

Fallen, Fallen is Babylon

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[0:00] We are working our way through the first section of Isaiah, chapters 1 through 39, and here we are, 21 to 23 is our big text tonight.

From chapter 13 to 27, there are three cycles of prophecies. Last week we looked at 13 to 20, this week 21 to 23, the second cycle of prophecies.

And they're all talking about the same things in different ways. Last week we looked at the fact that 13 to 20 is all about the day of the Lord. And the day of the Lord is God's promise that one day He's going to kick evil out of this world, that He's going to knock every bit of rebellion, disease, death, disaster, hell that's in the midst of earth, He's going to knock it out forever.

That's the day of the Lord. And it's coming. And tonight it's the same idea, the same theme is in place. He's talking about that day. He said it a couple times in the reading, the day of the Lord. But there's also a greater focus. You see, there's something very similar. It's so similar, in fact, that the structure is the same. So in the first set of oracles, it began with a prophecy against Babylon, chapter 13.

[1:14] Tonight the second set of oracles, it begins with a prophecy against Babylon. In the first set of oracles, the fourth prophecy was against Israel. Tonight the fourth prophecy that we read, the Valley of Vision, is against Jerusalem.

So it's completely parallel, these cycles. And tonight the big emphasis, you probably saw the one famous line in this whole section. Fallen, fallen is Babylon, verse 9.

And Isaiah is coming and saying Jerusalem, it is certain that Babylon is going to fall. And that means a lot more than just what it looks like on the surface.

And that means we need to hear it, that Babylon is going to fall. And here's the three reasons. One, because it teaches us to beware of the spirit of Babylon that's in you, that's in us.

And then secondly, Isaiah says, come out of the city of Babylon. And finally, it's because God is building a greater city than the city of Babylon.

[2:14] That's the idea here. All right, so first, beware of Babylon that's in you. Now last week we said, same thing this week, Babylon is a place in the Old Testament, an empire, but more importantly, it's a spirit.

Babylon is a principle. Babylon is a symbol, it's an idea. And Isaiah is getting at that when he titles this oracle. Did you see the strange cryptic title, the wilderness, the oracle concerning the wilderness of the sea, chapter 21, verse 1.

So he's talking about Babylon, but he calls it the wilderness by the sea. The word wilderness also can be translated just desert. And the reason he's doing that is because Babylon is about to become the greatest empire in world history.

So right now we're in the 700s, and Assyria is the dominant power, but Babylon is on the rise, and they're about to become great. And the way Isaiah writing in the 700s, before Babylon will even become the world empire, after they ever become great says they're going to be a wilderness by the sea.

Great cities are often by seashores. And he's saying Babylon, oh, you think of it as this great city by the seaside, but it's about to become the desert.

[3:32] It's about to get wiped away. That the Babylonian empire before it ever begins is already dead. It's already knocked out. That's why he uses this cryptic title. And that's exactly what he's talking about in this oracle.

He's trying to say two things. The first is this. He's talking in this very cryptic prophecy. If you read it with me, you probably line by line were thinking, I'm not sure what he means.

That's how I felt when I first read it. I'm not sure what he means. But then you see the key is you got to understand the historical context. And the first thing Isaiah is doing is he's talking here to the leadership in Jerusalem.

Hezekiah is the king at the moment. And Hezekiah is a good king, but something terrible has happened. Hezekiah had led Israel very well, Jerusalem very well.

But all of a sudden, as Babylon began to rise, they sent emissaries to Hezekiah. And you can read about it. Verse five, it says they ate at the dinner table. And Isaiah, you see, Isaiah is seeing it.

[4 : 35] He's seeing these Babylonian emissaries sitting down with Hezekiah at the dinner table. And Isaiah is writing this prophecy at the moment and saying, Hezekiah, Babylon is not going to make it.

In other words, he's saying, don't marry political Babylon. Don't become part of her empire. Don't take on her army. Don't welcome the shield that she offers.

He says it over and over again in this text. And he's saying with the Old Testament, what God has said throughout the whole Old Testament, if you make an alliance with political Babylon, then you have to accept her gods too and her culture that you can't do this without also becoming Babylon at the very same time.

And you see, just look down at verse five, he says, they prepared the table, they spread the rug, they eat and they drink. And he's saying Babylon has shown up at your door.

She's prepared a great table for you. She's spread the rug for you, Hezekiah. And she said, look, if you'll just adopt our culture, if you bow down to our leadership, we will make you great.

[5 : 40] We'll protect you. And so the first thing he's saying is, don't marry political Babylon, but it's something more than that. That's not really the main idea. You see, the second thing is he's talking to Hezekiah, he's talking to Jerusalem, but he's talking to every single person that could read this text.

This is what God is saying. And he's saying, you've got to beware of Babylon because Babylon is not just an empire. It's a spirit.

It's a principle. Where is the spirit of Babylon? Where's the principle of Babylon? And he's, as they're saying, it's not just a historical empire.

Hezekiah, the problem is, is that Babylon is in your heart. And he's saying that what's happened is that, you see, the external circumstance, the Babylonian empire is just a circumstance.

It's the circumstance that's knocked on your door and said, come and embrace our culture, embrace our gods. But what's actually happening is Hezekiah has been exposed because Babylon is deep down in his heart.

[6 : 41] What is the spirit of Babylon? The spirit of Babylon is whenever profit, security, and self-interest crowd out trusting in the true God.

It's anytime that maximizing profit for all sake, for protecting yourself no matter what, being independent, self-reliance, self-interest crowd out the fact that you've been made to trust in the true God, the God who will really protect you from Assyria, whatever circumstance you might be facing. You see, it's not just that Babylon has come knocking the empire, the political entity. It's that Babylon came and drew Babylon out of the heart of Jerusalem, that Babylon, the circumstance, exposed the reality that was going on in the inside.

We quoted last week from Alexander Solzhenitsyn, the author of the Gulag archipelago, the great storyteller of what really happened in the Russian Gulags in the early 20th century.

And remember what he said? He said, the line between good and evil runs not through classes, not through nations, not through races, but through every single heart.

[7 : 55] And Isaiah is writing this article and saying, Hezekiah, the leadership of Jerusalem, human being, Babylon is in you. And when a Babylonian circumstance, a culture, an idol, comes and hits you, attacks you from the outside, it's very easy to let it draw the Babylon that's in your heart right out.

And that's exactly what's going on here. You see it, we'll close this point and move on, but in verse one and two. Right after he announces the oracle, he says, as the whirlwinds and the negev sweep on, there were tornadoes in my hometown this past week.

And here it's talking about tornadoes. As tornadoes whirlwinds in the desert, spin around as strong as they are, so it comes from the wilderness. And comes up like a tornado from the south, from the desert, from a terrible land.

In verse two, the traitor will betray the destroyer destroy. As bad as a whirlwind in the desert is, so the traitor has come into your living room, spread out a table before you and the traitor is going to betray you.

In other words, it's saying that if you embrace Babylon, you're going to be empty. You know, whenever you say, I want to maximize my profits, I want to secure my strongholds, I want to live my life according to my own desires, I want to protect myself.

[9 : 14] And I'm independent, I can do it. You see, he's saying something. He's saying the traitor will always betray. You'll be left empty. You'll actually experience a miniature day of the Lord in your own life where all of a sudden you realize I pursued what I wanted to pursue and I have nothing.

I'm empty. I've got money, but I don't have hope. I've got security. I've got fences, but I don't have joy. You see, the traitor of Babylon and your desire of life lived apart from God will always betray you.

And that's exactly what he's saying here. I said that last week I mentioned that yesterday, March 25th was the International Tolkien Reading Day.

I hope that you celebrated that because March 25th is the day that Sauron was defeated in the Lord of the Rings, the day that Frodo dropped the Ring of Power into Mount Doom.

You know, the Ring in Tolkien's narrative is the symbol of the Babylonian spirit. The Ring is the symbol of self-interest, power for power's sake, profit at all costs, unleashing one's personal desires with no checks and balances.

[10 : 28] That's the symbol of the Ring. And whenever the moment came at the beginning of the story for Bilbo to hand over that Ring to Frodo, when Gandalf said, Bilbo, it's no longer yours to bear, it's time for Frodo to carry this Ring to its destination.

What do you remember if you've read the books, seen the movies, you remember what Bilbo said? He was confronted. He said, you know, they tried to take the Ring away from him. What did he say? He said, after all, why shouldn't I keep it? It's mine. I found it. What business is it of yours to take what is mine?

And that is, so Tolkien understood, well, that is the spirit of Babylon. It's to say, the Lord made me, I've been given the gift of my time, my talents, my money, my treasures.

You see, everything that you have in life, you're dependent upon somebody else for. And ultimately to God, but then the Ring, the Babylonian spirit comes up and says, after all, isn't it my body?

[11 : 32] Isn't it my time? Isn't it my money? Isn't it my treasure? Can't I do with it what I want to do? And that's the Babylonian spirit. And that's what Isaiah is prophesying about here.

Now, secondly, briefly, the main idea here is that Isaiah is trying to tell us we've got to come out from Babylon, get out of Babylon, he's saying.

You know, in other words, don't let Babylon, the Babylon in your heart overtake you. Get out of Babylon. How do you do that? Well, in order to say how we can do that, that's the real point tonight. Let me just be a little more specific about what the Babylonian spirit is in two ways.

And you see, he's talking about it here, but Babylon shows up from Genesis to Revelation and to really know what this Babylonian spirit is in detail.

The key place is Genesis 11, where Babylon first started the Tower of Babel. And they say it in one line, the Babylonian spirit, let us make a name for ourselves.

[12 : 31] The Babylonian spirit is epitomized in the one line of the Tower of Babel. Let me let us make a name for ourselves. And it's not just the fact of self-interest. It's not just the fact that I want to do what I want to do with my stuff, my body, my things, my goods.

It's something more than that. And you see, they said, I want to make a name for myself. And what they were saying in that moment is, I want to be able to define my own identity without reference to God.

Let me see, the word name in the Old Testament, the Hebrew Bible, really refers to somebody's essence. It's not just this vocalization of a way to call someone. It's actually something that means more than that.

It means who they really are, deep down, all the way to the bottom, their essence. That's why any time God got a hold of somebody in the Old Testament, He would rename them. You've got a new essence.

You've been changed. You've got a new purpose in life. And they said, we want to make a name for ourselves. We don't want to have our essence, our nature, what even a human being is defined by

God.

[13:34] I want to be able to define it for myself. You see, the Babylonian spirit is when you say, I want freedom from God to be able to identify myself the way I want to identify myself.

And does that sound, oh boy, Genesis 11 is so modern. Does that sound like today? But it's the spirit that goes all the way back to the beginning. It's authenticity, as we call it today.

I have the right to define who I am, my identity comes from the inside, not the outside. This week, I went to a school assembly. A school assembly in Edinburgh that I'm connected to, a school I'm connected to.

I'm connected to this school in four different ways. And I won't name the school, but four connections. The theme of the assembly for one of my children was I am me.

And at the end of it, they sang Katy Perry's Firework. So my children go off to school and they, six year olds learn Katy Perry songs.

[14:39] I found out it's what they've been up to. Katy Perry in Firework, she says, baby, you're a firework. Show them what you're worth. And the whole point of the song is you've got to embrace your freedom.

When your freedom is this, you get to decide who you're going to be. And nobody else can tell you that. And the Bible comes and says, actually, that's the Babylonian spirit.

That God made us a certain way, that He gets to tell us who we are, that He gives us our mission and our purpose and our nature and commands and tells us how to live and the way to be, the manner in which we should be what we are.

Now that's not the final. You see, the first thing is the Babylonian spirit is self-interest. It's to maximize profits. It's to build an empire. It's to be utterly independent. The second thing is to be able to identify your own essence, to be free from God in that way.

But there's one more before we move on. And it's difficult. We read about it in Isaiah 22, 14. It's the very end of the passage that we read, this oracle against Jerusalem. The last thing that the Lord says, He says to Hezekiah in Jerusalem, the iniquity that you've caused, what you've done in your sin, will not be atoned for until you die.

[15:57] So He says, what you've done is not forgivable. Oh boy. The iniquity that you've done cannot be atoned for without your death. Now that's what the prophecy is to the Jerusalem leadership.

What is this unforgivable sin? And you've got to see it. It's so important. It's exactly the Babylonian spirit, and it's back in verse 11. This is the unforgivable sin, and it's cryptic.

You've got to really look for it, or you might have missed it. And it's this. From verse 9 to 11, He says, you know, Assyria had come knocking at Jerusalem's door.

Assyria had made a camp outside Jerusalem some years before this, not long before this. And they had said, we're going to take you, we're going to destroy you, you're going to become our slaves. And He records what happened here. They cut off the waters that led into Jerusalem and effectively forced Assyria to leave because they were thirsty.

[16:56] Hezekiah had done this. And it's saying here in verse 11, sure, you cut the waters off, but you did not look to Him who really did it or see Him who planned it long ago.

In other words, it's saying, Hezekiah, you're now sitting at the table with Babylon thinking you're the one who stopped Assyria. But I did, God did. He truly did. And here's what Alec Matier says about this unforgivable sin.

What is it? He says, it's to believe this, that if I can't save myself, then I cannot be saved. You see, Hezekiah had come to believe that if I can't save myself, I'll take matters into my own hands.

I'll marry political Babylon because if I cannot save myself, then nothing can save me. The Lord can't even save me. And you see, in other words, the unforgivable sin here is to reject the Lord outright.

As we saw last week, it's to actually choose hell. It's to fail throughout the entirety of life to say, I don't need to depend on God. I can be completely independent.

[18:05] It's to reject the cry of helplessness and say, Lord, I'm helpless before you. I depend upon you. I need mercy. You see, it's to reject the offer of the mercy of God.

And He says, this is what's unforgivable. It's to reject the Lord outright. It's to choose Babylon. It's to choose hell. And Isaiah's coming at the end of this and saying, okay, look, Hezekiah, Isaiah, leadership in Jerusalem, friend tonight, come out of Babylon, reject Babylon, the Babylonian spirit.

It's in every single one of our hearts to be independent, to be self-interested at the point where we neglect the fact of who we really are, made to trust in the living God.

Let me move on, but I want to say this. What's wrong with this spirit? The spirit of freedom, the spirit of independence. And we can't say tonight everything that's wrong about it, but let me just say one or two things that's wrong with it.

One of the ways to get out is this. This line, fallen, fallen is Babylon shows up four times across the Bible. Here Jeremiah 51, Revelation 14, and then Revelation 18.

[19 : 20] You see, Isaiah 21 shows up again at the very end of history, Revelation 18. And in Revelation 18, John the prophet cries out, fallen, fallen is Babylon.

It's a vision given him by one of the angels. And we learn there why this won't work, the Babylonian spirit. See, John there says, John says, look, God is going to wipe all selfishness off the map.

And so come out of Babylon, reject the selfishness. That's in you. Be dependent on the living God. But more specifically, there in Revelation 18, John calls the Babylonian spirit the harlot of history, and it says, it says, you know, she's the harlot.

She's, it's pleasure for a day, but it leaves you empty. It leaves you miserable for a lifetime. And you know, you're wooed into utter self-interest, but you're left experiencing these miniature days of the Lord throughout your life, where you realize all of a sudden everything I've lived for, I've built my life in my independence and my freedom, but I'm left empty.

And Charles Spurgeon talked about this. He said, the reason the Babylonian spirit will fail you is because it's living a life that is not real. It's an illusion that you're not independent, you're dependent.

[20 : 44] You're not free from God. You're entirely his subject. And so he said, it's like trying to build a life where you're standing on bursting bubbles.

Every step you take is like standing on a bubble that's waiting to pop. It's empty. It leaves you empty. That means the other big reason is this, it's a life without joy.

It's a life without joy. We don't have time to develop tonight, but it doesn't take very long for anybody to learn in life that a life devoted to themselves entirely is a life without joy.

Real joy comes, real joy comes in the loss of your own self to a greater mission.

That's where real joy comes from. A life that is fully alive is one that is lived for the kingdom of God.

And that means that the life of independence is one without joy.

[21 : 44] And that's why people have never been so comfortable in human history as now, and people have never been so free to define themselves in their own essence as today is right now.

And yet people are more lonely and more sad than ever before in human history. And that's because the loss of divine, divinely determined identity and mission is the loss of meaning.

And the loss of meaning leaves you without joy. Now let's close our time. He says here, Isaiah says, Revelation 18 says, come out of Babylon, my people.

Why? Because God is building a better city. There's a better way, a better city. The book of Isaiah and the book of Revelation are actually largely the same message.

When you read them side by side, you see that they're saying very similar things, and they're saying really two things. God is going to fall, and the spirit of self-interest will fall, and God is doing something better than that.

[22 : 51] He's building a greater city than that. And that's why in chapter 21, verse 3, Isaiah, it says, this is one of the key moments of Isaiah's own emotions in the book.

He says, I'm filled with anguished pangs have seized me. He says, I'm like a woman in labor. And the reason he says that is because he's looking out at what's happening.

Jerusalem embraced political Babylon and knowing that this means the end of Jerusalem. He knows. He says, this is so painful for me because I know what we're going to give birth to here, destruction.

We're going to fall because of this. Isaiah and Revelation say the same thing, fallen, fallen is Babylon. How can a person come out of Babylon?

That's the message tonight. How can you come out from Babylon? And the way to do that is that you've got to see the big picture. Imagine that you have all the money you need to go build your perfect holiday home by the seaside.

[23 : 55] Maybe that's on the West Coast or the East Coast or the French Coast or the Italian Coast, wherever it may be. And you've got all this money to build this holiday home right on the

beach.

You're the architect. You're the plumber. You're the electrician. You're the carpenter. You're all of it. Some of you have been all those things in your past and you know what I'm talking about.

It sounded great when you started, but you've laid the foundation and it took longer than you could have ever imagined. It rained so much you could never get the machinery in.

And you finally got the frame up and you've put the roof on and it's time to start running the wires and putting the plumbing lines in and all sorts of things. And every day, you know, your fingers are bleeding and you say to yourself, why did I do this?

You know, you're so tempted and then you're hammering that nail right through the wood and all of a sudden the sunset starts to come down upon the seaside.

[24 : 59] And you say, I remember again. You know, you've never nailed faster than in that moment. I remember what I'm here for. I remember why I did it. Look, you've got to see big pictures because you walk out into the world every day and the objective temptation of Babylon is there to draw the subjective temptation of Babylon out of your heart.

And you've got to see the sunset at the seaside, which is the big picture. You know, why is fallen fallen is Babylon mentioned in Revelation 18? And it's because of this. Babylon falls in Revelation 18 and Revelation 19 and 20, God says, and salvation has come for you.

And Revelation 21 says, and now there's a better city coming down than Babylon. And Revelation 22 says, and now I'm going to let you eat at the tree of life. See, that's the big picture. Isaiah is trying to get you to see the big picture.

Don't marry Babylon and don't let Babylon overtake your spirit because there's a better city than that. The tree of life is the very last thing we read about in the Bible, that when Babylon dies, the tree of life comes.

And you remember, Babylon starts in Genesis 11, no, Babylon starts back in Genesis 2 and 3, where the original tree of life set.

[26 : 17] And there Adam was told, if you choose God, if you choose the Lord, he had freedom. Choose the Lord and I will give you the tree of life forever. I'll give you the city of God.

And he said, I want to make a name for myself. And he chose Babylon in that day. Now the theologians recently have reconnected to an idea that the early church fathers talked about. And that's that in that moment when Adam chose Babylon, he had another choice that came to him. And that second choice was this. God came into the garden and he said, what's happened here? Where are you? What have you done? Why did you go this way? And Adam right then had a decision to make. What would he say to the Lord? And when you read the rest of the Bible, you start to get a logic in place.

When the Lord comes to you and says, what have you done? You should do one thing. You should, you should, what did Adam do? God said, what have you done?

[27 : 16] And he said, the woman did it. But when you read the New Testament, you realize that if we were to have a true Adam, if there were to be a second Adam, he would be one, he would be one who would give his life because of the spirit of Babylon for the sake of his bride.

Now, Adam stood there with his bride and he just blamed her. He embraced Babylon and he blamed his wife. But if there was a second Adam who would come for his bride, you know, not the city of Babylon, but the New Jerusalem, the bride of Jesus Christ, he would come for his bride and he would say, you know what, I will swallow the Babylonian spirit for you.

Now, what if Adam would have said, take me, let her live, give her the tree of life, give her the city of our Lord?

Is that what he was meant to do? But oh boy, we have a second Adam who came and said, I will swallow everything that Babylon has brought into this world for your sake so that you can get out, so that you can come out of her, so that you can have the city of our God, so that you can eat of the tree of life forever.

Now listen, that means that all sin can be forgiven, that you can become a Christian. That's the choice that stands before you tonight. Choose the dependence that you're invited to upon Jesus Christ this evening, not Babylon.

[28 : 39] And you'll have joy today, you'll have life forever. Now, let me close with this. In some sense, it's enough to say that the difference in Babylon and not Babylon is being in Christ with Christ following Jesus.

But let me close by saying this. This is what Isaiah was really talking about in Isaiah 21. He understood something, and that's that you can be a Christian and Babylon can get deep down in your bones at the same time.

Isaiah loved the Lord, he was a believer, and Babylon got into his bones. And you see, that means there's a call on us tonight to realize that we have the choice in the Christian life between two cultures.

You know, you can't get Babylon out of Edinburgh, but you can go into Edinburgh and witness to a better city, the city of God.

And so maybe it's your workplace, one writer talks about it like this, maybe at your workplace, everybody is absolutely obsessed with the spirit of Babylon.

[29 : 44] They'll stab people in the back to get ahead, that all that matters is I make money, I get ahead. I don't care whether I'm making a product that helps people or not. I don't care whether I'm making this a better place to live.

I don't care whether I'm really building a decent society. I'm here for profit. That's the spirit of Babylon, but you can create a different culture or its relationships.

The spirit of Babylon and the city tonight. If this person does not fulfill my needs and help me reach my personal goals, I'll walk. I don't care how long we've been committed to one another.

It's about me. It's about my goals and my dreams. That's the city of Babylon. And so here's a diagnostic question. Because of the mercy of God in your life, and we'll close with this, because of the mercy of God in your life, do the people that you interact with day after day know you as unusually loving, unusually gracious, generous, compassionate, and as a Christian?

You see, come out of Babylon in your heart so that you can go back into Babylon and witness to the city of our God and the way that you love and the way that you give and the way that you share and the way that you wear public faith.

[31 : 02] Why? Because Jesus Christ has already died for your Babylonian heart. And that means that you've now got power to live for the city of God.

Let's pray together. Lord, we ask that you would help us to live as great witnesses to the city of our God, that you would rip the Babylonian heart out of us because of the power that we have in the spirit of Jesus Christ resurrect us in our desires.

And we give thanks, Lord, that we have hope. We give thanks that one day we can eat at the Tree of Life. We give thanks that we will see Jesus. We give thanks for a better city. And so we give thanks that as we look out at the beauty of our city and so much that's good, that you witness to it and we can too in the way we live.

So send us from this place with the power to be people who love and are gracious and compassionate all because we've experienced the mercy of our God.

Let me pray this in Christ's name. Amen.