

We are entering into a new section of the book of Isaiah. Like Jeremiah 46-51 and Ezekiel 25-32, Isaiah grouped his prophecies to other nations together in one section 13-27. We won't spend a lot of time on each, but will instead draw out some relevant points for us today.

Once again we come to a chapter in which the skeptics attempt to disavow Isaiah as the author. Because Isaiah is seeing into the distant future, long after his own lifetime, addressing the future kingdom of Babylon, the skeptics insist the passage must have been added by a later scribe. They claim it was either added, or the name of the country was changed to apply to their current situation. But the passage begins by declaring this is the vision of Isaiah son of Amoz. As the passage proceeds, it jumps back to Assyria, a nation that was no longer in existence in the time of Babylonian captivity of Israel. This shows us that it was written during Isaiah's lifetime. It was written in the same writing style as the first part of the book and only makes sense in light of the prophecies in that first section. The author also uses phrases that can be found in all three sections of the book.

I think the reason liberal scholars try so hard to discredit prophecy is that it would show divine origin (1 Peter 1:21). That would imply responsibility to hear and obey the principles, which is something they are unwilling to do. So the attempt goes on, often in the face of historical and literary evidence.

The theme of next fifteen chapters is that God is sovereign over the nations. Though Judah will go into captivity, nothing can thwart God's plan of bringing the Messiah and His kingdom. All the rising powers and the tumult of the nations, as frightful as these may seem, were all under the control of Almighty God. As we have seen before, though these nations were violent in exercising their own free will, God directed the defeat of kingdoms for His own purposes. He could still judge the tool in His hand for the excesses that they chose to exhibit (10:12).

It has been argued that the violence in the Old Testament could be used to justify brutal acts of warfare today. It is one thing for us in our secure homes, who have never had our loved ones slaughtered simply because they are Christians, to speak of non-violence. But for many in the world today, having lost a loved one or be personally maimed because of your faith is a painful reality. What keeps us from retaliating in the same brutal manner? **God's justice upon nations that are brutal should warn us against being like those nations.**

We seek to imitate God's nature as much as humanly possible. When it comes to judging others, God tells us emphatically that vengeance is His, and He promises to repay (Romans 12:19). Sometimes we see it in this life. Most of the time it comes later. While we should oppose injustice and can't dispense justice on our own terms, what do we do when injustice prevails? What do you do when the con gets away scot-free and

**Commented [PW1]: 2 Peter 1:21 (ESV)**

<sup>21</sup> For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

**Commented [PW2]: Isaiah 10:12 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> When the Lord has finished all his work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, he will punish the speech of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria and the boastful look in his eyes.

**Commented [PW3]: Romans 12:19 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."

laughs at you? Where do we turn when our loved one is harmed and the perpetrator gets away with it? Some of you have had to deal with this lately. This world is often inequitable in its dispensing of justice.

We have to turn to the fact that God is utterly just and He will give each one what he or she deserves (Deuteronomy 32:4). What peace this can give us in the face of injustice! God sees all and knows all and will see justice is served (Hebrews 4:13). The guilty will pay, unless they humble themselves and turn to the only available recourse for sin, Jesus. Our agony over injustice is often shortsighted. "The day of the Lord" is a day when even God's high standard of justice will be satisfied. In the New Testament it is referred to as the "day of our Jesus Christ" because He is the One through whom God will judge the world (1 Corinthians 1:8). He is the reason we don't take matters into our own hands. Only He can enable us to love our enemies (Matthew 5:44).

Isaiah is addressing that coming day for Babylon. **Babylon is a type of all those systems and governments that exalt themselves against God.** The prophets used Babylon to represent these anti-Christ systems because the first great organized effort to defy God was the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11). As with many of the prophecies we have seen, this one is also fulfilled in the immediate and distant future. The judgment that was coming against Babylon would take place by the hands of the Medes in 539 B.C., but Jesus quoted chapter 13 verse 10 when He spoke of His return. <sup>29</sup> *"Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.* Matthew 24:29 It will be a day when the world's armies battle Jesus. While Babylon's defeat was a day in history, it was a preview of that ultimate day. And so too is every major war. John the Revelator speaks of a future judgment of Babylon, meaning the whole human effort of defying God and His people.

Throughout the prophecies to the nations, there runs a common thread that God is addressing. The pride of nations keeps them from God and from acting in a way that is acceptable to Him. Babylon is the first example because, of all the nations mentioned, it seemed to be the most sure to succeed. From its hanging gardens to its immense fortified walls, they truly believed they were unbeatable. In fact, when they were attacked by the Medes, they threw a party to celebrate their gods, and brought out vessels they had taken from the temple in Jerusalem with which to drink wine (Daniel 5:23). They praised the gods of gold and silver as the Medes diverted the river that ran under the city, providing them an attack route which led to the city's downfall that very night.

They did not fear God. One of the points that God is making through Isaiah's prophecies is that He is no local area deity. He is the Creator of heaven and earth and every nation answers to Him. Every person will answer to Him. The nations will answer to Him in history. We will answer to Him at His throne of judgment (Romans 14:12).

Wars will continue until the final battle against God (Matthew 24:6). Wars throughout history are really just precursors. One side or both are fighting God, for they are treating those made in God's image as cannon fodder to obtain what they want. God will raise up nations to resist other nations in their greed and arrogance, but those nations will also be accountable for how they conduct themselves in warfare.

**Commented [PW4]: Deuteronomy 32:4 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> "The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he.

**Commented [PW5]: Hebrews 4:13 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

**Commented [PW6]: 1 Corinthians 1:8 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup> who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**Commented [PW7]: Matthew 5:44 (ESV)**

<sup>44</sup> But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

**Commented [PW8]: Daniel 5:23 (ESV)**

<sup>23</sup> but you have lifted up yourself against the Lord of heaven. And the vessels of his house have been brought in before you, and you and your lords, your wives, and your concubines have drunk wine from them. And you have praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood, and stone, which do not see or hear or know, but the God in whose hand is your breath, and whose are all your ways, you have not honored.

**Commented [PW9]: Romans 14:12 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.

**Commented [PW10]: Matthew 24:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet.

As with Isaiah's previous prophecies, there is inserted in the midst of these judgments a word of promise. <sup>1</sup> *For the LORD will have compassion on Jacob and will again choose Israel, and will set them in their own land, and sojourners will join them and will attach themselves to the house of Jacob.* <sup>2</sup> *And the peoples will take them and bring them to their place, and the house of Israel will possess them in the LORD's land as male and female slaves. They will take captive those who were their captors, and rule over those who oppressed them.* Isaiah 14:1-2

Remember the three themes that Isaiah is addressing: the judgment of Israel, the coming captivity and return, and the coming Messiah. In the midst of telling of the judgments of the nations surrounding Israel, God reminds His people that His purposes are intact. They will return from captivity to the Promised Land. They will prosper again. In verse one there is a hint of the inclusion of the Gentiles as sojourners attach themselves to Israel. When we come to faith in the Messiah, we Gentiles are grafted in (Romans 11:17). While some from the captivity purchased slaves on their return, a greater fulfillment is found in the Gentiles becoming servants of the Lord.

I appreciate the way the Lord interjects these little rays of hope and promise. It tells us that life can be very hard at times, but God has a plan and His purposes will prevail. Like those in the hall of faith in Hebrews chapter eleven, we will probably die in faith not receiving the promises. Yet, we know God is at work and has something better in mind for us. The author of that passage says it was for the purpose of them attaining a better resurrection (Hebrews 11:35). God has the eternal perspective while we are focused so much on the temporal. That is why the grace of God keeps interjecting these words of promise into this book and into our lives. It helps us change our focus.

Chapter fourteen continues with the taunt that will be raised against fallen Babylon. Remember, Babylon is not even a nation yet and Isaiah is telling them the song they will sing after it falls. The reason for this is that Babylon will be the nation that takes captive what is left of Israel. It will seem that the plan of the coming Messiah and His kingdom has been thwarted. So God is telling them in advance what they will sing. Some believe this description of the fall of the king of Babylon parallels the fall of Satan or the Anti-Christ (2 Thessalonians 2:4). In a remote sense that may be true.

The taunt tells of five "I wills" that declare the pride of Babylon's kings. <sup>13</sup> *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 on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north;'* <sup>14</sup> *I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.'* Isaiah 14:13-14 In Babylon's attempt to rule the world, they were voiding the promises of God, and that can't happen. It was Babylon or the Word. The Word will always prevail. These kings were as insolent and arrogant as one could be. Now they are worm food. Hell declares the depths to which they have fallen. Each of them became just another prideful but helpless soul in Hades unable to demand attention or control a single thing.

Prestige in this world often means nothing in eternity (Luke 16:15). In fact, God Almighty resists the proud (James 4:6). That is the message to these nations. For all

**Commented [PW11]: Romans 11:17 (ESV)**

<sup>17</sup> But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree,

**Commented [PW12]: Hebrews 11:35 (ESV)**

<sup>35</sup> Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life.

**Commented [PW13]: 2 Thessalonians 2:4 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.

**Commented [PW14]: Luke 16:15 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> 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.

**Commented [PW15]: James 4:6 (ESV)**

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

the might they thought they possessed, each was told how they would be brought low. <sup>6</sup> *We have heard of the pride of Moab— how proud he is!— of his arrogance, his pride, and his insolence; in his idle boasting he is not right.* Isaiah 16:6 These nations stand condemned because they ignored the God of Israel trusted their idols. They dare to boast before God.

Pride is the downfall of nations. They become so sure of their greatness that they think they are undefeatable. Then they lose the fear of God, become undisciplined, and unprepared, ripe pickings for another nation eager to take their place. We see the cycle again and again in history, yet we don't learn. But it will continue until the day of the Lord. The only difference is that prophecy seems to indicate that man will become increasingly anti-Christ (Matthew 24:12). How else would they dare to consider resisting His glorious appearance? And isn't it that way with individuals? God works on our heart time and time again and yet we keep looking to ourselves for direction and deciding on our own what we will do regardless of God's direction for our lives. Nations simply reflect the heart of man.

In chapter seventeen God tells us what it often takes for us to turn to Him. He describes the failure of crops that result in hardship. When we forget God, desolation is often the only thing that will force us to turn back to Him. <sup>7</sup> *In that day man will look to his Maker, and his eyes will look on the Holy One of Israel.* <sup>8</sup> *He will not look to the altars, the work of his hands, and he will not look on what his own fingers have made, either the Asherim or the altars of incense.* Isaiah 17:7-8

God works through the hardship that is often a result of our sin to remind us of what we have lost. Sin always promises more than it can deliver and costs us more than we are willing to pay (Romans 6:23). When we have nowhere else to turn, we let go of the control of our lives and surrender. It doesn't have to be so hard, but we often insist that it be so by our choices. God doesn't want it to be so hard.

In the previous chapter Isaiah was crying over Moab (15:5). Though they had been enemies of Israel and refused to take their refugees in the day of calamity, his heart was broken over what the Moabites would face. That was the heart of God in Isaiah weeping for them. He longs that we see through the deceptiveness of sin and yield to Him.

In Dickson's talks on Freedom in the Ten Commandments he shared a personal illustration that helped him grasp the freedom found in following God's ways. He had been skiing for years but thought he would buy some lessons for his son and take a few himself. The teacher tried to tell him how to make a slight difference in his turns, doing a little hop and digging in a certain way. He struggled changing his longtime habit of how he went through a turn, but once he forced himself to change, he found it was so much better than the way he had done it. It added a whole new pleasure to skiing. It was a rule to which he conformed to find a new joy and freedom. That freedom is what Moab could have experienced had they come under the reign of the Davidic kings and worshiped with Israel. But they were not willing to make the change (16:5).

**Commented [PW16]: Matthew 24:12 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold.

**Commented [PW17]: Romans 6:23 (ESV)**

<sup>23</sup> For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

**Commented [PW18]: Isaiah 15:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> My heart cries out for Moab; her fugitives flee to Zoar, to Eglath-shelishiyah. For at the ascent of Luhith they go up weeping; on the road to Horonaim they raise a cry of destruction;

**Commented [PW19]: Isaiah 16:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> then a throne will be established in steadfast love, and on it will sit in faithfulness in the tent of David one who judges and seeks justice and is swift to do righteousness."

God goes through the list of the nations that surrounded Israel: Babylon, Assyria, Philistia, Moab, Syria (Damascus), and Egypt. Why did He bother to tell them when they weren't going to change? On the Day of Judgment they will not be able to say that they didn't know God's will. Perhaps a few did hear and change. A hundred years later when Judah was taken captive they knew that their captors, the Babylonians, would one day fall. They knew the taunt they would sing. It encouraged their faith to read God was faithful to His Word. And if He was faithful to do that, then surely He would be faithful to bring the Messiah and the kingdom of God as well.

And what of us? Do we look back and see the faithfulness of God to fulfill His Word and allow our faith to be strengthened by the fact He did send the Messiah? Do we trust Him today and look to Him or to our own abilities and in our pride resist His directions to us? Do we lean to our own understanding or do we pray and seek His direction (Proverbs 3:5)? Are we anxious about situations or are we walking by faith in His goodness (Philippians 4:6)?

Chapter nineteen closes with surprise of which most people are unaware. It's a prophecy of which we have only seen a partial fulfillment. The Lord cuts off all which Egypt depends on; and the amazing result is that Egypt and Assyria begin to worship the Lord and bring offerings to Jerusalem. <sup>21</sup> *And the LORD will make himself known to the Egyptians, and the Egyptians will know the LORD in that day and worship with sacrifice and offering, and they will make vows to the LORD and perform them.* <sup>22</sup> *And the LORD will strike Egypt, striking and healing, and they will return to the LORD, and he will listen to their pleas for mercy and heal them.* <sup>23</sup> *In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and Assyria will come into Egypt, and Egypt into Assyria, and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians.* <sup>24</sup> *In that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth,* <sup>25</sup> *whom the LORD of hosts has blessed, saying, "Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my inheritance."* Isaiah 19:21-25

There have been Christians in these nations since the first century. However, right now, Egypt and Assyria are Muslim nations. But God is declaring that will change. I don't know if this is during the millennial kingdom or before. It is a fascinating prophecy. It speaks of God's desire that none should perish (2 Peter 3:9).

How could that possibly happen? We do hear of numerous conversions through dreams and visions, but it is still unimaginable. Egypt has booted the Muslim brotherhood but it has certainly not helped the Christians. While many are converting, many Christians are still fleeing these countries as well. We'll have to wait and see how this unfolds.

In chapter twenty, Assyria defeated the Philistine town of Ashdod (20:1). Isaiah was told to walk naked for three years as a sign to Egypt and Cush that they would be the next slaves taken into captivity (20:2-3). I'm glad the office of prophet is over (Luke 16:16). I much prefer preaching the message than acting it out as a drama. You probably prefer receiving the message that way too, I hope.

We can't go over these messages to the nations without thinking of how it applies to us as a nation. Are we humbling ourselves before God and looking to Him? There have

**Commented [PW20]: Proverbs 3:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.

**Commented [PW21]: Philippians 4:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

**Commented [PW22]: 2 Peter 3:9 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

**Commented [PW23]: Isaiah 20:1 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> In the year that the commander in chief, who was sent by Sargon the king of Assyria, came to Ashdod and fought against it and captured it—

**Commented [PW24]: Isaiah 20:2-3 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> at that time the LORD spoke by Isaiah the son of Amoz, saying, "Go, and loose the sackcloth from your waist and take off your sandals from your feet," and he did so, walking naked and barefoot.

<sup>3</sup> Then the LORD said, "As my servant Isaiah has walked naked and barefoot for three years as a sign and a portent against Egypt and Cush,

**Commented [PW25]: Luke 16:16 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> "The Law and the Prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone forces his way into it.

been 143 national calls to prayer, humiliation, fasting and thanksgiving from the office of the President of the United States, but they seem to be decreasing in frequency and attendance. Where are we looking for guidance? It all starts with each individual, then our homes, then as a church, and the community in which we live. **If we are to change culture we must individually change first.** Jesus must become our life. We must let His love give us our priorities. Then as a church we must depend on God and be led by Him. Then we must let our light shine in our communities, unafraid and unashamed to show His love, to invite others to church, and to talk about issues of faith. Jesus invites us into an all-consuming relationship of faith.

Questions:

- 1 How can we tell Isaiah wrote this?
- 2 Where do we turn when evil wins?
- 3 What does Babylon represent?
- 4 What verse did Jesus refer to?
- 5 What was the word of hope?
- 6 Why did God give them the taunt in advance?
- 7 Why did God give them the taunt for Babylon so far in advance?
- 8 Review the five "I will".
- 9 What can it take to turn us back to God?
- 10 Why warn those who won't hear?
- 11 What is the surprise prediction?