

# Isaiah 13

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 26 June 2016

Preacher: Paul Levy

[ 0 : 00 ] My brother-in-law has given us his Sky code so we can watch on the iPad and Sky TV. It's a remarkable thing and a wonderful thing.

What it means is that you can get up on a Saturday morning and you can watch three international rugby test matches. And then in the afternoon you can watch three international football games. It's a great recipe for family harmony.

But one of the things that you notice is as you watch rugby and football there's many, many differences. But one of the big differences is the managers or the coaches.

And you notice in football they stand in a little box by the side of the pitch and they shout and they gesticulate and they scream at their players. But in rugby the coaches or managers don't stand at the side of the pitch. They now sit in the stands and they sit in the box.

And the reason for that is it gives them a better perspective. They can see the whole of the pitch. They can see the whole of the team. And in Isaiah 13 we begin a new section of the book of Isaiah that we're working through.

[ 1 : 14 ] And you can say it's as if Isaiah takes his audience up the steps of the stadium of the world. So that you can get a better vantage point of what is going on. So that you can see the whole game.

And so from verses 13 to 23 you will see that there are ten oracles or ten burdens, ten messages that are delivered by Isaiah to ten nations.

On one level you could say that it's Isaiah's state of the nations address. But what we're going to see is that Isaiah doesn't deliver these oracles to the respective nations. He doesn't go to them. No, the audience for each oracle is actually the people of Judah.

And particularly the remnant. That group of people within the people of Judah that were actually holding on to God. They were trusting in God.

And not forsaking God. And Isaiah speaks to them, these ten oracles. So the question is why would it be important for these people, to this small little group of God's people, to hear about what is going to happen amongst the world?

[ 2 : 29 ] What is going to happen to these other super nations? These other nations? And here's the reason. Paraphrase Bob Dylan. You've got to trust somebody. You've got to trust somebody.

And Isaiah wants his audience to understand, whatever you do, you don't want to trust the nations. Whatever you do, you don't want to trust the nations.

And Judah, little tiny Judah, is going to be tempted to seek alliances with other nations, to deliver them, to protect them from their enemies. And Isaiah says, don't put your trust in them.

And the question is, well, if you're going to trust somebody, who are you going to trust? And over and over and over again, Isaiah wants them to understand, that they've got to trust the Lord.

They've got to trust God, because he is sovereign over all the nations. And through these chapters, we are going to find that God is not just in the coach's box, watching the action, seeing what the opposition is doing, and then acting and reacting accordingly.

[ 3 : 35 ] No, God is in absolute control of everything that is going on below. that his game plan is being executed sovereignly, with all the twists and all the turns.

But as we're going to see, God has got his eye on the final play of the game. And the reason Isaiah gives us a glimpse into the playbook of God here, is because Isaiah's role here as the prophet is to be a faith builder.

He wants to encourage the faith of the people of Judah. He wants to encourage you and I to not give up as God's people, to not give up trusting God. It is to encourage you and I not to look for our security and our identity in other things, in other places, but to keep trusting in the Holy One of

Israel.

You've got to trust somebody, says Isaiah. And here is why that somebody needs to be God. And the first oracle, Isaiah, gives us specific reasons why we are to trust God.

And the specific reason comes in five words. Five words. Why you need to trust God. Why is it that he needs to be your only and ultimate security?

[ 4 : 46 ] Five words. It's the day of the Lord. The day of the Lord. That's the reason. The day of the Lord. For what ultimate purpose?

So we're going to ask. Four questions. We're going to ask what, why, who, and for what ultimate purpose? What, why, who, and for what ultimate purpose? Number one. What is the day of the Lord?

Look at verses one to eight. What is the day of the Lord? Verse one. The oracle concerning Babylon, which Isaiah, the son of Amor, saw on a bare hill, raised a signal, cry aloud to them, wave the hand for them to enter the gates of the nobles.

I myself have commanded my consecrated ones, my set apart ones, and have summoned my mighty men to execute my anger, my proudly exulting ones. The sound of a tumult is on the mountain, as of a great multitude.

The sound of an uproar of kingdoms, of nations gathering together. The Lord of hosts is mustering a host for battle. They come from a distant land, from the end of the heavens. The Lord and the weapons of his indignation to destroy the whole land.

[ 5 : 48 ] Wail, for the day of the Lord is near. As destruction from the almighty it will come. Therefore all hands will be feeble, and every heart will melt, and they will be dismayed.

Pangs and agony will seize them. There will be an anguish like a woman in labour. They will look aghast at one another. Their faces will be aflame. The language is very unnerving.

And yet, as the reader and the listener, we are drawn into this. As we hear the various commands that are being uttered, raise a banner, listen, listen, wail, and other commands as you go through the chapter, it doesn't take too much investigation to realise why all these commands are being given.

They are being given because the day of the Lord, the day of the Lord is actually a day of judgment. It will, says Isaiah, come like destruction from the almighty, and it is God who is the one who is in charge.

God is not watching from a distance. He is in charge, he is directing, he is controlling, and yet the judgment that is to come on Babylon, we read off here, is to come at the hands of other nations.

[ 7 : 03 ] God is gathering an army from the other nations around to defeat Babylon. It's probably worth pointing out, isn't it, that in verse 3, it says consecrated ones, it might even say holy ones in your translation of the Bible.

That doesn't mean holy in the sense of holy, holy, holy is the Lord God almighty. They're not holy in themselves, but they are holy in the sense of the word is set apart. They've been set apart, they've been consecrated by God for the task that he's called them to do.

And at the end of verse 3, we see that they are proudly exalted ones. They are full of themselves, aren't they, the psalmist? They think they're chocker, they're full of themselves. These warriors, they are full of arrogance and boasting.

But unknown to them, God has claimed them to achieve his ultimate purposes. And his purpose is to bring wrath and judgment to Babylon.

And the result of this day, verse 7, is feeble hands and melting hearts. What a picture of helplessness. Demoralization.

[ 8 : 14 ] Total personal paralysis. Feeble hands and melting hearts. The day of the Lord, we see, is a fearful day. It's a day of divine judgment.

And at the same time as we read on, we discover, however, that this day of the Lord seems to point beyond this particular judgment that is coming on the nation of Babylon. Look at verse 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 on 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 and the arrogant and lay low the pompous pride and the ruthless. Verse 13. Therefore I will make the heavens tremble and the earth will be shaken and misplaced. Can you see the day of the Lord that Isaiah is talking about here is cosmic in its effect. And that is the unison chorus of the prophets throughout the Old Testament. The day of the Lord is cosmic. [9:24] But this day of the Lord is not only coming later but it is also coming much later. And that is one of the challenging parts of reading the Old Testament prophets, isn't it?

Because the prophets seem to occupy they seem to operate in three different time zones. You know, you go into those buildings sometimes and there are those offices and there are three clocks on the wall.

There's a clock at the time of the UK GMT Greenwich Mean Time and then there's a clock about Tokyo and then one about New York say and there's three different time zones.

And the prophets of the Lord they operate in three different time zones. They operate in the now and the later and the much later. Have you got that? The now and the later and the much later.

And we've already seen them in the first twelve chapters how the prophet in a sense is speaking in the now time zone. He's contending the people of Judah for their abandonment of God.

[10:29] But here in chapter 13 we've been an example of the later time zone and the much later time zone. But the difficulty is that sometimes the prophets don't delineate very quickly very clearly today entirely well between the two time zones together.

But it's clear he's not just talking about a later period a time that's to come but a much later period. That this judgment on Babylon is pointed to a cosmic judgment.

A cataclysmic judgment when God will pour out his wrath in judgment on the world and we're told here on the whole earth. The heavens will tremble.

He will pour out his wrath and judgment on the day of the Lord on which day on which the day that Babylon will fall. Well on the day that Babylon will fall is just actually a pale shadow of that great and terrible day.

The day of the Lord is a day of judgment. But it's ultimate manifestation the ultimate day of the Lord still lies in the future. So that in a sense is the what of the day of the Lord a day of divine judgment.

[11:40] The second question is why? Why? What is God's reason for the day of the Lord? Look at verse 11 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. Now the danger here is that we read a verse like this and we begin to think to ourselves well finally God is going to sort this world out.

He's going to get rid of all the evils. He's going to get rid of all the wickedness. He's going to get rid of the terrorists and the rapists and the murderers and then he's going to give the rest of us a much better world to live in.

And when we go down that route we find ourselves we give ourselves far too much credit. Listen to this quote by the Russian writer Solzhenitsyn. He says if only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them.

But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being and who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart. You see the why of the day of the Lord is sin and evil but all of us, every single one of us stand condemned.

[13:10] All of us have missed the mark for how God intends us to live. We do that by sense of commission when we lie or steal or covet what other people have.

We do it by sense of omission too when we fail to love other people as we are called to do. When we fail to forgive when we refuse to be content with what we have in life and we're always wanting more.

All of us, think about it another way, all of us may have built our identity on something other than God. And so by this account we are guilty. We've looked at other things other than God and thought if only I had that.

If only I had that I'd be condemned. If I just had that dress or if I could just live in that house or if I could just have that job or if I could just have that husband, we've looked at those things and we've thought if only I had those things then I feel valuable.

Then I feel significant. I feel I have meaning if I get those results, if I achieve this. And as such we've made those things more fundamental to our security and our worth than God.

[ 14 : 29 ] And we've enslaved ourselves to idols. idols of money, possessions, reputation, job or possessions. And thereby we've condemned ourselves and that is why the day of the Lord, the why of the day of the Lord is sin and evil.

And the reality is therefore all of us, every single human being stands condemned. judgment. So the what of the day of the Lord is judgment and the why of the Lord is the day of the Lord is sin. But what does Isaiah say here about who? The who of the day of the Lord? It's very specific here. The who of the day of the Lord. Again in chapter 13 and verse 1.

The oracle concerning Babylon. Like I said at the beginning of the sermon, the ten oracles here form something of a state of the nations for Israel.

For Isaiah's. But for the reader, we've been reading through, haven't we? I hope we have. And the first 12 chapters of Isaiah. Particularly for Isaiah's audience, the first one would be a massive surprise.

[ 15 : 42 ] Who would they have expected it to be about? Who is the nation that they would have expected the first oracle to be about? They would have expected it to be about Assyria.

Assyria. Up to this point, Isaiah has been warning Judah of the imminent threat of Assyria. Assyria at that point was the superpower nation to the east. But Isaiah in the first 12 chapters has learned that Judah is going to be overthrown.

He's going to be scattered. But it's not going to be in the hands of Assyria. Assyria is going to attack Judah, but it's not going to overpower Judah. No, the power that was biding his time in the shadows, who is going to overthrow Judah, was indeed first one, Babylon.

Babylon held the title among the nations of the kind of rising superpower. The up and coming nation. And as such, Babylon was probably the nation that was most tempting to Judah.

It was most tempting for Judah to run to them, to the Babylonians, and say, if we do what you tell us to do, will you protect us? Will you guard us against our enemies? And then in this opening oracle, God chose through Isaiah to reveal what was going to happen to them.

[ 17 : 03 ] What is going to happen to Babylon? After their defeat of Judah, they themselves are going to be destroyed. You've got to trust somebody, Isaiah says, but whatever you do, don't trust Babylon.

Because look what God is going to do to her. You've got to trust in the Lord. Now there's another reason, isn't there, why Babylon is the head of this list, of these nations and oracles.

But I want to make one quick application. I think all of us probably have felt a little bit concerned about the political rhetoric of the last few days, no matter what side you're on.

Our country is at something of a crossroads. And I don't want to encourage patriotism or a love for this country. Nor am I suggesting that a Christian should abandon the political process.

This country is a great country to live in. And this country is so much to serve the rest of the world.

But the UK, like any country, can become an idol. And God would view any attempt to find our security in this nation in which we live, he would find any attempt to do that with the same contempt that he had for those to find their security in the superpower nation of Isaiah's day, namely Babylon.

[ 18 : 24 ] Isaiah says to you and I this morning, the one that you are to trust in is the Lord. There is no guarantee that God will delay the day of the Lord. But this nation will not go the same way as Assyria, or Babylon, or Rome, or Greece.

But there is one, isn't there, who outlasts the nations. because he is sovereign over all the nations. And Isaiah says to you and I, that is who I want you to trust.

I want you to trust in God. So Isaiah puts Babylon at the top of the list because they are the superpower nation. But there is another reason why they are at the height of the list. Which is this, that more than any other name in the Bible, Babylon personifies something, doesn't it?

What does Babylon remind you of? It reminds you of Babel in Genesis chapter 11. Humankind's desire to be its own saviour.

But Babylon is the epitome of human pride. Look at verse 11 again. I will put an end to the pomp of the arrogant. And I will lay low the pompous pride of the ruthless.

[ 19 : 38 ] And then look at verse 19. And Babylon the glory of kingdoms, the splendour and pomp of the Colatians. Well, it will be like Sodom and Gomorrah when God overthrew them.

And each time when Babylon is mentioned in Isaiah chapter 11, the actual Hebrew word is Babel. It's Babel. And that rings a bell, does it?

And it's true because in Genesis 11, the origin of the city is in fact the city of Babel. What happened in Genesis 11? There was a bid to organise life, to create security and stability with our own resources.

And without reference to God. So the people of Babel, do you remember, they said, let's build a city for ourselves and a tower that reaches up to the heavens so that we can make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the whole earth.

And it's pride. And they said, we will show God and in the end God shows them. He confuses their language. And he scatters them throughout the earth.

[ 20 : 45 ] But here we see in Isaiah that that city doesn't go away. It's back. Babel is back and rearing its ugly head in the time of Isaiah.

And it obviously hasn't changed its tune. It's still known for its pride. And God says, now I'm going to destroy this city. And God does destroy the city of Babylon.

But the thing is, the spirit of Babylon, the spirit of Babel lives on. That initial day of the laws brings destruction for the physical city.

But the pride from which Babylon was known continues. And indeed continues. So Isaiah here in verse 11 is saying God is going to put an end to that arrogance and that pride.

And he's going to humble the pride of the ruthless. And the question is, when is he going to do that and we come back to the day of the Lord? You see, what is going to happen on the day of the Lord isn't just the focus of the Old Testament.

[ 21 : 48 ] But it's also the focus of the New. And when we turn to the end of the Bible in Revelation chapter 18, here is what John tells us of his vision of history.

Let me read to you. After this he says, I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was made bright with his glory, and he called out with a mighty voice, Fallen!

Fallen is Babylon the great. In her heart, she says, I sit as a queen. I am no widow, and mourning I will never see.

For this reason, her claims will come in a single day. Death, and mourning, and famine, and she will be burned up with fire, for mighty is the Lord God who has judged her.

And you read through Revelation chapter 18, and as confusing as Revelation can be, but Babylon in Revelation 18 looks like a place of culture, and of craft, and home comfort, and normal daily pleasures.

[ 22 : 56 ] Things that you and I are very very familiar with in this life, and it's a good life, but Revelation says it is inherently corrupt.

And here's what is important to see, that in Revelation 18, that Babylon is not just one nation, it's not a state, but it is anywhere where a godless world order holds sway.

This is how one commentator puts it, Greg Veal. He says any institution or facet of culture that is characterized by pride, economic abundance, persecution, and idolatry is part of Babylon.

So you see, Babylon is all those things that seek to undermine God and his people. All those things that seek to lure us away from trusting God. All those things that would say we should spurn God, ignore God, pretend to be God, or mock God, and God says, I am not going to be mocked.

So is Babylon present in the UK? You bet it is. Is it present in Ireland? Yes. Is it present in Canada?

[ 24 : 10 ] In Afghanistan? In Mexico? In Iraq? In the Americas? Throughout Europe? And Australia? And Africa?

Of course it is. And all those who are part of Babylon, who seek to find their satisfaction elsewhere, elsewhere other than in God, who seek to find their satisfaction in wealth and power and not in him, who seek to save themselves, who are full of pride, will one day come under the fearful judgment of the day of the Lord.

One last thing. I mentioned didn't I earlier that Isaiah serves as a faith builder. you might be wondering, I haven't seen that yet, in Isaiah 13, but here it comes.

How is this meant to build up your faith? And I think the answer to that lies in the final question of the day of the Lord, which is what is its ultimate purpose? What is the day of the Lord's ultimate purpose?

Look at Isaiah chapter 14 and verses 1 and 2. 13, 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 attach themselves to the house of Jacob 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 captives and rule over those who oppress them.

[ 25 : 44 ] Now there is a word That is so vital And it's the first word It's a three letter word Can you see it? For For First one For the Lord will have compassion Do you see why that is so important?

Here is the reason For everything that we've just read On chapter 13 The reason for God's judgment On Babylon Is ultimately God's compassion on his people The reason that God is going to bring judgment On all That is against God Is because God loves his people He wants to give his people A world that doesn't have to deal With all this kind of stuff And you see that points us to something That we see all the way through The teaching of the Bible It's a pattern that is picked up In the book of Isaiah Which is how God seems to work Over and over and over again Which is that God Is the God Who brings salvation Through Judgment You go back to the beginning of the Bible You go to Noah And the flood And God judges those people In Noah's day Doesn't he In the flood But through the judgment Of the flood He saves Noah and his family In the boat Salvation through judgment He went the clock Forward a little bit And God judges Pharaoh And the Egyptians And he brings the water And the sea down On the Egyptians The same sea that he split In order to save his people Moses and the Israelites Is salvation through judgment And here we see that God Is going to judge Babylon But he's going to save Judah By bringing her back from exile Salvation through judgment And in these verses While God will bring his people Back from exile in Babylon And judge Babylon The fulfillment of all That is in these two verses Doesn't happen in their return And the reason for that is The ultimate fulfillment Of these promises Will depend on the ultimate Salvation through judgment That all these were pointed to Listen to Saul's in it again The line dividing good and evil

Cuts through the heart Of every human being Remember back in the wise section We saw that all of us Found condemned There is none righteous No not one None of us here can claim To be without pride And in that sense All of us Are condemned But two thousand years ago God in a sense Brought the day of the Lord Forward a bit For some people He brought the day of the Lord And his wrath And his judgment Forward And he pulled it out On one person The one person in human history Who could never have been accused Of being part of Babylon Jesus Christ himself You see what happened On the cross Two thousand years ago Was that the wrath The judgment of God For sin Was poured out

Upon the Lord Jesus He took on The role of Babylon He took on the role Of the consummate Enemy of God Such that on that day As Isaiah prophesies here The rising sun Would be darkened On that day as well And for those who trust In this Jesus Who is being judged There is salvation Salvation through judgment For those who trust In Jesus And nothing else Nothing in themselves For those who will move From the boastful pride That is characteristic Of Babylon To the humble repentance That judgment Means our salvation God judges His son On the cross But he saves All who will trust In him But for those Who will find Their security In God Through Jesus There is no fear

[ 30 : 09 ] Of that fearful day Because for us The day of the Lord Has come And Jesus Has taken the wrath And judgment Of that day For us already That all the wrath That you and I Deserve If we trust In Jesus Has been paid for It has been dealt with And so in the book Of Revelation The chapter following Chapter 18 Where Babylon Falls In chapter 19 We have A string of Hallelujah choruses And here is what John writes Right in the midst of it John 19 He writes Then I heard What seemed to be The voice Of a great multitude Like the roar Of many waters And at the sound Of mighty peals Of thunder Crying out Hallelujah For the Lord Our God The almighty Reigns Let us rejoice Let us exalt And give him The glory For the marriage Of the Lamb Has come And his bride

Has made herself Ready It was granted To her To clothe herself With fine linen Bright and pure John Oswald writes He says It is all too easy To be blown away By the glory Of the world So we think Ah there is reality But that is not Where glory resides Glory resides In the Lord God almighty Who brought salvation To us Through judgment Of his son In our place And he says All who trust In him Have no fear Of the day Of the Lord And on that day Of the Lord When Babylon Falls When Babylon Is crushed When every Anti-God Force is crushed We will rejoice He will usher us Into a world Where there is No sin And no rebellion Where all the things We read of In chapter 13 Of Isaiah Could not be further From our experience Or imagination Because the world Will be perfect And Isaiah says to you You've got to trust somebody Trust in the one In whom The glory Truly resides Not in any nation Not in anything In this world Trust in the Lord God almighty

Let's pray