

The Day of the Lord

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Date: 19 March 2023

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[0 : 0 0] All right, well, we are carrying on in the book of Isaiah and Isaiah is a great book. It's one of the great prophets and it's a hard book at times and we've got a big section to think about tonight chapters 13 to 20 as I mentioned And the reason we can do that in the normal time a lot is because chapter 13 really does epitomize the whole of chapters 13 to 20 if you read any commentators on the book of Isaiah one of the things they'll say is that this is an Entire section a unit from chapter 13 through halfway through chapter 20 And if you have one of our church Bibles or your own Bible you can flip and see Even in the titles which are not original we've added those but in the titles of the sections You'll see language Like the judgment of Babylon chapter 13 verse 1 the oracle concerning Babylon and if you flip over you can see these little Sub titles like the oracle concerning Assyria the oracle concerning Philistia and Moab and Kush and Egypt and Damascus and a number of nations that are considered and then chapter 21 picks up with Babylon again

You see that so fallen fallen as Babylon chapter 21 so in chapter 13 an oracle against Babylon and Then these little subordinate oracles against Kush and Egypt and Philistia and Damascus and then Babylon again And so it's bookended this section from Babylon to Babylon with all sorts of little judgments that happen in between this and all of it is One section because it's got an idea behind it all it's got a main theme and the main theme you Might have seen in verse 6 It says woe for the day of the Lord is near okay So this whole section is talking about this idea that we see across the Bible the day of the Lord And it shows up again in verse 9 behold the day of the Lord comes and if you look at all the little oracles After this one you're gonna see a little phrase that says in that day in that day in that day against Egypt in that day Kush and that day Damascus and all of these little phrases are referencing this big idea the day of the Lord

That's what God has brought here and is bringing now We've got to be very limited tonight This is a very difficult passage to think about and talk about and the day of the Lord is a major concept throughout the Bible Old Testament and New Testament and we can only talk about one aspect of it this evening And that's the aspect of judgment that the day of the Lord brings so let's think about that together. What is the day of the Lord?

What problem does it create for us and then what hope does it bring to us? Okay, so first what's the day of the Lord very briefly?

We here in Isaiah 13 and in the whole book are in the seventh century BC the 600s the mid 600s and At the time Assyria is the great power of the land They're the world dominators at the time. They're the colonial Empire and if you were to pick up a newspaper in the middle of Jerusalem right here when Isaiah is writing Isaiah 13 It would have said on the front page of the Jerusalem times Assyria has been the great power, but Babylon is rising So everybody knew and was starting to find out that there's also another kingdom One that's much older than Assyria Babylon and that Babylon is the rising power of the north and And eventually Babylon is going to destroy Assyria and eventually Babylon is going to be the ones that destroy Jerusalem in the 580s Towards the end of this book and this is what Jeremiah is prophesying about it's what the book of laments what the Babylonians will ultimately do to Jerusalem in the 580s a

[3 : 46] Syria is the is the great power the great problem for Jerusalem in Israel at the moment But when you come to this section where the day of the Lord the day of judgment is being meted out against all these nations It's not a Syria that gets the first billing. It's Babylon Babylon is the beginning chapter 13 and as I said the ending chapter 21 It's the book ends and there's a real reason for that You know, there's a primacy to Babylon across the Bible if you've read much of the Bible You'll have noticed this that Babylon keeps coming back Even well beyond Babylon actually existing Babylon becomes the great symbol So if you read the book of Revelation the prophet John He says over and over again the apostle that Babylon is the great problem that Jesus is coming to deal with in the end of All of history and that's because of an Old Testament idea that Babylon is the symbolic Power that stands for all evil So Babylon is a real place. It's a real city. It's a real Empire. It starts all the way back in Genesis 11 at the Tower of Babel

But it also stands for more than just a place in the Old Testament And so Babylon is not to be thought of here merely as a world geography as a sorry as a local geography but more like a world concept and The book of Revelation tells us about it. John tells us that Babylon is anywhere that the playground of personal and corporate vice has been maximized You know, it's it's where lust greed gluttony and violence have become nothing more than everybody's vending machine and It's where human evil has been maximized to the degree that depravity has been unleashed Into a society where a society is completely corrupted That's where you have Babylon anytime that happens. You've got Babylon It's when evil desires are maximized throughout history and we know that's what Isaiah is talking about here because if you look carefully at verses 1 to 16, you'll realize he's not talking about a specific nation

Babylon he's talking about the world in verses 1 to 16 You can look down and see that verse 7 He says the day of the Lord is coming upon every human heart verse 7 verse 9 It's coming to destroy sinners from the land and that word land there is the word word word for world or the earth It's the kind of word that you see in Genesis 1 God created the land the whole world He's destroying the sinners from the whole world in verse 9. You see it again in verse 11. I will punish the world for its evil verse verse 10 as well it says it over and over again That Babylon here is a symbol that stands for this cosmic Universal image of the day of the Lord the day of judgment the day that God will come and judge all evil from all the lands from all the lands of The world and so the big idea of the day of the Lord the first big idea is very simple but it's very difficult and It's that God is assembling destruction in order to knock the hell purge the hell out of earth itself

That's what God plans to do is doing has done in the day of the Lord and on the one hand Tonight you've got to be you know, you're a modern person. You've got to be willing to say I Want God to dismiss dismiss all hell all evil from the world I Want God to come into the world and and get rid of all the evil and purge all the evil and at the same time when you come to A passage like this and you read what that looks like You read a text like verse 9 which says when the day of the Lord comes it comes with wrath and fierce anger You see on the other hand, I don't want the day of the Lord and I don't know what to do with the passage like this I don't know what to do with the concept of the day of the Lord It feels difficult it feels cruel as the language puts it here in the text and this is all over the prophet Zeffania 1 14 says the great day of the Lord is near and it's hastening fast Amos 5 18 Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord. It is darkness not light And so one scholar puts it like this the day of the Lord is when God intrudes into space and time to reconstitute right order through punishing wicked wickedness

Okay, what do we do? Secondly the problem that it creates for us Modern people we come to this and you know no matter how mature you are as a Christian no matter how great of a Bible reader You are we still come to a passage like this and there's one big problem I think that comes up as you read it you read text like verse 9 verse 16 And the question that comes up for us and really for any human being is Is God good?

[8 : 46] Can I read a passage like this? Can I read about the day of the Lord and say that the Lord is good? And I want to say tonight that we don't we don't ever need to hide from the from the Bible You know we don't ever need to skip over things We need to be able to come and look at exactly what it says and try to understand it as God's given it to us And so in verse 16 we have one of those Text one of those that most of the time if you're preaching a passage you try your best to not have to talk about But I think we should and it's verse 16 It says their infants will be dashed in pieces before their eyes their houses will be plundered and their wives ravished You see a text like that and you say is God good or is God unnecessarily brutal?

What's happening here? How am I to understand a passage like this? Especially as a modern person In a day where all sorts of people are challenging belief in the Bible based on verses like this richard Dawkins The famous militant atheist of our time. He says that the Bible is a text Remarkable for the bloodthirsty massacres it records and the xenophobic relish with which it does so Now I think that if you take a closer look If you take a closer look there's something substantially different happening That Dawkins doesn't understand to say the least And let me suggest to you that to understand passages like this. You've got to be able to read it in the light of the whole Bible You got to be able to read it in the light of all that God's doing from Genesis to Revelation to really understand How to how to take it how to see it how to read it and so we're going to do something a little different tonight and Sometimes sometimes you come to passages in the Bible where you have to do a little more teaching than preaching

So we're still going to do some preaching too in a moment, but you've got to do that sometimes You've got to get through through hard things sometimes by by thinking of it in a different way So let me give you in the second point just four four things. I think that we need Bible-wide to understand in order to treat a passage like this And maybe this will be helpful to you as you read across prophecies like the prophet Isaiah Okay, so the first thing is this when you look at God's judgment in Joshua the conquest of Canaan Kings and chronicles Under the hand of David and his sons when you come to the prophets and you see the wars that are being prophesied the day of the Lord One of the things that's so important is to see that you've got to read these books in their entirety to understand the point And when you read these books in their entirety to understand the point the big idea is always the same And it's that God is overwhelmingly patient Overwhelmingly patient with the most horrific evils Across the Old Testament

Every single book about judgment is a book where it says God has been so Overwhelmingly patient with humanity Even when it has committed the most horrific evils for century after century after century and that's exactly what we've got here Babylon Is the symbol of hell on earth That's what Babylon means in the bible. What's the pinnacle of that sin of that hell unleashed on earth throughout the Old Testament?

And the Old Testament makes it makes it clear. It's not easy to talk about even here tonight But if you read a book like Joshua Deuteronomy Leviticus Kings chronicles Isaiah Jeremiah They all say the same thing that in each of the lands that we're talking about especially in the Joshua conquest That Babylon got so unleashed upon the land that eventually the pinnacle of all evil happened people started worshiping Evil spirits through human sacrifice And that's regularly noted across the Old Testament And if you read carefully what you find out is that almost every single unleashing of judgment is in a time When evil hell had been unleashed to that degree in the world And so even the conquest of Canaan God says over and over again the iniquity of the evil And the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete. He says to Moses it's not yet time for judgment of Canaan because their iniquity is not yet full What does he mean by that?

[13:01] He means by that that he gave the Canaanites 400 years To repent of the most horrific things things that I can't speak about From the pulpit he gave them 400 years immense patience. He poured forth Over and over again upon the peoples of the ancient Near East telling them showing them saying I'm patient with you Just repent just come back just return Just put away your evils and you will not face what you deserve You will not get the justice that you deserve in the midst of the land This is so built in in fact to to Leviticus that in Leviticus 18 God says that if you bring this type of evil into the land He's talking to Israel to the people he said if you go into the land and you bring the kind of evil Into that place that the Canaanites brought into it. It says the land will vomit you out And he's saying that God made the world to be a place of goodness and joy And justice and peace and shalom And when people group after people group after people group commit such horrific violence in the place

It says the land can't even tolerate it The land has to spit you out the land has to bring up justice against against you And so it's so important to understand that we're not here talking about idyllic utopias That God brings to justice. We're talking about horrific injustice That God brings to justice And that's the message of the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah in Isaiah chapter 7 says to Jerusalem Jerusalem Why are you continually trying the patience of the Lord?

Don't you know that he keeps he keeps letting you off? He keeps showing mercy to you. He keeps giving you chance after chance. And so here's what we learn One author who read a very helpful book about this topic. He puts it like this. He says the question should not be God if you're good, why are you inflicting judgment on these cities?

And the real question is this God if you're good, why are you letting this go on so long? You know that that's actually the question of the Psalms. How long go Lord? That's the question of the book of Revelation. It's the prayer come Lord Jesus. When are you going to purge injustice from the land?

If you're so good, then when Lord when are you gonna? When are you gonna kick the hell out of this land out of this earth? When are you gonna do it? Why do you allow evil of God? When are you gonna put it away? You see God is patient And he's more patient than any of the judges of the earth any human being any king that's ever existed He is slow to anger and abounding instead fast love Now the second thing is this When you look at ancient Near Eastern studies about this issue So people spend their entire career looking at places like Isaiah 13 And then comparing it to the ancient Near Eastern text that we have text Outside the Bible from the time of the Old Testament one thing always comes through You know, there's all sorts of war stories from the ancient areas that we have you can read about them You can find them for free on the internet all you want and read them Things that were written at the exact same time period as the book of Isaiah and they all do the same thing They're written from the perspective of a single nation a king an army and they all say the same thing. They say

[16:18] You know, we went into the land And all of our deities helped us to completely defeat this other people group And our king is the best king And our king is the wisest that has ever been You know, sounds like some of our politicians today a little bit You know, we we're the best and we're the richest And there's been no nation that's ever been blessed like our nation And you read these ancient Near Eastern war text and they always say that they always say the same thing Look, this is how you know that we're dealing with something very real When you read the book of Isaiah You find out that the good guys are actually the bad guys That Israel and Jerusalem are also the object of the day of the Lord That Israel and Jerusalem are no better than any of the nations And that these stories of judgment are ultimately stories about Israel's failure and Jerusalem's failure and their evil And that's why in the New Testament in the gospels when Jesus Christ creates the term that we now call hell, Gehenna

What is he referring to? He's referring to a space outside of Jerusalem This space Gehenna, it was a land, a territory outside of Jerusalem You could see it from the Temple Mount and it was a place called the Valley of Hinnom We read about it in the prophets and at the Valley of Hinnom The Israelites had at the time of the Old Testament Sunk to the same exact level of evil that I spoke of earlier You know Jesus actually looks out at a place and says that's hell. You want to know what hell is?

You want to know what Babylon is? It's what they did It's when a hell like that gets unleashed into the world And Jerusalem had done it too And so when Dawkins says, you know, these wars in the Old Testament, there's xenophobia Well, oh boy, he didn't read well because actually the whole point of the Old Testament is that Israel and Jerusalem are the object of God's judgment because they're the same as everybody else You know, he shows mercy. He's so patient with the world And he brings justice in the midst of injustice equally He has no partiality and that tells us that we've got to remember the Deuteronomy 7 principle You know, the Deuteronomy 7 principle, it's one of the great passages of the Old Testament It's a principle that stands for everyone for all time. It's when God says I'm about to send you into the land of Canaan, but when you get there Israel, remember If you ask the question, why us? Why did God put us in this great land?

You need to remember one thing. I did not do it because you were great I did not do it because you were morally upright I did not do it because you were a Christian I did not do it because you were morally upright. I did not do it because you were powerful What does he say? Deuteronomy 7-9. I did it because I love you That's it And any single moment in all of human history that we're not being judged It's because God is patient and because God loves us And anything other than that would not keep us from the fires of justice The fires that we deserved I love what Alexander Solzhenitsyn said about us about humanity. Alexander Solzhenitsyn wrote the gulag archipelago the account of the horrors of the Russian gulags of the mid 20th early 20th century And Alexander was a Solzhenitsyn was a prisoner of those gulags and he came out and he wrote the multi-volume series on that That's a really important read a great read

But you might have heard the famous quote. He says he understood humanity He says the lines separating good and evil passes not through states not through nations not through classes not between political parties But right through every human heart and through all human hearts the lines separating good and evil it runs through every single human heart It's not an issue of states and classes and societies and people groups and races. It's all of us that Babylon Runs through every single human heart gk. Chesterton more popularly. You've heard this probably it's cliché at this point But Chesterton was asked to write an essay in the early 20th century From one of the London papers an essay contest They asked all the great thinkers at the time Including Chesterton. They said write a short essay on what is wrong with the world and what did Chesterton write back?

[20 : 45] He said dear sirs I am Yours truly gk. Chesterton You see he understood He understood that Babylon runs through every one of our hearts And that means that whenever we read a passage like this, we have to say oh lord. Why are you so patient with me?

Why do you why do you allow me to draw a breath? Why do you love me? this much now thirdly a fourth um It's been regularly pointed out and this is where we get into a little bit more of the detail It's been regularly pointed out by the theologians Of history and by the commentators that when you look at God's judgment on the day of the lord across the bible One of the things you notice when he says things like I will put an end to the pomp of the arrogant as he does here In chapter 13. I will lay them low the question is how?

How does God judge? How does he execute his justice in the world? And you've got to be very careful with how you think about this and the main way. If you look carefully the main way that God brings judgment into the land in the old testament and the new testament even is it's regularly depicted as God simply letting human beings be themselves. You see the way that judgments actually depicted in this passage is more like God letting go of humanity. The sense is that God at all times is upholding society in his goodness and grace. You know that if he would let us become what we really are. If he would let us do what we really want to do. That would be Babelon. And at all times God is not he, he we call this common grace. He's holding us back. You know, we're totally depraved. But we're not as bad as we could be. And the judgment in the old testament is regularly depicted as God allowing us to become what we really are in our sin.

And back to verse 16 remember that very difficult verse we read. The infants will be dashed in pieces. The house is plundered. Wives ravished. What is it talking about? It's not talking about the agency of God. It's saying that when the Meds come, when the Persians come, when the Assyrians come, when the Babylonians come, humans are going to do this against humans. He's saying, if I unleash my grace from you for just a moment, this is what humanity does to humanity. You see, he lets the chaos of sin unfold. And that's why when you get to the new testament, this is exactly the way Paul describes the wrath of God. Across the entirety of the old testament. What does Paul say in Romans 1:18 through 32?

He says the wrath of God has been revealed to all the nations and then how does he describe it? It says he God gave the nations over to themselves. He let them do what they wanted to do. He let them be themselves. He let them live in the depth of their sin. He unleashed Babylon by actually simply stepping back from his gracious holding of them. And so the judgment means that God is never the author of sin. God is never the author of sin. We are. We are. Judgment is simply giving to humanity exactly what it wants. And c.s. Lewis was really sharp on this. He helped us think about this. He talked about how hell really is humanity's choice. And the unleashing of judgment in this passage, the unleashing of hell into the world is simply giving humanity its choice. To live like this, to act like this. Now you may be tempted, we all are tempted to say, but oh boy, we're modern people. We know that we've progressed, you know, we've gotten beyond this.

[24 : 29] We've gotten beyond things like this and let me just say this is not a numbers game and need not be, but I just want to know that in world war two the low estimates for civilian deaths at the hands of soldiers and bombs, civilian non-combatant deaths. On the low side was 45 million people. There were more deaths on a few single days of world war two of civilians. Then the entirety of war deaths in the old testament combined. We're modern people, but we're the same and there are today 50 million people in human slavery situations, 50 million across the world being trafficked and horrific moments. Our He had us right. The line of good and evil runs through every human heart. We are prone to Babylon. And that means that we've got to understand that any moment that society is being upheld, that it's just doing okay at least, is a moment where God is pouring forth his grace on us.

He's patient. He's love and he's gracious to let us carry on now fourth and finally. Fourth and finally, last say that means that I just want to point out. Let me give you one thing before I say that I missed this quote and I want to give it to you. Miroslav Wolf. Miroslav Wolf gives us something very helpful in his book, exclusion and embrace. Let me close my third with this. This is what he says. Just think about this. He says this in a world of violence. In a world of violence, it would be unworthy of God to withhold the sword of judgment. If God were not angry at injustice and deception and did not vow to make the final end to violence in the day of the lord, would God be worthy of our worship?

Even more he carries on let me give you one more. He says in a world of violence We are faced with an inescapable alternative either God's violence Either God's justice or human violence unto justice Most people who insist well God God can't be bring justice God can't bring judgment into the world I can't believe in a God who judges a city who judges a nation who judges anyone They think of nothing at the same time of entrusting final judgment into human hands Of entrusting justice and judgment into human rulers And it seems responsible to say something like well surely God can't be a God of judgment But that God should judge the world seems crude while they're totally okay with human beings doing the exact same thing We can bring justice even by violence. That's okay if it's brought about by humans But God cannot be entrusted to that and so without God violence will always thrive Now lastly that leads us to say is is God let me let me close this point by saying is God full of wrath and anger

You know it says the wrath of God here in chapter 13 on several occasions And let me do one more broad thing and that's say that the theologians of history the bible scholars of history have all agreed Throughout 2,000 years of reading the bible as one book. They've said the same thing and they've said that The wrath of God is not something that comes to us in the way that you think it does Number one it's it's God unleashing who we are as humans, but number two is God full of wrath In other words is wrath one of the characteristics of God an attribute of God And for 2,000 years Christians have said no No, God is not wrath God is not anger You see when you get to the New Testament you you realize this Paul says in Acts He says men of Athens understand that the true God is not of like passions As you and I that's a word for emotion And it means that God is never to be thought of as someone like us who gets angry

You know sometimes you're okay, and then you get angry God never does that he doesn't get angry. He doesn't get full of wrath. You see God is holy And God is love. He never gets angry. He's just God never gets loving. You see God see how this works? You say well, I'm not sure about that with anger, but think about love You say look God never starts to love you God never started to love you. He never began loving you. He always is God is love. He doesn't begin to love. God never gets angry. He is just He is holy. God is not full of wrath He is holy love And so when the Bible talks about God's wrath, what's it talking about?

[29 : 16] Paul says the wrath of God. What's the wrath of God? The wrath of God is the effect of justice The wrath of God is what we experience It's society going all the way to the bottom It's just it's the judgment we feel we experience it's justice poured out into the world. God is not wrathful Wrath is an effect of God's justice that we experience in the world and the theologians have said this for century after century after century God is love. God is good and because he is good. He is just and so the message of isaac even here in isaac 13 Is God is love. God is holy. God is patient And God will purge the evil from the land in the day of the Lord Now we're going to talk about the power of God Patient and God will purge the evil from the land in the day of the Lord now last thing as we close point three And it's just one brief note The hope it gives us let me close by saying that the day of the Lord gives us hope And it that could be talked about in multiple ways one of the ways we've already mentioned

Oh boy, are you a human being tonight? Do you look out at the world and say lord? When will you bring justice? You know when will you put away the 50 million the 50 million people that are currently enslaved and modern slavery in some form?

When are you gonna when are you gonna do away with that? And as a christian, you know your heart gets softened and you melt under the under the beauty of the gospel And you start to feel the pain of other people And and it makes you actually say boy if you're good lord, I just want you to come Come lord Jesus, Mary and alpha the final prayer of the bible But let me focus instead on this other way that the day of the Lord brings us hope And that's to say that the day of the Lord came in little snippets in the old testament The day of the Lord is coming At the end of history in the book of revelation But in the middle of history The day of the Lord already came And you can see that in Isaiah 13 Isaiah 13 verse 10 It says the stars of the heavens And their constellations will not give their light On the day of the Lord the sun The day of the Lord the sun will be dark At its rising Now in the gospel of mark chapter 15 verse 33 it says

That there was a day there was a day And on that day from the sixth to the ninth hour The stars did not give out their light the sun was dark at its rising That the lights went out You see the day of the Lord has already come The day of the Lord is coming but it's already come and it came the day that the lights went out And the day that the lights went out was the day when the Lord Jesus Christ hung on the cross and was utterly forsaken by his father And you see God says in the day of the Lord I will pour out justice on the land I will purge evil from the land And then he said oh boy nobody has ever gotten the justice that we deserved Nobody has ever gotten the justice they deserve but only one only one has gotten the justice we deserved the true day of the Lord And it came the day the lights went out upon the body and the soul of Jesus Christ himself He experienced the ultimate justice of God the day of the Lord was poured out upon him and it was so So that you could stand on the day of the Lord You know the day of the Lord came in the middle of history so that at the end of history you could stand and the day of the Lord would be beauty not judgment

And in Jesus Christ God has done it. He has brought it. He has brought justice He has poured it out upon this man's body The judgment of Jesus Christ says I love you I'm patient with you and I want to give you grace And that's exactly the message of the prophet He's done it in Jesus And now we can say come Lord Jesus Miranatha Let's pray father. We give thanks that Even in the midst of really difficult passages like this you speak So speak oh lord as we come to you and receive the fruit of your holy word show us That you are good help us to believe it. We know it's true, but let us speak God help us to believe it. We know it's true, but Lord we are the problem We struggle with that sometimes and so we ask Lord that in the midst of reading about a passage of justice and judgment You would help us to see That there are no skeletons in your closet. They're only in our closet

[33 : 52] It helped us then to turn to Jesus Christ the man who was judged for us judged in our place The one upon whom you poured the day of the Lord for us so that we might stand in the day of judgment So give us faith today in him and we pray this in Jesus name Amen