

Isaiah 13

Isaiah 13:1-22

¹ The burden against Babylon which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw. ² "Lift up a banner on the high mountain, Raise your voice to them; Wave your hand, that they may enter the gates of the nobles. ³ I have commanded My sanctified ones; I have also called My mighty ones for My anger-- Those who rejoice in My exaltation." ⁴ The noise of a multitude in the mountains, Like that of many people! A tumultuous noise of the kingdoms of nations gathered together! The LORD of hosts musters The army for battle. ⁵ They come from a far country, From the end of heaven-- The LORD and His weapons of indignation, To destroy the whole land. ⁶ Wail, for the day of the LORD *is* at hand! It will come as destruction from the Almighty. ⁷ Therefore all hands will be limp, Every man's heart will melt, ⁸ And they will be afraid. Pangs and sorrows will take hold of *them*; They will be in pain as a woman in childbirth; They will be amazed at one another; Their faces *will be like* flames. ⁹ Behold, the day of the LORD comes, Cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger, To lay the land desolate; And He will destroy its sinners from it. ¹⁰ For the stars of heaven and their constellations Will not give their light; The sun will be darkened in its going forth, And the moon will not cause its light to shine. ¹¹ "I will punish the world for *its* evil, And the wicked for their iniquity; I will halt the arrogance of the proud, And will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible. ¹² I will make a mortal more rare than fine gold, A man more than the golden wedge of Ophir. ¹³ Therefore I will shake the heavens, And the earth will move out of her place, In the wrath of the LORD of hosts And in the day of His fierce anger. ¹⁴ It shall be as the hunted gazelle, And as a sheep that no man takes up; Every man will turn to his own people, And everyone will flee to his own land. ¹⁵ Everyone who is found will be thrust through, And everyone who is captured will fall by the sword. ¹⁶ Their children also will be dashed to pieces before their eyes; Their houses will be plundered And their wives ravished. ¹⁷ "Behold, I will stir up the Medes against them, Who will not regard silver; And *as for* gold, they will not delight in it. ¹⁸ Also *their* bows will dash the young men to pieces, And they will have no pity on the fruit of the womb; Their eye will not spare children. ¹⁹ And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, The beauty of the Chaldeans' pride, Will be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. ²⁰ It will never be inhabited, Nor will it be settled from generation to generation; Nor will the Arabian pitch tents there, Nor will the shepherds make their sheepfolds there. ²¹ But wild beasts of the desert will lie there, And their houses will be full of owls; Ostriches will dwell there, And wild goats will caper there. ²² The hyenas will howl in their citadels, And jackals in their pleasant palaces. Her time *is* near to come, And her days will not be prolonged."

I am not going to go verse by verse as much as usual this morning. This text has some difficulties that scholars don't agree on. But there are some things that are clear, no matter what. These are the truths we will focus on.

The layout of the text goes like this as I understand it.

The whole passage is talking about two things.

First it is talking about the limited destruction of Babylon by its attackers. This is going to happen because of how ruthless the Babylonians were to God's people. But it doesn't stay limited to the punishment of the Babylonians. It spreads to God's wrath on the whole world. That is the second point. The difficulty is knowing which verse is talking about which.

We are helped in knowing that the word "Babylon" is used as an actual place and it is also used as a symbol for all the collective efforts of human pride to defy God and ultimately replace Him.

It starts with Babel- the root word of Babylon.

Genesis 11:1-9

¹ Now the whole earth had one language and one speech. ² And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there. ³ Then they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They had brick for stone, and they had asphalt for mortar. ⁴ And they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth." ⁵ But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. ⁶ And the LORD said, "Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them. ⁷ Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." ⁸ So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city. ⁹ Therefore its name is called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.

Humanism is nothing new. And evidently human potential, unchecked by God, has a greater capacity than we might think. I think it is a bit ironic that the church has bought the lie that the secret to mental health is self esteem. These people in Babel probably had **great** self esteem. Look at how well they were doing at earning the wrath of God. What humans need is the correct **God-esteem**. Liking ourselves is not the beginning of wisdom. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. These people saw **what they could do** but did not concern themselves with **what God could do**.

And look what the Lord did to all their technological attempts. He threw a wrench in the works. He caused their advancements to come to a halt. Why? My guess is that technological advancements would have sped up the time table regarding when God would have to end the project earth. He delayed it to have more people with Him for eternity. Keep in mind, in doing this he also prolonged suffering. The two go hand in hand.

So our **first** Babylon is the tower of Babel.

Let's look at more references.

1 Peter 5:13

¹³ **She who is in Babylon, elect together with you, greets you; and so does Mark my son.**

This was not a reference to the actual location of Babylon. It was a reference to Rome. So here Rome is Babylon. It is the icon to the pride of man attempting to take over the world for itself.

Revelation 14:8

⁸ **And another angel followed, saying, "Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication."**

MacArthur says that “It may be that a restored city of **Babylon** will be Antichrist's capital city. But **Babylon** in this passage refers not just to the city, but to Antichrist's worldwide political, economic, and religious empire.”

MacArthur New Testament Commentary, The - MacArthur New Testament Commentary – Revelation 12-22.

That is a very common view. It may be Rome. It may be the actual city of Babylon. Or it may be something else. But it will be the center of man's pride and arrogance against God.

So while our text begins by talking about the literal fall of the physical place, it is a natural extension to move beyond the **literal place** to the **spirit** of Babylon. This **larger Babylon** will suffer the same fate as the **literal** Babylon. Annihilation. And it will be just as deserved.

This insight given to us by the rest of scripture helps us better understand our text and why the Holy Spirit may have presented it the way He did. We should understand that **what will soon happen to Babylon, the city**, in Isaiah's day is a picture of what would eventually happen globally.

I have picked a passage out of the middle of our text that appears to be about global punishment to make a point.

⁹ **Behold, the day of the LORD comes, Cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger, To lay the land desolate; And He will destroy its sinners from it.** ¹⁰ **For the stars of heaven and their constellations Will not give their light; The sun will be darkened in its going forth, And the moon will not cause its light to shine.** ¹¹ **"I**

will punish the world for *its* evil, And the wicked for their iniquity; I will halt the arrogance of the proud, And will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible.¹² I will make a mortal more rare than fine gold, A man more than the golden wedge of Ophir.¹³ Therefore I will shake the heavens, And the earth will move out of her place, In the wrath of the LORD of hosts And in the day of His fierce anger.

An artist I tend to like wrote this song. He is probably a Christian. But listen to what he says.

Here comes the helicopter, second time today
Everybody scatters and hopes it goes away
How many kids they've murdered only God can say, hey
If I had a rocket launcher, if I had a rocket launcher
If I had a rocket launcher, I'd make somebody pay

On the Rio Lacantun, one hundred thousand wait
To fall down from starvation, or some less humane fate
Cry for Guatemala, with a corpse in every gate
If I had a rocket launcher, if I had a rocket launcher
If I had a rocket launcher, I would not hesitate

Doesn't that seem called for? Isn't wanting justice a good thing? Doesn't evil need to pay for what it has done? Yes. There is something in us that resonates in a retaliation to evil doers. When guys watch movies, it is often for the satisfaction when the good guy overpowers the bad guy. We know that ultimately that is right.

But look at what Mr. Cogburn is saying. He wants to take it into his own hands.

He wants it done now. They need to pay **now**.

But what does Scripture say?

Romans 12:17-21

¹⁷ Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men.

¹⁸ If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.

¹⁹ Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "*Vengeance is Mine, I will repay*," says the Lord.²⁰ Therefore "*If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.*"²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Hebrews 10:30-31

³⁰ For we know Him who said, "*Vengeance is Mine, I will repay*," says the Lord.

And again, "The LORD will judge His people." ³¹ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Matthew 5:43-48

⁴³ "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' ⁴⁴ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, ⁴⁵ that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. ⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷ And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so?

⁴⁸ Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

What are we to make of this? How can we accept this? How can we get ourselves to do such things in light of our desire for justice? Is justice no longer important? Does it not matter? Is it really just no big deal any more? Now that Christ has died, is God's righteousness somehow muted or turned down? No. That is not the point. The point is **not** that there will be **no** vengeance, that no vengeance is called for. In fact the point is just the opposite. We are to leave vengeance to the only expert.

When God says, "I will repay", those are not just words like we might say to our kids to distract them from the bad thing they want to do. No Isaiah describes what it is like when God gets to repaying.

I will read it again in a minute and ask yourself this question. Is this not adequate repayment for the evil we experience and the evil that our brothers and sisters have experienced? Does this not meet the terms of the souls under the alter who were calling out for justice in **Revelation 6:9-11**

⁹ When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held.

¹⁰ And they cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"

¹¹ Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both *the number* of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they *were*, was completed. Notice what God told them. He did not rebuke them for wanting vengeance. Vengeance is called for. He just tells them they will need to wait a little longer. Listen again to the vengeance of God in our text.

⁹ Behold, the day of the LORD comes, Cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger, To lay the land desolate; And He will destroy its sinners from it. ¹⁰ For the stars

of heaven and their constellations Will not give their light; The sun will be darkened in its going forth, And the moon will not cause its light to shine.¹¹ "I will punish the world for *its* evil, And the wicked for their iniquity; I will halt the arrogance of the proud, And will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible.¹² I will make a mortal more rare than fine gold, A man more than the golden wedge of Ophir.¹³ Therefore I will shake the heavens, And the earth will move out of her place, In the wrath of the LORD of hosts And in the day of His fierce anger.

What we see here is a world that is coming apart, as if sin has reaped its final result. All creation is falling apart under the weight of sin and wrath of God. Evil is being destroyed. Everyone who **sides with evil** is being destroyed. The suffering will be immense for the rebels of God.

Our God does not hold a view toward people that none of them should ever suffer for the harm that they have done to others, especially to His people. But God makes it very clear that **this is not the job of a Christian right now**. We are to leave it to the expert.

Justice will be satisfied in the end. We can count on that because God is just.

Now, I have been dealing with a question about forgiveness lately. And I think our topic today has a direct bearing. Have you ever noticed that Christians are never told to forgive their enemies in scripture?

We are told to **love** them. But we are not told to **forgive** them. Why is that? Christians need to be big into forgiveness. We see that in Matthew among other places.

Matthew 18:15-22

¹⁵ "Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother.¹⁶ But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that '*by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.*'¹⁷ And if he refuses to hear them, tell *it* to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.¹⁸ Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.¹⁹ Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven.²⁰ For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."²¹ Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?"²² Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.

Notice some things here. First it is talking about a brother. A non believer is never addressed in this fashion. We are never told to pursue a non believer in order to forgive them.

Second, it requires a **true hearing** on the part of the offender. We know by other contexts that this isn't saying if the person actually is physically able to hear what we said they have been gained, but a deaf person wouldn't. It means that the hearer buys into it. They confess. They repent.

And if they don't, what is to happen? A break in fellowship. An action is to be taken as a drastic measure to win them back. And Jesus goes on to stress just how important this business of forgiveness is. A Christian is not free to withhold this transaction from a believer asking for it. It is actually business we are doing on God's part. What is being done on earth represents accurately what is being done in heaven.

Now, what do we do with those people who have wronged us in our pasts and they will **never** repent. They will **never** ask us to forgive them. And even if they did, they have not repented of their sin before God. What do we do about that? Our psychologists and psychologists tell us that bitterness over what has been done to us can kill us. As we dwell on it, it will punish us. We pay a price for that. Then what is the next thing they say? They say we must **forgive** that person in order to put it into the past, in order for it to stop harming us.

And the church has bought that nonsense hook, line and sinker. The world used our vocabulary and we have allowed them to change our dictionary. Now forgiveness means that we are releasing a person from our own bitterness and we call it forgiveness. That is not how scripture uses the word. And I am convinced that is not how Christians should use the word.

This view sets up a false idea to all concerned about what forgiveness really is. As if forgiveness is just something we do psychologically to get a person off the hook. God does not do it that way. If he did, there was no reason that Christ had to die. God could have just chosen to ignore our sin, just brush it off in His mind. But God did not forgive our sin psychologically. He did it legally. He transacted a legal business that had to be carried out to get us off the hook once and for all. When a Christian pronounces forgiveness, it has to mean that forgiveness of sin **has been received** in such a way that this sin will no longer distance a believer from fellow believers in fellowship. Fellowship is restored. Such a thing is impossible with an unbeliever. And psychological forgiveness is just **playing pretend** if a believer has not confessed their sin. In scripture, all forgiveness is a transaction whereby the sin is no longer held against a person by God and fellowship is restored among believers.

So, what do we do with the advice the world gives us? We need to re-educate ourselves and the world with the Word of God. We need to use the proper vocabulary instead of changing our dictionary meaning of the word forgiveness. Is it true that we need to get rid of bitterness? Yes.

Acts 8:22-23 is referring to Simon the sourcerer

²² Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. ²³ For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity."

Ephesians 4:31

³¹ Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice.

Hebrews 12:14-15

¹⁴ Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: ¹⁵ looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled;
So we see that bitterness must be dealt with. But really, what is the heart of bitterness? What really is it that drives bitterness? Is it not our desire for justice for ourselves? Sometimes it is our evil imaginations that are so disappointed that we have not been treated like the center of the universe. That kind of bitterness needs dealt with by **our own** repentance.

But what about when wrongs have really been done against you by people who are **never** going to confess that wrong to you, or even maybe be sorry for it. In many cases the wrong doers actually may have been pleased with the wrong they did to you. What do we as Christians do then? Do we live in that bitterness? No. I believe we orient to reality. We might want vengeance. Our seemers are likely to tell us that **we must have it** in order to be happy. But King Jesus says no. He says **leave it to me**. And that is exactly what **we do to have that bitterness released**. We trust Christ to repay any wrong that has been done to us. We know that in the end He will make it right. And **only He** can make it right. We release bitterness by trusting that God will administer justice that is due to the wrong that was done to us. We trust that over to His hands. And we lay that burden there for Him to deal with.

But we don't call it forgiveness. It is not forgiveness. No one's sin is being covered. No transaction in heaven has taken place. We can now love because we can afford to love. We see this person's dismal state as it truly is. They are bringing upon themselves the wrath of God if God is truthful at all. And now, whatever harm they have done to us will never be as great as the harm **God will do to them**, unless they repent. And if God causes repentance in them, wouldn't it be sweet to have that person come to us with tears for the harm they have

caused us and the deep contrition that only comes from the Holy Spirit? If we knew it was real and could be trusted, wouldn't that be the best of all outcomes? So there is no sense hunting down people who have wronged you to tell them you forgive them. That is nonsense and a danger to that person's soul. You would be acting like you are better than the God you claim to serve. Because our God certainly has not forgiven them unless they have asked Him for it.

Our rest, our release, our answer to the vexing bitterness of being wronged is not to initiate a false psychological "so called" forgiveness. Our answer comes by an absolute trust in the character of God to make everything right at the end.

And those who cling to their evil will **face this end** described in our text.

"I will punish the world for its evil, And the wicked for their iniquity; I will halt the arrogance of the proud, And will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible.

With this in mind, wouldn't the most loving thing we could do for our enemies be to tell them how to get right with God? Without it, they are facing a dismal end.

Now let's looks at verse 17

¹⁷ "Behold, I will stir up the Medes against them, Who will not regard silver; And as for gold, they will not delight in it.

I think that the reference to gold and silver makes the point that these people won't be bought off. But there is something amazing here. No person living in that day would have thought that the Medes would take down Babylon. In fact the Medes joined with the Persians, the Babylonians, to take down Assyria who was the major threat at the time of Isaiah. This statement of Isaiah's would have been difficult to believe. No one could have predicted it given the evidence of the day.

And let's end with a look at the prophesy about Babylon.

. ¹⁹ And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, The beauty of the Chaldeans' pride, Will be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. ²⁰ It will never be inhabited, Nor will it be settled from generation to generation; Nor will the Arabian pitch tents there, Nor will the shepherds make their sheepfolds there. ²¹ But wild beasts of the desert will lie there, And their houses will be full of owls; Ostriches will dwell there, And wild goats will caper there. ²² The hyenas will howl in their citadels, And jackals in their pleasant palaces. Her time is near to come, And her days will not be prolonged."

No one living in this day could have ever predicted such a thing. It would have been unthinkable that one of the power centers of the world would one day, rather soon, lay desolate. No one but God would have or could have predicted such a thing. Several attempts have been made to bring back the city of Babylon, but all of them have failed. They have been thwarted by God. His prophesy still

stands. The inhabitants of Babylon were eventually forced to move to Seleucia, a city built across the river. And Babylon truly became a haunt for wild animals. If you are ever tempted to doubt the truth of the Bible, look at the prophesies. Nothing explains them except that the writers were either infinitely lucky above all believable odds, or their source actually knew the future like it was the past. It is also good to consider that this is the same God that determines **our present**. I think we have good evidence to trust that **the God who sees the future like he does the past** has the ability to **handle our present** just fine. And given just how fierce His anger will be against his enemies, I think we can also trust Him fully to handle any of the issues requiring vengeance in our lives. We can be released from any bitterness by trusting Him.