

We are in the section of Isaiah that groups the prophecies to nations. This is our second of three sermons in that section. Last week we heard the prophecies to Babylon, Assyria, Philistia, Moab, Syria, and Egypt. We saw that God holds nations accountable for their actions and their pride. We learned that Babylon was a type of all world powers that defy God. We also saw that there are times when God allows calamity to turn us back to God.

Our passage today returns to addressing Babylon. ² *A stern vision is told to me; the traitor betrays, and the destroyer destroys. Go up, O Elam; lay siege, O Media; all the sighing she has caused I bring to an end.* Isaiah 21:2 As we saw last week, this siege on Babylon came to pass long after Isaiah's life. It was important for the Jews to know that when Babylon took them into captivity, that it was only for a set amount of time. They would be restored as a nation, even though the reign of Davidic kings had come to an end. That did not mean the promises of God had failed. The line of David was keeping careful records of their lineage. One of those groups would settle in a town called Nazareth, meaning "the Branch," a messianic title referring to in a previous passage in [Isaiah \(Isaiah 11:1\)](#).

In Isaiah's vision, the nations that would destroy the coming kingdom of Babylon are specifically named, Media and Elam. This took place under King Darius in 539 B.C. Isaiah was so disturbed by the vision that he was doubled over and describes his pain as woman giving birth, and making his nights disturbing instead of restful. He grieved for the very people who would take His own people into captivity. Verse five gives an amazing prediction of a detail that Daniel would describe over a hundred years after Isaiah. ⁵ *They prepare the table, they spread the rugs, they eat, they drink. Arise, O princes; oil the shield!* Isaiah 21:5 The Babylonians were partying while the Medes were attacking ([Daniel 5:1, 30](#)).

⁹ *And behold, here come riders, horsemen in pairs!* And he answered, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon; and all the carved images of her gods he has shattered to the ground." Isaiah 21:9 Darius the Mede did not destroy idols, but the defeat of the Babylonians who worshiped the god Marduke showed those idols to be mere stones ([Jeremiah 51:47; 52](#)). The idols were shattered to the ground in the sense that people no longer looked to them as a power that could protect them.

John's revelation sees this verse partially quoted by an angel in [Revelation 14:8](#) and [18:2](#). Babylon had taken Judah captive and ended the Davidic dynasty. It threatened to put an end to the hopes of a coming Messiah. That is why it represents the forces of Satan in their attempt to stop Jesus from reigning in the hearts of men.

Babylon was a place of luxury and ease at the expense of all those they conquered who groaned under their oppression (see verse 2). Luxury and oppression are the two ways in which Satan attempts to reign, and luxury is usually more successful. The fall of

Commented [PW1]: Isaiah 11:1 (ESV)

¹ There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.

Commented [PW2]: Daniel 5:1 (ESV)

¹ King Belshazzar made a great feast for a thousand of his lords and drank wine in front of the thousand.

Commented [PW3]: Daniel 5:30-31 (ESV)

³⁰ That very night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was killed. ³¹ And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old.

Commented [PW4]: Jeremiah 51:47 (ESV)

⁴⁷ "Therefore, behold, the days are coming when I will punish the images of Babylon; her whole land shall be put to shame, and all her slain shall fall in the midst of her.

Commented [PW5]: Jeremiah 51:52 (ESV)

⁵² "Therefore, behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will execute judgment upon her images, and through all her land the wounded shall groan.

Commented [PW6]: Revelation 14:8 (ESV)

⁸ Another angel, a second, followed, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who made all nations drink the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality."

Commented [PW7]: Revelation 18:2 (ESV)

² And he called out with a mighty voice, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place for demons, a haunt for every unclean spirit, a haunt for every unclean bird, a haunt for every unclean and detestable beast.

Babylon therefore symbolizes the freedom that God's people will enjoy when people are no longer slaves of sin and when persecution and oppression of every kind ceases (John 8:32). (See next verse) "Babylon is fallen" is to say Christ has conquered. The world powers that deny God and persecute His people will one day end. Injustice and oppression will cease. The fall of ancient Babylon foreshadowed the final fall of all nations that resist the kingdom of God.

¹⁰ O my threshed and winnowed one, what I have heard from the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, I announce to you. Isaiah 21:10 Isaiah speaks to the future captives of Babylon. He calls them a threshed and winnowed one. The Israelites threshed grain by taking a board into which they had pounded sharp rocks and then dragging it over the harvested grain. Then they would throw it up into the wind to blow the chaff from the grain. We could say in today's vernacular, "raked over and tossed about." One hundred years later when the Jews in captivity felt that very way, they could look to this prophecy and know deliverance was on the way. That would encourage them to look the Lord and lean on Him.

In the rest of chapter twenty-one, Isaiah prophecies to Edom and Arabia using a play on words and prose. He switches a letter in the name Edom to make it the Hebrew word for silent, implying the silence of death. Just when they get a hint of dawn, the night comes again. That is a prediction that after these areas were no longer under the thumb of Assyria, they would be under the dark cloud of Babylon.

Hundreds of years later an Edomite would reign in Israel. His name was Herod the Great. In this season of looking forward to the coming of Christ we are reminded of Herod's choice to remain in darkness instead of coming to the light (Isaiah 60:1). He heard the prophecies of a coming Messiah, but instead of worshiping Him with the Magi, Herod tried to kill Him by executing the babies in Nazareth (Matthew 2:16).

Chapter twenty-two begins by addressing Jerusalem again. Isaiah predicted that the Babylonian siege on Jerusalem would see the Jews partying on their rooftops, eating their flocks and drinking up their wine. The spirit of Babylon was prevalent in Jerusalem. They used up their food supply and would die a death of starvation and pestilence (Lamentations 4:9). The leaders would try to escape but be caught and bound. All the rest who survived were captured and taken into captivity.

In Isaiah 22:5 Isaiah calls Jerusalem the valley of vision. *⁵ For the Lord GOD of hosts has a day of tumult and trampling and confusion in the valley of vision, a battering down of walls and a shouting to the mountains.* Isaiah 22:5 Though Jerusalem is on a hill, it is surrounded by mountains. From the mountain of Gethsemane you actually look down on Jerusalem. They had the words of the prophets. That is why it was called the valley of vision. But because they did have revelation and still lived like Babylon, a day for the siege had been appointed by God.

⁸ He has taken away the covering of Judah. In that day you looked to the weapons of the House of the Forest, ⁹ and you saw that the breaches of the city of David were many. You collected the waters of the lower pool, ¹⁰ and you counted the houses of

Commented [PW8]: John 8:32 (ESV)

³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

Commented [PW9]: Isaiah 60:1 (ESV)

¹ Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.

Commented [PW10]: Matthew 2:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men.

Commented [PW11]: Lamentations 4:9 (ESV)

⁹ Happier were the victims of the sword than the victims of hunger, who wasted away, pierced by lack of the fruits of the field.

Jerusalem, and you broke down the houses to fortify the wall. Isaiah 22:8-10 The removal of their covering might refer to God's hand of protection or it may refer to Jerusalem as a woman who is shamed by her public nakedness (Nahum 3:5; Lamentations 1:8). There was no repentance. Instead there was just dependence on weaponry (1 Kings 7:2-6). The House of the Forest was an armory that was built by Solomon. When hearts are hardened to the message of God, they will always place trust in the things that cannot save.

¹¹ You made a reservoir between the two walls for the water of the old pool. But you did not look to him who did it, or see him who planned it long ago. Isaiah 22:11 They lived in the valley of vision, but they wouldn't receive the vision. They looked to the armory and water storage rather than to "look to him who did it."

How often we look for the worldly practical solution and forget that God is sovereign over all things? How many times in their history had God intervened in impossible situations? But God knew they would refuse to look to Him when this time would come. He knew this was coming when He called them to be His people. He knows prosperity often leads to spiritual decay. He knows we tend to trust in the flesh before we trust in Him. Yet, He purges us, allowing us to be winnowed and threshed by the world that we might be of eternal value (James 1:2-4). He teaches us that carnal ways won't meet our needs when times are difficult. Don't despise the chastening of the Lord or trials of life. Know that He is disciplining us for our good (Hebrews 12:5-6).

It's a sad prediction for the nation, but it is the mercy of God that is warning them of what is coming and telling them of the future hope. God is showing them they aren't different from those who will be their captors. They have the same priority of luxury at any cost. Worldly pleasure is their sole aim. Pleasure is their god regardless of what they claim. Their indictment is found in verses 12 and 13. *¹² In that day the Lord GOD of hosts called for weeping and mourning, for baldness and wearing sackcloth; ¹³ and behold, joy and gladness, killing oxen and slaughtering sheep, eating flesh and drinking wine. "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."* Isaiah 22:12-13

The siege was a chance for them to turn back to the Lord with weeping and sackcloth. Shaving the head was also a sign of repentance. Instead the people prepared to die in their sin. If the enemy was going to take their herds and wine storage, why not consume them now. This is what they lived for, so enjoy it and die. This is the attitude of the world, living for the temporal pleasures of this life (1 John 2:15-17). God meant for natural pleasures to be enjoyed in moderation as gifts from Him. Judah responded to the call to repent with defiance and rebellious revelry. The result would be prolonged starvation. This kind of defiant sin is self-defeating.

Paul contrasts the suffering that believers endure for the Lord with this attitude (1 Corinthian 15:32). He wrote that if our hope was in this life, we would have the same attitude. But instead we gladly endure because we know the resurrection is coming. We are living for the glory of God and eternity in His presence. By referring to this passage, Paul was shaming those in the Corinthian church who were still living for pleasure like the Jews before captivity and the Babylonians.

Commented [PW12]: Nahum 3:5 (ESV)
⁵ Behold, I am against you, declares the LORD of hosts, and will lift up your skirts over your face; and I will make nations look at your nakedness and kingdoms at your shame.

Commented [PW13]: Lamentations 1:8 (ESV)
⁸ Jerusalem sinned grievously; therefore she became filthy; all who honored her despise her, for they have seen her nakedness; she herself groans and turns her face away.

Commented [PW14]: 1 Kings 7:2-6 (ESV)
² He built the House of the Forest of Lebanon. Its length was a hundred cubits and its breadth fifty cubits and its height thirty cubits, and it was built on four rows of cedar pillars, with cedar beams on the pillars.
³ And it was covered with cedar above the chambers that were on the forty-five pillars, fifteen in each row.
⁴ There were window frames in three rows, and window opposite window in three tiers.
⁵ All the doorways and windows had square frames, and window was opposite window in three tiers.
⁶ And he made the Hall of Pillars; its length was fifty cubits, and its breadth thirty cubits. There was a porch in front with pillars, and a canopy in front of them.

Commented [PW15]: James 1:2-4 (ESV)
² Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds,
³ for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.
⁴ And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

Commented [PW16]: Hebrews 12:5-6 (ESV)
⁵ And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him.
⁶ For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives."

Commented [PW17]: 1 John 2:15-17 (ESV)
¹⁵ Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.
¹⁶ For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world.
¹⁷ And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

Commented [PW18]: 1 Corinthians 15:32 (ESV)
³² What do I gain if, humanly speaking, I fought with beasts at Ephesus? If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."

Chapter twenty-one closes with an example of why Judah was headed this direction. Under godly King Hezekiah there was an administrator name Shebna. Apparently he was not Jewish for his father's name is not mentioned and the name sounds Egyptian in origin. He misused his office and authority to try to make a name for himself. He wanted his tomb to be like that of the kings. He was a blot on Hezekiah's godly government.

Shebna made plans to be famous in Israel, but God made plans to hurl him out of the land. The same thing can happen in the church. Godly leaders try to act to exalt the Lord alone. However, some individuals crave recognition and honor. When our focus turns from glorifying God to being important and influential, we are in danger of being hurled out of the fellowship of the saints by the Lord Himself. Just as Shebna was a shame to Hezekiah's government, so we can be a shame to the church if we seek our own glory (John 7:18).

What Shebna labored for is given to Eliakim, whom God calls, "my servant." That is a title of high honor, for it will later be applied to the Messiah. Eliakim's fatherly heart of unselfish concern for the people is in contrast with Shebna's selfish ambitions. A fatherly heart is the heart every leader needs. It is a heart of genuine concern, protection, and provision. Isaiah predicted the key of David would be on Eliakim's shoulder. That means he would have the responsibility even though he did not hold the power.

Here again we have verses that are quoted in the New Testament. Jesus is said to hold the key of David and open what no man can shut, and shut what no man can open (Revelation 3:7). Eliakim's fatherly heart and faithfulness with his responsibilities was just a shadow of the coming Messiah. The contrast of the self-seeking Shebna and the fatherly heart of Eliakim is a picture of the contrast of governments of man and of the reign of Christ Jesus.

Though Eliakim is God's servant and given great authority over so much, the office Eliakim held would not last. The suddenness may imply an untimely death or simply that his position ended. Jesus on the other hand will reign forever (9:7). (Also see Hebrews 7:23-24)

Chapter twenty-three moves to the oracle of Tyre and Sidon. While Babylon conquered land by force, Tyre colonized and spread by trade. Nevertheless, Tyre was just as prideful as Babylon. Babylon worshiped power and oppression to attain what they desired. Tyre used trade to and commerce to obtain what their hearts lusted after. Neither looked to the Lord.

In verse eight the prophet asks who purposed this downfall of a nation that crowned kings. The next verse answers the question. ⁹ *The LORD of hosts has purposed it, to defile the pompous pride of all glory, to dishonor all the honored of the earth.* Isaiah 23:9 All who seek their own glory, glory in fallen man, will face the ever true maxim, "God opposes the proud." James 4:6 Nations or individuals that exalt themselves against God, who walk arrogantly as if they had no need of God will find themselves

Commented [PW19]: John 7:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ The one who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory; but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and in him there is no falsehood.

Commented [PW20]: Revelation 3:7 (ESV)

⁷ "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: 'The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens.'

Commented [PW21]: Revelation 3:7 (ESV)

⁷ "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: 'The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens.'

Commented [PW22]: Isaiah 9:7 (ESV)

⁷ Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

Commented [PW23]: Hebrews 7:23-24 (ESV)

²³ The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, ²⁴ but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever.

Commented [PW24]: James 4:6 (ESV)

⁶ But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

facing reality (Psalm 9:17). That is the faithfulness of God to turn them. When believers forget their need of a Savior on a daily basis, we will have trials to remind us of our need.

James tells us that **when God is so gracious as to give us trials, we should receive them with all joy.** If we can see that the end result is patient endurance, maturity, and not lacking any good thing, then we can make this our new and honest way of seeing the trials we face (James 1:2-4). Unlike these kingdoms that will fade into oblivion because they would not receive God's message or repent, we can repent and be willing to change. Trials make us face the reality that God's love allows difficulty to come into our lives to perfect us.

These nations could have been changed had they been willing to humble themselves and turn to God. We can change if we are willing to do the same. But it must be an unconditional surrender to the way God sees us and to His will for us. Humility is taking a backseat to God, and that is something these nations refused to do.

¹⁵ In that day Tyre will be forgotten for seventy years, like the days of one king. At the end of seventy years, it will happen to Tyre as in the song of the prostitute: Isaiah 23:15 Why was Tyre compared to a prostitute. E.J. Young tells us "For the sake of material gain men may sell their souls, as well as for the gratification of fleshly desires and appetites." This selling of our souls for temporal pleasure is like prostitution. This is the way of man and man's systems (Revelation 18:3).

The Lord told how short the memory of Tyre would be. One generation would pass and the glory of Tyre would be completely forgotten. I often think of this concept at funerals. I have done some funerals for wonderful, godly people, but even if they were the godliest saint I wonder how soon they will be forgotten? Depending on our calling, this could be true of us. How few names have endured?

Do you know of Charles Cowman? He was an amazing man of God whose labors for Christ resulted in every house in Japan receiving the Gospel. He took on Korea and started on China before world war broke out. He worked himself to heart failure. More than likely you never heard the name of this great servant of God.

The point I'm getting at is that **what this world remembers doesn't really matter. It is what heaven will be talking about through eternity.** Most of that talk will be about the grace of God that changed us and prepared good works in advance for us to walk in (Ephesians 2:10). We are only talking about Tyre because it is in God's Word. It is in God's Word to tell us that the memory of man is short and unimportant in eternity. What is highly esteemed among men is often an abomination in the eyes of God (Luke 16:15).

If the people of Tyre could have heard this message and received it, how their history would have changed. God gives us a preview of what that change looks like. *¹⁸ Her merchandise and her wages will be holy to the LORD. It will not be stored or hoarded, but her merchandise will supply abundant food and fine clothing for those who dwell*

Commented [PW25]: Psalm 9:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ The wicked shall return to Sheol, all the nations that forget God.

Commented [PW26]: James 1:2-4 (ESV)

² Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds,

³ for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.

⁴ And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

Commented [PW27]: Revelation 18:3 (ESV)

³ For all nations have drunk the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her luxurious living."

Commented [PW28]: Ephesians 2:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Commented [PW29]: Luke 16:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ And he said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.

before the LORD. Isaiah 23:18 Initially, Tyre's purpose was still self-centered, and still described as prostitution. But eventually she received God's invitation to do what lasts (Ezra 3:7). Change is possible. God can still bring Himself glory through your life.

This is God's invitation to us. Everything we do can be sacred (1 Corinthians 10:31). Everything we do can matter. Even our daily routine can be sanctified if we are living for the glory of God. Why do you get up each morning? Is it just for selfish, temporal pleasure or for the eternal glory of the One who made you?

Questions

- 1 What does Babylon represent? Why?
- 2 Why is the fall of Babylon and angelic cry?
- 3 How does the prophecy address God's people?
- 4 What is the application to Herod?
- 5 Where do the hardhearted turn?
- 6 How did Judah respond to God's plea for them to repent?
- 7 How did Paul use 22:13?
- 8 What/whom did Eliakim foreshadow?
- 9 How do we face trials with "all joy"?
- 10 Why was Tyre compared to a prostitute?
- 11 What is "forgotten in seventy years"?

Commented [PW30]: Ezra 3:7 (ESV)

⁷ So they gave money to the masons and the carpenters, and food, drink, and oil to the Sidonians and the Tyrians to bring cedar trees from Lebanon to the sea, to Joppa, according to the grant that they had from Cyrus king of Persia

Commented [PW31]: 1 Corinthians 10:31 (ESV)

³¹ So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.