help to conquer Nineveh in 612 BC. In fact, the Babylonians had to hurry. They had to rush to get up there so that they can be in on it. That happened 100 years after the death of King Ahaz, who we met in chapter 7. Later, the Medes would join up with the Persians. They may have been cousins. Both were from lands north of Mesopotamia. Daniel and Esther refer several times to the laws of the Medes and the Persians, they include them together. Cyrus the Great, the Persian, will lead the combined forces. Isaiah mentions only the Medes here. Daniel 5:31 does give credit to the military leader Darius the Mede for leading the host that defeated the city of Babylon in 539 BC. That is right after Belshazzar saw the writing on the wall and then Darius the Mede's troops came in. Isaiah's predicted complete destruction. Verses 20-21.

²⁰ It will never be inhabited or lived in from generation to generation;
Nor will the Arab pitch *his* tent there, Nor will shepherds make *their* flocks lie down there.
²¹ But desert creatures will lie down there, And their houses will be full of owls;
Ostriches also will live there, and shaggy goats will frolic there.

That kind of desolation did not come under Cyrus the Persian. So, this passage is sometimes brought up to question how literally we should take Isaiah's predictive prophecy.

The city of Babylon came under Persian rule, then it fell under the Seleucid rule, and it's still standing, that followed the conquest by Alexander, and later eventually declined into desolation. Here is how John Oswalt describes his understanding of this prophecy.

¹ J. A. Motyer. *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996) 146.

“It is certainly true that Babylon, the jewel of the nations, was eventually abandoned and is today. In this way, 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 (35:1, 2; 60:1–22, esp. 1–3, 13, 19).”²

Security of God’s Remnant

This interim prediction of Babylon’s fall is followed by two short verses assuring Israel of the Lord’s compassion on a future remnant. The two verses may feel out of place. It helps to recognize that this oracle has a chiasitic structure. These two short verses place God’s remnant in the center of the oracle.

We began with A-13:2-26: God’s universal judgment against the pride of humankind. Then we just consider B-13:17-22: the overthrow of Babylon and the end of the kingdom. Now we have come to C, the middle, 14:1-2: the security and future of the Lord’s people. Then we are going to move back out again to B’-14:3-23, to the overthrow of Babylon and the end of the king. And we will finish with A’-14:24-27: God’s universal judgment exemplified through the end of Assyrian power.³

God’s protection on the remnant of his people provides a central contrasting point to the oracle. God will exert His sovereign judgment over the nations. And through a remnant, He will faithfully fulfill His promises to His chosen people. They will not be swallowed up. They will not disappear in the judgment; in the destruction.

Parallel to the downfall of the city-state of Babylon at the hands of the Medes, Isaiah next describes the downfall of Babylon’s king. King and city bear a close connection in Isaiah, both when we are talking about the worldly city, like Babylon and her king and also when we are talking about God’s city Zion and her King.

Fall of the King

Just as every human city must fall, no matter how glorious, so also every human king must descend into death. Isaiah expertly paints this picture in 14:9-10.

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| ⁹ “Sheol from beneath is excited over you
It arouses for you the spirits of the dead,
It raises from their thrones | to meet you when you come;
all the leaders of the earth;
all the kings of the nations |
| ¹⁰ “They will all respond and say to you, | ‘Even you have been made weak as we,
You have become like us. |

That is the inevitability of death, no matter how great the human position or achievement in life, the dead will receive you, “you have become like us.” Isaiah goes on to describe this great human king; he’s a King of kings, He is over nations. And that description is in 14:12-14.

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| ¹² “How you have fallen from heaven,
You have been cut down to the earth, | O star of the morning, son of the dawn!
You who have weakened the nations! |
| ¹³ “But you said in your heart,
I will raise my throne
And I will sit on the mount of assembly | ‘I will ascend to heaven;
above the stars of God,
In the recesses of the north. |
| ¹⁴ ‘I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; | I will make myself like the Most High.’ |

Did you catch the irony? “I will lift myself above the highest place, but in the end Sheol will welcome you down to death, just like everybody else.” Some Church fathers interpreted these verses as the fall of Satan. The Hebrew word “helel,” which means “shining one,” is taken by my Bible as a reference to the planet Venus. So, it is translated, “star of the morning.” As an interesting sidenote,

² J. N. Oswalt. *NICOT: The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1–39*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986) 309.

³ Motyer, 106.

the King James Bible translated this Hebrew word using a Latin word that means “light-bringer.” That Latin word was “Lucifer.” And it only ever appeared in English Bibles here in Isaiah 14:12. The name is not used anywhere else. And the Hebrew “helel” was probably never meant as a reference to Satan.

A little bit of trivia: Lucifer is not a Biblical name. Helel may be a literary reference to a Canaanite myth about an attempted coup in Heaven. The Canaanite story refers to lesser gods challenging the high god. So, it’s not too hard to make a comparison to Satan. But Isaiah’s focus throughout the oracle is on human pride. This is not a god challenging Yahweh. This is a creature challenging his creator. This is more like the Tower of Babel.

Any human challenge to deity must be short lived. It can last no longer than the life span of a man.
14:15-20.

- 15 “Nevertheless you will be thrust down to Sheol, To the recesses of the pit.
16 “Those who see you will gaze at you, They will ponder over you, *saying*,
‘Is this the man who made the earth tremble, Who shook kingdoms,
17 Who made the world like a wilderness And overthrew its cities,
Who did not allow his prisoners to *go home*?’
18 “All the kings of the nations lie in glory, Each in his own tomb.
19 “But you have been cast out of your tomb Like a rejected branch,
Clothed with the slain who are pierced with Who go down to the stones of the pit
a sword
Like a trampled corpse.
20 “You will not be united with them in burial, Because you have ruined your country,
You have slain your people.
May the offspring of evildoers not be mentioned forever.

End of Human Pride: The Example of Assyria

The oracle concerning the king of Babylon gives us a concrete, specific example of one human being who has declared his arrogant self-sufficiency before God, “I will be the captain of my own soul,” and yet, this is the result. Just as the city will fall, the empire will fall; every man and every woman who lifts themselves up will fall.

Now, the oracle concerning Babylon ends with a declaration of doom on Assyria. Babylon has been used by Isaiah in this oracle as a symbol of Mesopotamian power. Assyria is the concrete representation of Mesopotamian power during Isaiah’s lifetime. It is the nation ruling over the area. Like the fall of Babylon to the Medes, the downfall of Assyria serves as an even nearer interim fulfillment of the promised future overthrow of human pride and self-sufficiency.

Isaiah’s words encourage believing readers to acknowledge God’s sovereign power over whatever superpowers currently stand at the top of human affairs. Trust God, not the superpower. This is 14:24-27.

- 24 The LORD of hosts has sworn saying, “Surely, just as I have intended so it has happened, and just as I have planned so it will stand, 25 to break Assyria in My land, and I will trample him on My mountains. Then his yoke will be removed from them and his burden removed from their shoulder. 26 “This is the plan devised against the whole earth; and this is the hand that is stretched out against all the nations. 27 “For the LORD of hosts has planned, and who can frustrate *it*? And as for His stretched-out hand, who can turn it back?”

Notice Isaiah using this phrase again, “this is the hand that is stretched out against the nations.” It is not only stretched against Israel and Judah as in earlier chapters. God’s hand is stretched out against every nation. We first encountered this phrase paired with the idea of a standard lifted up. That was in 5:25-26. Isaiah has created an inclusio for this oracle by beginning in 13:2 with a reference to God’s standard and ending here in 14:27 with a reference to God’s outstretched hand. This image of God’s sovereignty as King of kings creates bookends around the whole oracle.

God is King of kings, sovereign over all the nations. He makes His plans, and His plans stand. Human pride may succeed for a moment. But every city will fall, every king will descend into death. There will be some justice during the course of human events. And in the final day, justice will be made complete. The world will be punished for its wickedness. God will put an end to the arrogance of the proud.

The Oracle Concerning Philistia

The short oracle concerning Philistia in Isaiah 14:28-32 instructs the peoples of the Earth where to turn for security. The Philistines in the oracle are rejoicing over the removal of Assyrian dominance. It is not clear whether that's because the Assyrians have experienced a military setback, or whether an alliance with Egypt gives Philistia courage. Isaiah warns the Philistines that their sense of security is misplaced. Verse 31 ominously declares,

³¹ "Wail, O gate; cry, O city; Melt away, O Philistia, all of you;
For smoke comes from the north, And there is no straggler in his ranks.

That's the Assyrian army, no stragglers coming from the north smoke. That is the army. Instead of depending on alliances with human powers, humankind must find security in looking to God. This is Isaiah's advice to the envoy from Philistia in verse 32. He is witnessing to them,

³² "How then will one answer the messengers of the nation? That the LORD has founded Zion,
And the afflicted of His people will seek refuge in it."

The people of God do not escape affliction. Though, even in suffering, God provides for His people. He is their refuge. They find hope in the city founded by God. The city of Zion is intertwined with the Messianic king. Security is not found in contemporary Jerusalem, not that Zion. God's people, believing in His faithfulness, look ahead to a new kind of city and a new kind of king. On to our next oracle.

The Oracle Concerning Moab

Our overarching theme declares that God is sovereign over all nations, and that His sovereignty is expressed in just punishment of human pride and in faithfulness to a believing remnant. The oracle concerning Moab adds an interesting element to this overall theme. God not only grieves over the waywardness of His chosen people; He grieves over the waywardness of all people.

There is just a bit of repetition in this oracle, and that can lead us to organize it chiastically.

The center of this oracle declares security for God's people as God's sovereign plan unfolds. And that is the same as the center of the oracle concerning Babylon and the end of the oracle concerning Philistia. So, this is the major theme. This is 16:4b-5.

^{4b} For the extortioner has come to an end, destruction has ceased,
Oppressors have completely *disappeared* from the land.
⁵ A throne will even be established in lovingkindness, And a judge will sit on it in faithfulness
in the tent of David;
Moreover, he will seek justice And be prompt in righteousness.

That short bit of verse concerning God's people and their Messianic King is right in the middle of the oracle. "A throne will be established in lovingkindness. He will seek justice and be prompt in righteousness."

That's Jesus. That's the center. On one side of this central passage, we get a plea from Moab for shelter. "Let the outcast of Moab stay with you." But then on the other side of the central passage, we see Moab's attitude, "We have heard of the pride of Moab, an excessive pride; even of his arrogance, pride and fury."

Moab desires shelter, but Moab does not want to submit to the reign of God. Moab persists in its own ways, its own worship, its own agenda.

The oracle begins and ends with prediction of certain ruin. In 15:1, the first verse, “Ar of Moab is devastated and ruined. Surely in a night Kir of Moab is devastated and ruined.” Then jumping to the end, 16:14, “Within three years as a hired man would count them, the glory of Moab will be degraded along with all his great population.”

That leaves us with the inner frame. In 15:2-4 Moab’s grief is expressed. “They have gone up to the temple and to Dibon, even to the high places to weep. Moab wails over Nebo and Medeba...” In the parallel section, 16:7-8, Moab’s grief is explained. Because God has heard of Moab’s excessive pride, “Therefore Moab shall wail; everyone of Moab shall wail.”

In both cases, the wailing of Moab is followed by the grief of God. That’s new information in this oracle. Isaiah has described for us the punishing of the nations for their wickedness. He has not, until now, talked about how that punishment affects the heart of God. 15:5, “My heart cries out for Moab.” And then later in 16:9 and 11, “Therefore I will weep bitterly for Jazer...My heart intones like a harp for Moab.”

God grieves, but He does not set aside His goodness in his grief. Moab persists in requiring God to give what a holy God cannot give. “Accept me according to my own way. Accept my definition of who you are and my definition of who I am. Accept my assertion of self-sufficiency. Accept my lifestyle. Accept my ruthless commitment to power, money, and fame. Accept my ongoing worship of my own gods on my own high places. Accept me without guilt, or repentance, or will to change.” God grieves, and Moab’s plea for shelter is rejected.

The Oracle Concerning Damascus/Ephraim

The fourth oracle concerning Damascus quickly shifts focus to Ephraim, so we can call it “the Damascus/Ephraim oracle.” The two seen joined together here probably dates this oracle to the time of chapter 7, when the two kings joined together against Judah. It is quite possible that Isaiah wrote different pieces of the Book of the King at different points of his long career. And later in life he expertly wove together different prophecies and different writings to create the first third of the book of Isaiah. That would be one explanation for these various oracles that seem to have some connection to a historical situation, but they don’t give detail about the historical situation, not in this given form, not in this new context because Isaiah is here these oracles thematically.

For example, a delegation may have come from Philistia at some point to woo Judah into an anti-Assyrian alliance. And Moab would have suffered a major defeat by Assyria three years after Isaiah spoke his words to Moab. But Isaiah is not concerned in this present book with clarifying those events. He has gathered these writings with updates and transitions, and he has added new material to communicate theologically. As we have noted, the overarching theme is God’s sovereignty over the nations, both in His just punishment of self-sufficient human pride and in His faithfulness to keep His promises for a remnant of His people.

So, even though this oracle concerning Damascus seems to come from the historical period addressed in chapter 7, when the King of Assyria united with the King of Israel to attack Judah, our concern is not with the historical detail of that alliance. Isaiah now uses this oracle to focus on God’s wayward people.

In our list of oracles, the first three and the fifth are nations other than Israel or Judah. That is true of the oracles in the first cycle and it’s going to be true of the oracles that we look at in the second cycle. The fourth position is for God’s chosen people. Here it is Israel, the Northern Kingdom. In our next set of five oracles, it will be Judah in the fourth spot. Motyer points out an interesting fact about the geography of the other four nations mentioned in this cycle. In both cycles, one nation sits to the north of Israel, one to the south, one to the east, and one to the west. In this set of five, Babylon sits to the north; Philistia is on the coast, it’s to the west; Moab is across the Jordan, to the east; and Egypt is to the south. We will see the same pattern with different nations in the next set of five oracles. So, then we can ask, “What does this do for us? Why this literary arrangement?” It highlights the fact that Israel is surrounded by other peoples. We are encouraged to ask, “What is the

relationship between the chosen people of God and the surrounding nations; you know, both super-powers like Babylon and Egypt, as well as regional neighbors like Philistia and Moab?" Isaiah's development of the relationship between the people of God and the world is complex. Here are three realities.

1. The peoples of the world are opposed to the Kingdom of God and constitute a threat to God's people. In that sense, the fact that these nations surround Israel is menacing.
2. Nevertheless, the nations of the world exist for the people of God. Every nation belongs to the universal Kingdom. Every nation depends on the sovereignty of God for their existence. God places kings and God removes kings. There is some sense in which the governments and kingdoms of the earth exist to create basic order that exists to benefit the people of God. And they all owe allegiance to the people of God. God's people represent His Kingdom on Earth.
3. In another way, the people of God exist for the nations. God promised Abraham that he would be a blessing to the nations (Genesis 12:3). On Mount Sinai, God called Israel to be a kingdom of priests (Exodus 19:6). Priests serve as mediators to help others worship and serve God. And Israel was supposed to live according to the law of God as a witness to the nations (Deuteronomy 4:6).

So, Israel exists as a means by which others can come to know God. In this multifaceted relationship with the peoples of the world, the people of God may feel threatened, they may feel overwhelmed, they may feel awed by all the success of everybody else. They are not to solve that threat by turning to the world for help, by depending on the world, or depending on their own worldly strength and strategies. The people of God center their hope in the faithfulness of God so that, instead of fearing the world, they might be a witness to the world. We can see Israel's place, surrounded by these nations as an image of threat, but we can also see it as an image of special calling. They are central to God's plan for the nations.

This oracle to Damascus/Ephraim has two messages. The first is to God's people. The second is to the world.

Destruction is prophesied for God's people Israel because they have turned from God, worshiping idols and trusted in worldly alliances. Verses 7, 8, and 10.

⁷ In that day man will have regard for his Maker And his eyes will look to the Holy One of Israel. ⁸
He will not have regard for the altars, the work of his hands, Nor will he look to that which his fingers have made, Even the Asherim and incense stands.

¹⁰ For you have forgotten the God of your salvation And have not remembered the rock of your refuge.
Therefore you plant delightful plants And set them with vine slips of a strange *god*.

Though God does punish His people, the peoples of the earth will not be given complete dominion over God's chosen ones. The second half of the oracle concerns the peoples of the world. 17:13, 18:3, and 5,

^{13a} The nations rumble on like the rumbling But He will rebuke them and they will flee
of many waters, far away,
³ All you inhabitants of the world and dwellers on earth,
As soon as a standard is raised on the mountains, And as soon as the trumpet is blown,
you will see *it*, you will hear *it*.
^{5b} Then He will cut off the sprigs with pruning knives And remove *and* cut away the spreading branches.

Isaiah's image in that last verse, verse 5 is one of pruning the nations. That's an interesting change. The judgment on the nations has to this point been communicated by Isaiah in terms of complete destruction. Pruning sounds like a removal of what is bad, so that the good might flourish. You're not cutting down or burning up the vine; you're pruning it. We get a hint in this last verse that God wants the remnant to include peoples other than just Jews. He has a plan for the Gentiles - 18:7,

Israel will not find security in Egypt from Assyria or in Assyria from Egypt. Assyria and Egypt must both find security in the God of Israel. That's the surprising message of the central section. Hope is not surprising. All of these oracles have offered a glimmer of hope in a couple of verses. The surprise here is that the hope is extended to the people of Egypt and the people of Assyria, the oppressors of Israel. What a shock Isaiah's words must have been to his Jewish audience! Listen to Isaiah 19:20–25, it all sounds like it should be spoken to Israel,

²⁰ It will become a sign and a witness to the LORD of hosts in the land of Egypt; for they will cry to the LORD because of oppressors, and He will send them a Savior and a Champion, and He will deliver them. ²¹ Thus the LORD will make Himself known to Egypt, and the Egyptians will know the LORD in that day. They will even worship with sacrifice and offering, and will make a vow to the LORD and perform it. ²² The LORD will strike Egypt, striking but healing; so they will return to the LORD, and He will respond to them and will heal them. ²³ In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrians will come into Egypt and the Egyptians into Assyria, and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians. ²⁴ In that day Israel will be the third *party* with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, ²⁵ whom the LORD of hosts has blessed, saying, "Blessed is Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel My inheritance."

"Blessed is Egypt my people"? How does God call Egypt His people? "And Assyria the work of my hands"? God is molding Assyria? Really, Egypt and Assyria are to be given equal status together with "Israel my inheritance"? Each is given a third part? I mean, Israel does not even receive the double blessing of the eldest son. Each gets a third. They share the inheritance equally. It is one thing to prophecy the salvation of Gentiles in general. You know, send missionaries to save those pagans out there, like the Gentiles of chapter 2 that are going to stream into Zion. And there, the Jewish remnant may be seen as central. The Gentiles come for help. They submit to the preeminence of Israel. But here Isaiah gives Gentiles an equal part. And when Isaiah starts naming the particular Gentiles, the whole idea becomes repulsive. "Yes, let's include Gentiles. But not the Assyrians. Not the Egyptians." Remember Jonah's anger at God's compassion on Nineveh. These people deserve justice, not mercy. This is too close to home, God. These are our oppressors.

Black and White. Croat and Serb, Ukrainian and Russian, Han Chinese and Uyghur, Iranian and Iraqi, all together with their Jewish brothers and sisters. God is not the God of any regional people. God is the God of all nations. He is King of Kings, who is sovereign in His justice. Every people will be held accountable equally. And He extends mercy with impartiality. Every person from every people group is invited to seek refuge in Him.