

BELSHAZZAR'S FALL

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Isaiah chapter 14 contains great prophecies of the destruction of the Babylonian Empire, and the restoration of God's people Israel to their land. It is quite possible that the chapter also contains prophecies that would find ultimate fulfillment in the New Testament, in the Lord's church, which is spiritual Israel (Gal 6:15-16; Heb 12:22-23). But there are several verses that explicitly foretell God's judgment of one of the kings of Babylon, who was Belshazzar. Isaiah 14:4-6 says, "*That thou shalt take up this proverb against the king of Babylon, and say, How hath the oppressor ceased! the golden city ceased! The Lord hath broken the staff of the wicked, and the sceptre of the rulers. He who smote the people in wrath with a continual stroke, he that ruled the nations in anger, is persecuted, and none hindereth.*"

A reception in Hades

God said that the whole earth would be at rest and break into singing when the king of Babylon died (Isa 14:7). "Yea, the fir trees rejoice at thee, and the cedars of Lebanon, saying, Since thou art laid down, no feller is come up against us. Hell from beneath is moved for thee to meet thee at thy coming: it stirs up the dead for thee, even all the chief ones of the earth; it hath raised up from their thrones all the kings of the nations. All they shall speak and say unto thee, Art thou also become weak as we? art thou become like unto us? Thy pomp is brought down to the grave, and the noise of thy viols: the worm is spread under thee, and the worms cover thee" (Isa 14:8-11). The word translated "hell" in verse nine is the Hebrew word *Sheol*. This Old Testament word is translated by the Holy Spirit to the Greek word *Hades* in the New Testament (Psa 16:10; Acts 2:27). In both languages, this is a reference to the "unseen world" where the dead go after life on this earth. This prophecy was fulfilled when the kingdom of Babylon was overthrown by the Medes and Persians and king Belshazzar was killed in Daniel 5:24-31. It is actually repeated in the "handwriting on the wall" that God wrote for this wicked king, and interpreted through His prophet Daniel. "Then was the part of the hand sent from him; and this writing was written. And this is the writing that was written, MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN. This is the interpretation of the thing: MENE; *God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it.* TEKEL; *Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting.* PERES;

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(continued)

Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians. Then commanded Belshazzar, and they clothed Daniel with scarlet, and put a chain of gold about his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him, that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom. In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain. And Darius the Median took the kingdom, being about threescore and two years old" (Dan 5:24-31). That very night, other dead kings met the freshly dead Belshazzar who was now as weak as they were, his spirit departed from the earth, while his body was now becoming covered with worms.

The fall of "Lucifer"

The next four verses continue the "proverb against the king of Babylon." Isaiah 14:12-15 says, "*How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit.*" Isaiah 14:12-15 is widely misunderstood as being about Satan, particularly his origin as the arch-enemy of all righteousness. There is a very widely held tradition, that Satan was once a righteous and faithful angel of God who then led a rebellion in heaven, desiring to overthrow God, and was consequently expelled from heaven along with his followers, and they have been fighting against God ever since. These verses in Isaiah 14 are commonly used to teach this tradition. Isaiah 14:12 is even the source of Satan's traditional "title" of *Lucifer*. But Isaiah 14:12-15 is not about Satan at all. Again, Isaiah 14:4 introduces these verses as a "proverb against the king of Babylon." The king of Babylon, not Satan, is the "day-star" that was going to fall from "heaven" (i.e. the *sky*). He had weakened the nations and lifted himself up in pride to the point that he imagined himself to be like God. He had lifted himself up against the Lord of heaven (Dan 5:23). Now, God was going to bring him down. And along with him, the entire kingdom of Babylon was going to fall. Indeed it did, as we read the recording of the event in Daniel chapter five.