

Text: Isaiah 13:1-22

Title: "Babylon Shall Fall"

Time: 12/7/2025 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: In Isaiah's day, Babylon was allied with the Medes against the Assyrians. That anti-Assyrian stance unfortunately made Babylon attractive to a godly king of Judah, Hezekiah. In Isaiah 39 the prophet recounts a related tragic event. Hezekiah had unwisely shown representatives from Babylon all the secrets of Jerusalem. Isaiah then issued a warning to the king:

"Then said Isaiah to Hezekiah, 'Hear the word of the Lord of hosts: "Behold, the days come, that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store until this day, shall be carried to Babylon: nothing shall be left," saith the Lord'" (Isa. 39:6-7). You may remember that Hezekiah remained unrepentant at this news, feeling assured that he would be gone long before any of this threat from Babylon materialized.

Others, perhaps younger than their apathetic king, must have felt a greater concern about Isaiah's word about Babylon. Undoubtedly, they wanted to know more about this promised threat. To meet this need, the Lord gave Isaiah a word for his scroll about the demise of Babylon and its king. Chapter 13 is about the city, and chapter 14 deals with the king. Unlike the great Isaiah promises about the future of Israel, Babylon shall fall without recovery.

The Assyrians destroyed Babylon in 689 BC, but it was subsequently rebuilt. Babylon fell to Cyrus the Persian in 539 BC, but Cyrus did not destroy the city. In 518 Darius Hystaspes attacked the city, and thereafter it declined to the point that the Greek geographer Strabo years later wrote of it: "The great city is a great desert."

That is where Isaiah's prophecy leaves the city (vv. 21-22). But remember that Isaiah wrote this prediction around 700 BC, two hundred years prior to its ultimate fulfillment.

Explaining this amazing feature of our text, the first verse introduces this chapter as "the burden of Babylon, which Isaiah the son of Amoz did see." The word translated *burden* comes from the Hebrew verb meaning *to lift* or *to carry*. While some commentators see this idiom as *lifting up one's voice to make a declaration*, I think its meaning is more likely that this is a message that must be carried from the Lord to the people by the prophet. In this way, it is a burden. It is the burden of every pastor-teacher of every true local church today to carry God's Word from Him to His people.

The chapter tells us three things about the fall of Babylon: (1) she fell because the Lord fell her (vv. 2-11); (2) she fell because the Lord meant man's evil for His good (vv. 12-16), and (3) she fell in spite of her former glory (vv. 17-22).

I. Babylon falls because the Lord fell her (vv. 2-11).

Illustration: If you drive up Hilltop Rd., you will see to your right a large stump of a tree in front of a stone wall. My wife and I enjoy walking up that hill, and for the longest time that stump had a tree connected to it that was very old, very large, extended over the road, and rotten to the core. At one point I warned its owner about it and asked if she had any plans to take it down. She did not, so it came down on its own during one of our NH storms.

Application: The Lord is very clear that Babylon does not fall on its own. In the original Hebrew, the grammar places great emphasis on the subject of verse 3. We could translate - "I, Myself commanded." What the Lord commands is the destruction of the city of Babylon. Isaiah emphasizes that this fall of Babylon is God's doing.

We are told that it will happen with due warning (v. 2), that

it will happen with the use of tools of destruction specifically set apart for this holy task of God's judgment (v. 3a), that these tools of destruction will enjoy their task (v. 3b), that they come from a land distant from Isaiah and made up of many nations, as Cyrus's army certainly was (vv. 4-5a), that they come literally to destroy the whole land (v. 5b), and that they will do so on the Day of the Lord that is at hand (v. 6). The residents of Babylon ought to cry out for help, but instead they merely tremble in fear (vv. 6-8).

As we come to verse 9, we see that Isaiah is speaking about more than the fall of the ancient city of Babylon when he speaks about the Day of the Lord here. In verse six, the Day of the Lord was at hand. Here Isaiah says it is coming, as though it is further away. In this day, sinners are extinguished from the earth (v. 9), the entire globe is darkened (v. 10), and what is done to Babylon is now done to the whole earth (v. 11). There is a sense in which Babylon is the entire world in rebellion against God, and the whole Bible is about Babylon's fall.

Near the beginning of our Bibles, in Genesis 11, a global government gathered in rebellion against God at the tower of Babel. God put down their rebellion against His command to fill the earth by confusing their common language into many different languages. That caused them to obey and fill the earth.

Near the end of our Bibles, in Revelation 18, another global government that will have rebelled against the sovereignty of the King of kings and Lord of lords is once again defeated, this time for all time. That government was led by the antichrist, and wherever we see the Babylonian spirit of antichrist in our world today, we see a lust for the power of concentrated global government in rebellion against God. In that chapter we read about the final Lord's Day of judgment. Every Babylon rebellion against the Lord and His

people will fall because the Lord is the one who shall fell it.

This Day of the Lord is the opposite of a different Day of the Lord, which He has designed for our lives each week. Genesis 11, Isaiah 13, and Revelation 18 speak of the Lord's days of judgment, but you and I have the privilege of celebrating today the Lord's day of resurrection.

The days of judgment extinguish courage (vv. 7-8); the day of resurrection encourages. The days of judgment are days of cruelty (v. 9a); the day of resurrection is a day of love. The days of judgment are days to extinguish sinners from the earth (v. 9b); the day of resurrection is a day to save sinners from their sin. The days of judgment are dark days (v. 10); the day of resurrection is a day to see God's light. The days of judgment are days the world crashes into the holiness of God (v. 11); the day of resurrection is the day the love of God for the world makes known His grace to make us partakers of His holiness (Heb. 12:10).

As we live among the inhabitants of the world of Babylon today, will the Day of the Lord's judgment mean anything to us? Will the Day of the Lord's resurrection, our Sunday? Will we believe on the Risen One for salvation and be faithful to worship Him on His day of resurrection?

II. Babylon falls because the Lord meant man's evil for His good (vv. 12-16).

Illustration: 1 Kings 9:28 tells us that Israel found tremendous stores of gold for King Solomon's reign at a place called *Ophir*. In 2017, the magazine *Independent* published a claim denying the biblical account:

"King Solomon's gold mines, which the Bible says helped him store wealth amounting to more than £2.3 trillion, are a complete myth, historians believe." One of these historians was Ralph Ellis, who criticized the account in 1 Kings:

"There comes a point when we either have to accept that

the biblical account is entirely fictional, or that we may be looking in the wrong location and for the wrong things.” The *Independent* article concluded, “Experts now say the pot of wealth is unlikely to have ever existed” [Cited by Mari-anna Bala’a, “Proof of the Mystical ‘Gold of Ophir’ Discov-ered” Armstrong Institute of Biblical Archeology (December 13, 2020)].

Application: Unknown to the authors of that skeptical arti- cle, however, a shard of a clay pot from the 8th century – the days of Isaiah, had been found in 1946 in Tel Aviv, which had inscribed on it “Ophir Gold to Beth Horon – 30 shekels.” The shard was once part of a pot owned in Isai- ah’s day, which was used to transport 30 gold shekels from Ophir to the house of Horon. So the gold mines of Ophir are not mythical after all. Once again, factual science vali- dates the Bible, while the ignorant ideology and pseudo- scholarship gets all the press.

Isaiah, of course, had no question in his mind about the ex- istence of the gold of Ophir, but he is not thinking of the preciousness of that gold. He thinks rather about the pre- ciousness of human life that survives the judgment of God (v. 12). Verses 12-16 describe the evil of Babylon’s conquer- ors. God knows they are evil, but still He uses them to do the good He intends.

It is the glory of our Creator that He made man in His own image, a person with free agency, who can do his own will, whether to obey or disobey God. It is also His glory that in spite of man’s fallen bondage to sinful evil, God can still use man’s evil to accomplish His good. That is what is hap- pening here. Babylon falls under the evil of their enemy, and God means it for His good.

You may remember Joseph spoke this truth to his treacher- ous brothers, who had sold him into slavery. He said to them, “Ye meant it for evil, but God meant it for good to

save many people alive" (Gen. 50:20). The Apostle Peter saw the same truth at work in man's evil crucifixion of the Savior: "For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and counsel determined before to be done" (Acts 4:27-28). There God brought the ultimate good out of the ultimate evil to His glory and our salvation. God's response to man's fallen evil is to use it for His sovereign good.

Of course, God means not only the evil, but also the good man does for good too. God can accomplish His work without man's evil. That was the original design for His creation. We do not have to do evil to bring about God's good. Nevertheless, the Bible is clear about this truth regarding all the evil of mankind – where man has meant it for evil, God has meant it for good. As so here too, Babylon falls at the hands of evil men, but God has meant it for His good purposes that cannot fail.

III. Babylon falls in spite of its former glory (vv. 17-22).

Illustration: Verse 17 tells us that the Lord *stirred up* the Medes against Babylon. This *stirring-up* includes mixing them with the Persians, when in 550 BC Cyrus of Persia revolted against Astyages of Media (who was Cyrus's maternal grandfather). In his book on the ancient near east, Carl Roebuck tells us this about the Medes of this verse: "The defeat [of the Medes by Cyrus] was almost in the nature of a family quarrel, for Cyrus treated Astyages with consideration and combined the two kingdoms. Both Medes and Persians were used as officials, and Cyrus ruled from Ecbatana [which was the Median capital]" (160).

Application: Remember that in Isaiah's day Babylon was the ally of the Medes against Assyria. His contemporaries, like Hezekiah, did not think that they had much to fear

from Babylon, nor did Babylon think that they had much to fear from the Medes. As time went on, Babylon achieved Isaiah's lofty description (v. 19), becoming the glory of all kingdoms, the beauty and excellency of the Chaldeans. But in his own day, Isaiah must have seemed a bit crazy to predict what he did about them in this chapter, especially their ultimate fall (vv. 20-22). God's truth always seems a bit crazy in a world of Satan's lies, but God's truth is still true.

It turns out that the same lofty vocabulary used to describe Babylon as glorious, beautiful, and excellent in verse 19, was used in Isaiah 4:2 to describe the Branch of the Lord, the Messiah, Jesus Christ. For many, it is the world's Babylons that are glorious, beautiful, and excellent – that which makes life worth living. For true believers, only the Lord Jesus Christ is truly glorious, beautiful, and excellent. Only He is worth living for. For which shall we live?

Like Jesus said, "What shall it profit a man if he should gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8:36). Throughout these chapters, Isaiah is posing a similar question: "What shall it profit a man if he should gain all that Babylon possessed and lose the promised Savior?" The Branch or Babylon – each of us must choose which to us is truly glorious, beautiful, and excellent.

Conclusion: Let me conclude with a final comparison between the Babylon and the Branch. Verse 15 tells us that all the citizens of Babylon found will be thrust through or pierced on the day of the Lord's judgment.

That word *pierced* is used in a passage about the Messiah, Jesus Christ, in Zechariah, "And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have *pierced*, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn" (12:10; see

also Ps. 22:16, “they pierced my hands and my feet”). The Apostle John explains that this piercing happened when Jesus was crucified (John 19:36-37). We still await the day that Israel looks in saving faith upon Him and mourns.

But that day can be today for us. Jesus bore the wrath we read about in this passage, the wrath of our holy God against the sin of sinners like us. He did so that you and I might do what the house of David shall someday do – look in faith upon Him, mourn for Him, be in bitterness for Him, recognizing that it was for our sin that He died, and then asking Him to save us from that sin.

If we do, we can read past Isaiah 13 on to 14:1, “For the Lord will have mercy on Jacob.” God will have mercy on us too, if we trust Christ with Jacob’s saving faith.

“A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction—the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*