

ISAIAH: **THE GLORY OF GOD IN A WORLD OF CHAOS**

Part 5: “The Power of God Over the Powers of Darkness”

Isaiah 13:9-11; 14:3-6, 12-17; 25:6-9

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Scripture Reading

“Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the land a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it. For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light. I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will put an end to the pomp of the arrogant, and lay low the pompous pride of the ruthless” (Isaiah 13:9–11, ESV).

“When the LORD has given you rest from your pain and turmoil and the hard service with which you were made to serve, you will take up this taunt against the king of Babylon: ‘How the oppressor has ceased, the insolent fury ceased! The LORD has broken the staff of the wicked, the scepter of rulers, that struck the peoples in wrath with unceasing blows, that ruled the nations in anger with unrelenting persecution... How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low! 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; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.’ But you are brought down to Sheol, to the far reaches of the pit. Those who see you will stare at you and ponder over you: ‘Is this the man who made the earth tremble, who shook kingdoms, who made the world like a desert and overthrew its cities, who did not let his prisoners go home?’” (Isaiah 14:3-6; 12-17, ESV).

“On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined. And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken. It will be said on that day, ‘Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the LORD; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation” (Isaiah 25:6–9, ESV).

Almighty and Everlasting God, we thank you for the gift of your revealed Word. May your Holy Spirit give us eyes to see your glory as we look into your Scriptures. In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

Introduction

During this fall, we have been walking through a sermon series entitled “*Isaiah: The Glory of God in a World of Chaos*.” Instead of doing a line-by-line, verse-by-verse study, we are taking a broad-angle view of Isaiah’s long, sprawling Old Testament prophecy.

Isaiah is an unbelievably significant book of the Bible.

The words of Isaiah are quoted in the New Testament more than any other prophet. In my opinion, Isaiah is woefully under-taught in the American church. But I also believe the truth contained in Isaiah is crucial and timely for us in our own cultural moment. So, if you stick with us, I am hoping that by the end of this year, you will have a solid understanding of the movements and the message of this magnificent and mysterious part of holy Scripture.

With that said, I have an ambitious goal for this morning. I am going to attempt to cover a section of Isaiah that spans from Isaiah, chapter 13, all the way to chapter 27. But these sections do go together and comprise a united literary unit, so I think it is helpful to look at this section as a whole.

Fair warning, I am going to throw a lot of Scripture at you today. But if you can hang on for the ride, you’re going to see that Isaiah has some brilliant and profound things to say. So, buckle up.

The context is the Syro-Ephraimite War (736-732 B.C.) [show [The Assyrian Empire](#)]. The brutal and powerful Assyrian Empire is invading the peoples of the Promise Land. This was the defining crisis of Isaiah’s lifetime. By Assyria, the nation of Syria will fall. The nation of Philistia will fall. The northern kingdom of Israel will fall. And in the southern kingdom of Judah, where Isaiah the prophet is ministering, the people of God are wondering if they too will fall into destruction.

In today’s Scripture readings, God answers the question everyone is asking, but in a very unexpected way. The people of Judah want to know what God is planning to do with Assyria. But God is going to show them his *plan for history*. The people of Judah want to know about the day when Assyria will be defeated. But God – through Isaiah – is going to tell them about “the Day of the Lord,” which will become a key concept of which many of the Old Testament prophets will speak.¹

¹ On the “Day of the Lord” see: Isa 13:6; 58:13; Jer 46:10; Eze 13:5; 30:3; Joel 1:15; Joel 2:1, 11, 31; 3:14; Amos 5:18, 20; Oba 15; Zep 1:7–8, 14; Mal 4:5

Look at Isa 13:9, “Behold, **the day of the LORD** comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the land a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it. For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light. I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will put an end to the pomp of the arrogant, and lay low the pompous pride of the ruthless” (Isa 13:9–11, ESV).

The “Day of the Lord” [show 2“**The Great Day of His Wrath**” by John Martin (1853)] is a day of judgment, a day of cataclysm, a day when the world is turned upside down. Admittedly, this is meant to be a truly sobering and terrifying vision that fills us with holy fear. But, for the Old Testament prophets, it was also a day of great and profound hope for the downtrodden and weak. Why? Because the Day of the Lord is the day when the powers of evil will be brought to justice, all brokenness will be healed, and creation will be restored.

But there is no justice without judgment. So, in the large section of Isaiah, we are surveying today, chapters 13 through 24 are composed of God’s oracles against the nations. God is asserting his Lordship – not just over Judah and Israel – but over all nations of the world. He is the divine judge who will put the world to rights. And, after these words of judgment, we have a vision of restoration for Israel, the nations, and all of the cosmos in chapters 25 through 27.

It might be tempting to get caught up in the specific predictions that God is making for the future of various nations in this section. But rather than getting distracted by the details, I want you to see the big picture that Isaiah is inviting us to see. He is showing us that when the empires of wicked men look invincible and terrifying, we need a vision of the infinite power of God over the powers of darkness!

Exposition

1. God’s Power Over Babylon

Chapter 13 begins a section in Isaiah known as the oracles (or prophetic judgments) against the nations. And you would think, since Isaiah is in the middle of the Assyrian crisis, that the first nation to be judged would be Assyria. But instead, the first nation up to bat is the nation of Babylon. Look at Isaiah 13:1: “**The oracle concerning Babylon which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw**” (Isa 13:1, ESV).

Babylon [show 3**Babylon in Isaiah’s lifetime**] is located over 500 miles east from the land of Judah. During Isaiah’s lifetime, Babylon was just like everyone else in that they, too, were getting beat up by Assyria. But there is a reason why Babylon is first in the list of judged nations. There is a reason that Babylon serves as a symbol for all wicked nations. After all, Babylon has a history.

The first time we encounter Babylon in history is in Genesis 11, otherwise known as the story of the Tower of Babel (Gen 11:1-9). It was here where the peoples of the world gathered, and instead of filling the earth and subduing it as God commanded in Gen

1:28, the people of Babel decided to make a name for themselves by building a tower that reached into the heavens.

Most biblical scholars and archeologists believe the Genesis 11 description of the tower of Babel would be similar to an ancient Mesopotamian Ziggurat [show image of 4Ziggurat], which was a type of pagan temple in the Ancient Near East. This structure was not an experiment of innovative architecture; it was an attempt to build *a literal stairway to heaven*. Babel was an attempt for man to put himself in the place of God and manage God on his own terms. The end result was division and destruction.²

This is why Babylon must be judged. Babylon is a living symbol of the world in rebellion against God [show 5“The Tower of Babel” by Pieter Brueghel (1563)]. Even in the New Testament, Babylon continues to be the dominant metaphor for the city of man set against the city of God.

Even more, what the people of Judah during Isaiah’s lifetime do not yet know, the kingdom of Judah will not fall by the hand of Assyria. They will fall to Babylon. Babylon will become the instrument of God’s discipline for his people.

In the year 587 B.C., Babylon will destroy Jerusalem, burn the temple of God to the ground, and take the Jewish people from their Promised Land. And while God’s people are in Babylon, God calls them to embrace the identity of God’s people in exile. God’s people are live *in Babylon*, but not be *of Babylon*.

As the prophet Jeremiah wrote to the Jews in Babylonian exile, “*Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare*” (Jeremiah 29:4–7, ESV).

As we saw in the book of 1 Peter this last summer, the New Testament calls Christians to live as “elect exiles” (1 Pt 1:1). We are God’s chosen people. But we live in a world that is not our own. We are called to live distinctly as missionary ambassadors of the kingdom of God, even while we live in the kingdom of men. We are to live in the world, but not be of the world. We are to seek the good of our “Babylon,” but our highest allegiance must not belong to Babylon.

Babylon has been used and will continue to be used as a tool of discipline for God’s people. But Babylon is still an enemy that will be defeated and receive its due justice.

² Dt 32:8 would suggest that Babel also led to spiritual oppression by demonic powers and principalities. See Block, *The Gods of the Nations* and Heiser, *Demons*.

Isaiah later says, *“And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the splendor and pomp of the Chaldeans, will be like Sodom and Gomorrah when God overthrew them”* (Isaiah 13:19, ESV).

There was a day in the early first century A.D. when a Jewish rabbi stepped out of the wilderness. His first words were, *“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel”* (Mk 1:15, ESV).

On that day, Jesus announced the inauguration of the kingdom of God and the beginning of the end of the kingdom of Babylon.

As Christians, we must not put our hope or allegiance in any version of Babylon. We must not be formed or conformed to Babylon (cf. Rom 12:2). We must come out of Babylon if we are living in compromise (Rev. 18:2-4). For Babylon will fall, but the kingdom of Jesus will never end (Isa 9:7).

2. God’s Power Over the King of Babylon

In Isaiah 14, Isaiah shifts his focus from the nation of Babylon to the king of Babylon: *“you will take up this taunt against the king of Babylon: ‘How the oppressor has ceased, the insolent fury ceased! The LORD has broken the staff of the wicked, the scepter of rulers, that struck the peoples in wrath with unceasing blows, that ruled the nations in anger with unrelenting persecution’”* (Isa 14:4–6, ESV).

Now, Isaiah probably had a particular human ruler of Babylon in view when he wrote this taunt. Different scholars have different views on who that ruler might be. Isaiah 14 refers to nothing less than a wicked human ruler, but it almost certainly refers to something more. Just as Babylon has become a symbol for the kingdom of the world, the king of Babylon here becomes a symbol for the spiritual power of evil that stands behind the kingdom of this world. Here, the king of Babylon refers also to *“the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan”* (Rev 20:2; cf. Gen 3:1).

Especially in the latter portion of our reading, it is clear that the being referred to in Isaiah 14 is more than a human king: *“How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low! 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; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High’”* (Isa 14:12–14, ESV).

This text seems to describe the fall of Satan [show **6“Satan Descends to Earth” by Gustave Doré (1866)**], who is portrayed in the Old and New Testaments as the original rebel against God. He is a spiritual being who is the ancient enemy of God and his people.

When mankind rebelled against God, instead of gaining freedom, we plunged ourselves into tyranny under this evil one who has since the dawn of creation sought to bring deception, destruction, and death onto God's image-bearers.

Now, I will be the first to admit the notion of the devil and demons is quite the challenge to a post-Enlightenment world that is encased within a worldview of naturalism and materialism. Even well-intentioned believers have tried to find ways to demythologize parts of the Bible that refer to spiritual beings and the unseen realm.

But make no mistake: the biblical view of reality includes the notions of angels and demons. The Bible teaches us that part of the reason there is an enduring power of evil in this world is that there are spiritual powers of darkness that actively work against all that is good, true, and beautiful.

There is much to say about this topic that is well outside the scope of this one sermon. But it suffices to say that the Bible teaches us that we do have a spiritual enemy. That enemy is real. That enemy is powerful. But that enemy is *doomed*.

At the cross of Jesus, our spiritual enemy was defeated, and his claim on our lives was revoked. As the Apostle Paul wrote to the Colossian church, *"And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him"* (Col 2:13–15, ESV).

By the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, the power of Satan was broken (Eph 1:20-23). When Jesus returns, the power of Satan will be forever vanquished.

To see what Isaiah sees – to see God's glory above our chaos – we need to see that Christ isn't just a good shepherd. He isn't just a friend to the weak. Jesus Christ – God in human flesh – is a mighty warrior who fights on behalf of his people. He contends with the spiritual enemies that we could never defeat in our own strength.

Toward the end of his book, Isaiah says this about our warrior God, *"He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head; he put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped himself in zeal as a cloak"* (Isa 59:17, ESV).

The only way we can successfully fight our spiritual war is to abide in our God, who is mightier than our enemy. We are no longer citizens of Babylon. We are no longer under the dominion of the king of Babylon. Our allegiance is to Jesus, our warrior King. We win our spiritual battles when we abide in him.

Or, as the Apostle Paul tells us, with very Isaianic language, *"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and*

blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Eph 6:10–17, ESV).

3. God’s Power Over Death

1 Cor 15:25-26 tells us, “*[Christ] must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death” (1 Cor 15:25–26, ESV).*

The Bible teaches us that our sin against God has fractured God’s good creation. Our betrayal begat brokenness; that brokenness culminates in the tragic power of death.

But after all the judgment against the nations and the spiritual powers of the nations, Isaiah has a vision of a day when the brokenness of creation will be healed. Isaiah sees a day coming when death shall die, “*And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken” (Isa 25:7–8, ESV).*

Here in the Old Testament, we see the promise. But in the New Testament, we see the Person.

At the cross, Jesus gave himself as our substitute. As one who was fully man, he endured the curse and penalty of sin of men. He allowed himself to be overcome by the power of death so that when he overcame death by His resurrection, the dominion of death would have no claim on him nor anyone who has been united with him by faith.

For Isaiah, the end of history is a feast, celebrating the victory of God over all his enemies. That feast will be held on the mountain of the Lord. Elsewhere in Isaiah, we learn that on this mountain, swords will be beaten into plowshares, and the art of war will be forgotten (Isa 2:2-4). On this mountain, the knowledge of the earth will cover the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea (Isa 11:9). On this mountain, what was lost at Eden will be restored with even greater glory.

But there is one last surprise.

Not only will the people of Judah and Israel be saved by their God, but peoples from all nations will be invited to enjoy this feast. People who once belonged to the enemy nations, who were once objects of wrath and judgment, will be brought into the family of God!

*“On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for **all peoples** a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined” (Isa 25:6, ESV)*

Conclusion

We, too, live in a time of chaos. We, too, have questions about when this season and how this season will end.

In this season, we have a dual temptation: we can grow hopeless in uncertainty and despair, or we can place our hope in the kings and kingdoms of this world that are powerless to save.

We, too, need a prophetic vision of the future. We need a new way of seeing.

Redeemer Christian Church, may we hear the words of Isaiah the prophet, and in hearing would we learn to see the glory of God in this world of chaos. May we learn to rest in our God who is infinitely more powerful than the power of the world, the power of Satan, and even the power of death.

AMEN.

Discussion Starters for Gospel Communities

- 1. Read Isaiah 13:9-11. From this passage, what can we know about the “Day of the Lord”? Why should this day fill us with a sense of both holy fear and eager hope?*
- 2. Isaiah 13 is an oracle against the nation Babylon. We first encounter Babylon/Babel in Gen 11:1-9. Read Gen 11:1-9. Why do you think Babylon becomes such a dominant metaphor in the Bible for a kingdom that is opposed to God (see: Rev 18)?*
- 3. Read Isaiah 14:3-17. Many biblical scholars have associated the king of Babylon in this passage with Satan. Why is it such good news that Satan is doomed to defeat?*
- 4. Read and compare Isaiah 59:17 and Eph 6:10-17. What do these passages teach us about spiritual warfare?*
- 5. Read Isa 25:6-9. What is significant about this vision coming after God’s pronounced judgments against the nations (Isa 13-24)? How does this passage fill you with hope?*

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