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Sermon Notes

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The End of the “World”: Babylon’s Future Destruction

Isaiah 13

We are all aware that we have a personal enemy constantly seeking our destruction:

1 Peter 5:8 Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

We have also learned to be aware that the very world in which we live is an enemy of our souls:

1 John 2:15-16 Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For everything in the world-- the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does-- comes not from the Father but from the world.

The world... by that John means the world system... that alluring, powerful, enticing culture that attacks our very souls and seeks our eternal destruction

The world is made up of people... real living people... whose minds are controlled by the flesh

Some of them have political and military ambitions to rule and dominate... perhaps a non-Christian politician running for the highest office in the land... or an Al-Qaeda terrorist masterminding the next attack on American soil... or the publisher of a pornographic magazine... or an actress willing to do anything on film to further her career... or a marketing consultant urging a bolder approach to marketing clothes to teens... or a financial expert writing a column on how you can be far richer than you ever dreamed... or a motivational speaker telling spellbound audiences ten irrefutable laws for success

The seething culture of unbelief... pulsating with the lusts John mention: the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, the boastful pride of life

It is a vicious, relentless, alluring, cold-hearted enemy to your soul; it is the enemy territory through which you are making your dangerous pilgrimage to heaven

It has a symbolic name in the bible: Babylon

Now Babylon was the name of an ancient city in Mesopotamia, on the Euphrates River... from it arose a mighty empire which conquered the world

From it came an army that conquered the Promised Land, tore down the walls of Jerusalem, and burned the Temple of God to the ground

The enemy of the people of God...Babylon

Isaiah 13 is the clear prophecy of the fall of Babylon a full century and a half before it happened

But Isaiah 13 speaks of God's relentless wrath poured out on Babylon, the enemy of his people... it would be fulfilled again and again through the history of the world, because from the ashes of one Babylon, rising like a wicked, God-hating Phoenix, would come the temporary glory of the next Babylon

Not until the end of the world would the final Babylon be crushed

All of this is the message of Isaiah: God's sovereign power to destroy the enemies of the people of God

As we enter a new section of Isaiah's prophecies, Isaiah 13-23, we come to grips with the central fact of the universe: the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of the Jews, is no tribal deity, no localized god who rules over this hill, or that mountain, or some aspect of nature like the clouds or the harvest

Isaiah portrays instead a God who rules 24 hours a day, 7 days a week over the small and great events of history... a God who makes a plan for the whole world and brings it about:

Isaiah 14:26-27 This is the plan determined for the whole world; this is the hand stretched out over all nations. ²⁷ For the LORD Almighty has purposed, and who can thwart him? His hand is stretched out, and who can turn it back?

This is a powerfully vital message for our times... when we are barraged by constant news stories that can tend to make us fearful for the future, when CNN and FoxNews and other continuous news sources saturate our senses with anxiety, the message of Isaiah 13-23 rings clear...

OUR GOD REIGNS

I. God's Sovereign Rule Over the Nations: Isaiah 13-23

A. One Central Theme, Many Smaller Oracles

1. the theme of God's sovereign power over Gentile nations has already been established in Isaiah 1-12

2. but in Isaiah 13-23, one oracles after another gives the same message: God rules over all nations and will judge them all for their sins

Babylon... Philistia (chapter 14)... Moab (15-16)... Syria (17-18)... Egypt... (19-20)... Babylon (21)... Edom (21)... Arabia (21)... Tyre (23)

3. clear messages to His people

- a. do not trust the strength of the nations... do not put trust in them or hope in them or make an alliance with them... they are all under God's judgment and will be swept away in the end
- b. There is no righteous political nation on earth... and all nations in the end will come under God's judgment

Isaiah 34:2-3 The LORD is angry with all nations; his wrath is upon all their armies. He will totally destroy them, he will give them over to slaughter. ³ Their slain will be thrown out, their dead bodies will send up a stench; the mountains will be soaked with their blood.

- c. do not question God's justice when it seems like some of these nations get away with murder for a time... God will bring each of them to justice eventually
- d. fear God and obey His commands... for no individual or nation will be able to stand before such a holy God without His redemption...

B. Isaiah's Far-reaching Vision

Isaiah 13:1 An oracle concerning Babylon that Isaiah son of Amoz saw:

1. many modern scholars seriously question whether Isaiah wrote these chapters
2. at the time that Isaiah wrote, (725 B.C.) Babylon was just a city under the Assyrian Empire
3. Babylon and the Medes were actually small allies somewhat resisting the power of the Assyrians
4. Isaiah is predicting the fall of Babylon to the Medes (look at verse 17!!!), something that did not happen until Cyrus the Great of Persia conquered Babylon in 536 B.C. almost two centuries later
5. even some conservative scholars have been sucked into quasi-weak statements about Isaiah's clear vision of the future fall of Babylon
6. but God knows the future!!!! That is the key to the power of Isaiah's prophecy

- a. he will speak quite plainly about the substitutionary death of Christ at the cross in Isaiah 53... and that wouldn't happen until 7 centuries later!!
- b. And in Isaiah 40-49, God again and again declares His power to predict the future:

Isaiah 42:9 See, the former things have taken place, and new things I declare; before they spring into being I announce them to you."

C. God's Sovereign Plan the Central Theme of History

1. the nations roar and rage like a raging storm... but

Hebrews 9:27 man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment

2. in the end, this is what matters:

Isaiah 14:26-27 This is the plan determined for the whole world; this is the hand stretched out over all nations. ²⁷ For the LORD Almighty has purposed, and who can thwart him? His hand is stretched out, and who can turn it back?

II. Babylon's Symbolic Role in Redemptive History

Key question: if Babylon wasn't even the issue at that point, if the real threat was Assyria, why does God give this prominent place to the prediction of the fall of Babylon

A. Babylon the Ancient Leader in Human Rebellion

Genesis 11:2-4 Tower of Babel... built specifically in defiance of God

B. Babylon the Leader in Human Empire-Building

1. the Babylonian empire was the first truly great, world-wide empire
 - a. the cultural level of Babylon was much higher than that of Assyria
 - b. Nebuchadnezzar's achievement in building Babylon was astounding
 - c. The famed "Hanging Gardens of Babylon" were one of the "Seven Wonders of the Ancient World"
2. Furthermore, the city of Babylon was mighty and powerful, thought to be unconquerable

Ancient Babylon: Herodotus's description & that of modern archaeology

- 14 miles square
- huge outer walls: 87 feet thick, 350 feet high (35 story building); thick enough at top for a chariot with four horses to rise along easily

- 100 great bronze gates in the walls
- inner/outer wall system, moat in between fed by flowing Euphrates
- great Euphrates flowed down center of the city under the wall
- within the walls: beautiful avenues, parks, palaces
- a great bridge, spanning the Euphrates connected eastern/western portions of city

C. Babylon the Symbol of Human Opposition to God

1. Peter's not so obscure reference to Rome as Babylon means the title of "Babylon" is transferable from one powerful empire to the next; Peter, writing from Rome, called that most powerful city on earth "Babylon":

1 Peter 5:13 She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings

2. Revelation will pick up on this title "Babylon" as the symbol of human commerce, luxury, power, wealth, evil, sin, and wickedness, as we shall see

III. God Summons an Army Against Babylon

A. God's Activity Central

1. Seven times in this chapter God states what He is doing

Isaiah 13:3 I have commanded my holy ones; I have summoned my warriors to carry out my wrath-- those who rejoice in my triumph.

Isaiah 13:11-13 I will punish the world for its evil, the wicked for their sins. I will put an end to the arrogance of the haughty and will humble the pride of the ruthless. ¹² I will make man scarcer than pure gold, more rare than the gold of Ophir. ¹³ Therefore I will make the heavens tremble

Isaiah 13:17 See, I will stir up against them the Medes

2. vs. 6, 9 it is the "Day of the Lord"... a day of judgment on the nations
3. God is acting directly to bring about judgment for His own glory
4. this is not some random swirling of events in human history... this is God the central actor of human history, bringing an end to the Babylonian empire

B. An Army Summoned from the Nations

Isaiah 13:2-4 Raise a banner on a bare hilltop, shout to them; beckon to them to enter the gates of the nobles. ³ I have commanded my holy ones; I have summoned my warriors to carry out my wrath-- those who rejoice in my triumph. ⁴ Listen, a noise on the mountains, like that of a great multitude! Listen, an uproar among the kingdoms, like nations massing together! The LORD Almighty is mustering an army for war.

1. God musters an army to destroy Babylon
 - a. ancient times, before radio communication, armies used banners on bare hilltops for visibility, to signal to one another
 - b. the nations are massing together against mighty Babylon
 - c. again, no accident... the Lord is mustering a mighty army for war
2. “to enter the gates of the nobles”= Babylon’s aristocracy... cultured, arrogant blue-bloods
3. God’s personal army to do His will:
 - a. “my warriors”
 - b. “my holy ones”... strange title for the Medo-Persian army... even though they don’t acknowledge His name

Later God will call Cyrus the Great of Persia “my anointed one”

Isaiah 45:4 For the sake of Jacob my servant, of Israel my chosen, I summon you by name and bestow on you a title of honor, though you do not acknowledge me.

Lesson: God uses people to carry out His will even though they have no idea who He is or what His purposes are

C. The Day of the Lord

Isaiah 13:5-6 They come from faraway lands, from the ends of the heavens-- the LORD and the weapons of his wrath-- to destroy the whole country. ⁶ Wail, for the day of the LORD is near; it will come like destruction from the Almighty.

1. The invasion of this international coalition against Babylon is not some accidental occurrence
2. there may be human factors, but it is the Lord who is riding at the head of this army
3. the reaction will be nothing less than terror

Isaiah 13:7-9 Because of this, all hands will go limp, every man's heart will melt. ⁸ Terror will seize them, pain and anguish will grip them; they will writhe like a woman in labor. They will look aghast at each other, their faces aflame. ⁹ See, the day of the LORD is coming--a cruel day, with wrath and fierce anger-- to make the land desolate and destroy the sinners within it.

4. there will be a future Day of the Lord at the end of all things... the terror described here will be replayed a thousand times more intensely

5. thus Isaiah uses extreme language to describe the fall of Babylon... language that will become literal at the end of the world

Isaiah 13:10, 13 The stars of heaven and their constellations will not show their light. The rising sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light...¹³ Therefore I will make the heavens tremble; and the earth will shake from its place at the wrath of the LORD Almighty, in the day of his burning anger.

IV. The Invaders Named (vs. 17)

Isaiah 13:17 See, I will stir up against them the Medes, who do not care for silver and have no delight in gold.

A. Astonishing Accuracy

1. at the time that Isaiah wrote, the Medes were no major player on the world scene
2. they were, like the Babylonians, a conquered people under the thumb of the mighty Assyrian empire
3. who were the Medes?
 - a. A people who lived in what is now central Iran, east of Mesopotamia
 - b. Inhabited the Zagros Mountains and the high plateaus east of that mountain range
 - c. As early as 836 B.C., the Assyrians referred to them as enemies
 - d. In 612 B.C., they joined along with the Babylonians to crush the last vestiges of the Assyrian Empire... but that was a century later than Isaiah's time!!
4. God Declares It Centuries in Advance
5. Later, He Even Names Their King: Cyrus

Isaiah 45:13 I will raise up Cyrus in my righteousness: I will make all his ways straight. He will rebuild my city and set my exiles free, but not for a price or reward, says the LORD Almighty."

6. the power of God to decide the future is the key to the faith of His people

B. Single-Minded Weapons of Wrath

Isaiah 13:17-18 See, I will stir up against them the Medes, who do not care for silver and have no delight in gold.¹⁸ Their bows will strike down the young men; they will have no mercy on infants nor will they look with compassion on children.

1. they cannot be bought off... they cannot be turned aside for silver or gold
2. they are ready to exact vengeance on Babylon and nothing will stop it
3. they will be cruel and merciless... even to the infants and children of the Babylonians

V. Desolation Decreed... Then Fulfilled (vs. 19-22)

A. The Reason for Judgment: Pride

Isaiah 13:19 Babylon, the jewel of kingdoms, the glory of the Babylonians' pride, will be overthrown by God like Sodom and Gomorrah

1. Isaiah 2 has already displayed God's tremendous hatred for human pride and arrogance
2. here Babylon is called the "Jewel of kingdoms, the glory of the Babylonians' pride"
3. it was for this very reason that Nebuchadnezzar was judged by God

Daniel 4:29-30 Twelve months later, as the king was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, ³⁰ he said, "Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?"

God changed his mind to that of an animal for seven years... at the end of that time, Nebuchadnezzar had clearly learned his lesson:

Daniel 4:37 Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble.

Unfortunately, the nations as a whole do not learn this lesson... Babylon represents human arrogance, God-defying arrogance, at its worst

B. The Horror of the Judgment

Isaiah 13:14-16 Like a hunted gazelle, like sheep without a shepherd, each will return to his own people, each will flee to his native land. ¹⁵ Whoever is captured will be thrust through; all who are caught will fall by the sword. ¹⁶ Their infants will be dashed to pieces before their eyes; their houses will be looted and their wives ravished.

C. Unfolding Judgment: Babylon Becomes Desolate Gradually

1. what is predicted: desolation!! Rejection!!

Isaiah 13:20-22 She will never be inhabited or lived in through all generations; no Arab will pitch his tent there, no shepherd will rest his flocks there. ²¹ But desert creatures will lie there, jackals will fill her houses; there the owls will dwell, and there the wild goats will leap about. ²² Hyenas will howl in her strongholds, jackals in her luxurious palaces. Her time is at hand, and her days will not be prolonged.

2. First step: Cyrus Conquers Babylon (538 B.C., Daniel 5)
3. Second step: Darius Hystaspis Tears Down Babylon's Walls
4. Third step: Alexander the Great's Great Plans Come to Naught
 - a. Alexander the Great had conquered the Persian Empire to its extremity, right to the Indus River in India
 - b. He sat down and wept that there were no further lands to conquer and that his armies were forcing him to return west
 - c. 323 B.C., He arrived in Babylon and decided to rebuild it and make it his empire's capital city... a center of world commerce

Alexander had stimulated economic activity by building new ports and by founding new cities and seventy military colonies in the conquered territories. Now Alexander began planning for the building of docks along the Euphrates at Babylon and for the clearing and dredging of the Euphrates River to the Persian Gulf. He planned to colonize the eastern shore of the Persian Gulf. And he planned to have Arabia circumnavigated and explored.

- d. God's sovereign will intervened... Alexander died in Babylon, tradition tells us from a drunken binge
5. Fourth step: the City forgotten succumbs to complete disrepair
 - a. 309 B.C. Antigonis I of Macedonia leveled Babylon
 - b. in 275 B.C., Antiochus I took away the remaining civilian population and deported them to other cities.
 - c. Pausanias, a Greek writer and geographer of the Roman period, said that there was absolutely nothing within the walls of Babylon.
 - d. Last century before Christ, ancient geographer Strabo wrote "the great city of Babylon has become a wilderness"
 - e. The Roman Emperor Trajan, eager to visit the infamous Babylon, was disappointed when he arrived at the site; it was only a wasted pile of rubble

- f. As recently as a century ago, the ruins of ancient Babylon had yet to be discovered
- g. Today: modern Iraq, Saddam Hussein had plans to rebuild Babylon, but they were thwarted by the Gulf Wars
- h. Some modern Iraqi leaders want to turn it into a theme park centered around archeological artifacts... problem is, American troops using ancient Babylonian clay to fill their sand bags have inadvertently destroyed ancient artifacts
- i. In the adjacent area there is today the city of Hilla, but the site of Babylon's ruins is now uninhabited except by wild animals and birds

D. Final Judgment: Overthrown Like Sodom and Gomorrah

Isaiah 13:19 Babylon ... will be overthrown by God like Sodom and Gomorrah.

1. Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed in a cataclysm from heaven, with fire and brimstone... left a smoldering ruins
2. while the actual city of Babylon will never be rebuilt, yet it will be destroyed at the end of the world with the rest of the earth

2 Peter 3:10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.

VI. Babylon's Final Fall

A. Language Goes Beyond the Fall of One Nation

Isaiah 13:9-13 See, the day of the LORD is coming--a cruel day, with wrath and fierce anger-- to make the land desolate and destroy the sinners within it. ¹⁰ The stars of heaven and their constellations will not show their light. The rising sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light. ¹¹ I will punish the world for its evil, the wicked for their sins. I will put an end to the arrogance of the haughty and will humble the pride of the ruthless. ¹² I will make man scarcer than pure gold, more rare than the gold of Ophir. ¹³ Therefore I will make the heavens tremble; and the earth will shake from its place at the wrath of the LORD Almighty, in the day of his burning anger.

Notice: overpopulation is not the threat that will destroy the world

In April of 2006, Professor Chris Rapley, director of the British Antarctic Survey, and Professor John Guillebaud, chair of the Optimum Population Trust, said that overpopulation is the greatest threat to planet earth

They said that by 2050, it would take the resources of four planet earths to sustain the population of 9 billion that would be there by then

God has a different plan:

Vs. 12 I will make man scarcer than pure gold, more rare than the gold of Ophir

These verses in Isaiah speak to the end of the world... right to the end of time

Isaiah 13:10-11 The stars of heaven and their constellations will not show their light. The rising sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light. ¹¹ I will punish the world for its evil, the wicked for their sins.

B. "Babylon" Will Fall Once More

1. literal interpretation of Isaiah 13:20... never inhabited again

Isaiah 13:20 She will never be inhabited or lived in through all generations

2. yet Revelation speaks of the fall of "Babylon the Great"
3. Revelation speaks of the Great Prostitute of Babylon, which allures the peoples of the earth to idolatry and wickedness

Revelation 14:8 A second angel followed and said, "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries."

Revelation 17:3-5 A vision of a woman dressed in purple, with : MYSTERY BABYLON THE GREAT THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. Written on her forehead

Revelation 17:18 The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth."

Revelation 18:21 Then a mighty angel picked up a boulder the size of a large millstone and threw it into the sea, and said: "With such violence the great city of Babylon will be thrown down, never to be found again.

4. Thus John speaks of the human system of arrogance, luxury, idolatry, power, lust, and wickedness as "Babylon the Great"
5. It will be thrown down one final time by the judgment of God

C. Christ Saves Us from Babylon

1. Isaiah 14 is going to make God's purpose in throwing down Babylon clear...
2. Babylon was the great enemy of the Jews... the nation that destroyed the Temple and exiled the remnant from the Promised Land

Isaiah 14:1 The LORD will have compassion on Jacob; once again he will choose Israel and will settle them in their own land. Aliens will join them and unite with the house of Jacob.

3. In throwing down Babylon the first time, God will enable the remnant to return to the Promised Land and rebuild the Temple in preparation for the coming of Christ
4. In throwing down Babylon the Great, the Great Prostitute, at the end of the world Christ will be freeing His people from the allurements of the world forever
5. He will reclaim us from the world, from Babylon, and bring us to the true Promised Land, the New Heavens and New Earth, to live forever
6. Christ gave His life to rescue us from Babylon's influence

Galatians 1:3-4 the Lord Jesus Christ, ⁴ who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age

The present evil age is the age of Babylon, of the great harlot that entrances the world by her sorceries, and tempts us and bullies us and mocks us and beats us

1 John 2:15-17 Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For everything in the world-- the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does-- comes not from the Father but from the world. ¹⁷ The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.

7. Christ calls us to be holy until then... to be pure because He is pure

VII. Application

A. Flee to Christ

1. Christ is against the spirit of Babylon still
 - a. Babylon stands opposed to all He loves
 - b. Babylon is the spirit of this world... of military conquest, of luxury, of human achievement, of arrogance, of pride
 - c. Though Babylon was thrown down by God's wrath, the spirit of Babylon rose from the ashes of that smoldering pile and slithered to the next mighty city, the next world conquering empire... it is still with us today
 - d. The love of Babylon is the love of the world

- e. Do not love it!! God is against it and will throw it down again and again until at last He throws it down one final time
 - f. Test everything you take into your life... every movie you watch, everything you hear on the radio, everything you look at or read on the internet... we live in Babylon; do not learn of its ways; be holy by the power of Christ
2. Christ is the only refuge from the judgment of God
 - a. His blood shed on the cross is the only refuge from the wrath to come
 - b. It is a safe place, a refuge secure
 3. Flee to Christ now for the first time
 4. OR flee to Him again now, for safety and protection from worldliness, sin, and temptation
 5. remember Lot, and how God preserved him in Sodom

2 Peter 2:7-8 he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men ⁸ (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)

B. Understand God's Sovereign Control Over the Nations

1. God is ruling over the ebbs and flows of human history
2. We live in very uncertain times
 - a. Oil crude prices keep skyrocketing
 - b. We may wonder what will become of our lifestyle
 - c. We may be tempted to worry about Islamic radicalism, about terrorists or about the rise of China as the major economic power of the 21st century
3. the consistent lesson of Isaiah is, "The Lord reigns, the Lord rules from His heavenly throne over all things... do not fear, do not be anxious, trust in Him!!"
4. God can summon armies to do His will, to level some rebellious empire's capital city, any time He chooses... whether that army that does His bidding recognizes Him or not!!

C. Call on God to Fulfill His Purposes

1. God has said He will crush the spirit of Babylon in the end

2. Long for that day, look forward to it, cry out for it... while seeking to rescue the perishing in the midst of it