

**CALVARY PANDAN
BIBLE-PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

**DHW BIBLE CLASS
LESSON 13
THE BOOK OF ISAIAH
CHAPTER 13**

Theme: “The LORD putteth up one king and bringeth down another!”

THEME VERSE

Isaiah 13:19 (KJV) “And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees' excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah.”

INTRODUCTION

The sovereignty of God is a most blessed and comforting doctrine to all of God's children. If you are a child of God, it is mind boggling that the most powerful Being, the God Almighty, would consider you His child and make you part of His heavenly Kingdom. The protection and care over all His children's life and well-being cannot be denied and hindered by anyone. There is nothing that He cannot do and nothing that anyone can do to stop Him from accomplishing His will in the life of every believer. Because of this wonderful doctrine, the believer knows that nothing bad can ever happen to him. For if a “bad” thing can happen to God's child, then God would be a derelict Heavenly Father. He is and will never be a derelict Heavenly Father.

In Isaiah 13, we shall see the sovereignty of the LORD God of Israel; over the two greatest empires to ever rule the Middle East. They are the kingdoms of the Babylon Empire and the Medo-Persian Empire. The Babylonian Empire comes first, followed immediately by the Medo-Persian Empire. At this time of Isaiah's writing, both these empires were small and insignificant. The ruling and dominant empire at this time was the Assyrian Empire. They ruled the Middle East with an iron hand. They were cruel and Israel was destroyed by them. The Southern nation of Judah was attacked by them but not destroyed. The LORD delivered Judah because of the prayer of Hezekiah and Isaiah sent the message of comfort that the Assyrians would be destroyed by the LORD in one night (see 2 Kings 18-19).

The sovereignty of God is not lost and has not ceased. He is the same yesterday, today and forever. This truth applies to His omnipotence just as much as it applies to His omnipresence and omniscience. The people of God today can learn and draw much comfort from this account of God's dealing with the Babylonian Empire whom He used to punish Judah and then was in turn punished for its evil and wickedness by the Medes and Persians. It is to be noted that the Medes and Persians were later punished by the Greeks led by Alexander the Great. The Greeks themselves were punished by the Romans. This goes on and on until the kingdom of Christ rules on the earth.

OUTLINE

1. The LORD called His Armies (v.1-5);
2. The Day of the LORD is at Hand (v. 6-18);
3. The Total Destruction (v. 19-22).

COMMENTARY

The LORD called His Armies – 13:1-5

The burden of Babylon means that these prophecies pertain to the Babylonians. The Babylonians were not the powerful nation at this time. They were small and insignificant compared to the Assyrians then. However, from the account of the LORD's judgement against the Babylonians, it reveals to us that the Babylonians will become great for a season and then will be totally and absolutely destroyed by the LORD! This burden was given to Isaiah by the LORD. This was indeed a prophecy with a fore-telling quality! Isaiah did not initiate this prophetic utterance. It was given to him by the LORD and it was in accordance with God's timing.

The command from God to Isaiah was to lift up a banner upon the high mountain and exalt the voice of God unto them. Isaiah was also told to shake the hand i.e. to gesture to them to get their attention to what the LORD wanted them to do. Who are the "them" in this context? It has to refer to the Medes who were mentioned in verse 17 as the ones who will punish the Babylonians. Isaiah was commanded by God to call the Medes to go to the

gates of the Babylonians who were called nobles here to mean that there is much wealth to be had in Babylon.

The Medes and Persians were called by God as HIS sanctified ones. The word for sanctified is the word for holy. This does not mean that the Medes and Persians were born again believers as this was not the context at all. The context was one of punishment upon the wicked Babylonians. Therefore the use of this word "sanctified" simply means that the Medes and Persians were set aside by God for His holy use and this instance to punish the Babylonians for all deeds by the thrice Holy God is considered holy. The Medes and Persians were also called mighty ones. They were indeed very powerful. The expanse of their empire was huge, much larger than that of the Assyrians and Babylonians who reigned before them. They were called by the LORD to fulfil His anger against the Babylonians. The Medes and Persians would attack the Babylonians and in their own mind believed that it was their own doing. They would even rejoice in their success and victory. However, they were merely doing the will of God. Of course, the Medes and Persians as an ungodly people would not and could not be aware of their role in God's plan. Their rejoicing in God's highness is not one of worship but that they were doing the high plan of God and they did it with joy. They were not forced to do God's will in punishing the Babylonians.

They would be many and they would make a lot of noise as they marched in the thousands against their

foes. They would seem to be made of many nations as their tumultuous noise dictate. They gathered together as a united whole for battle. The Bible made clear that no matter how strong and powerful they might appear, it is the LORD who had mustered them i.e. assembled them for battle in order to accomplish His will. They came from a far country even from the end of heaven. They were called the weapons of the LORD's indignation. The Medes and Persians were no more than an instrument that the LORD wields in His sovereign hand against the Babylonians. The Medes and Persians might think that they planned and conquered at will and in accordance with their hearts' desire. But actually they were just another instrument in God's plan. This does not mean that when the Persians did their evil that the LORD would be guilty of the evil of the Medes and the Persians. They will be held accountable by the LORD for their evil and wickedness just as the Babylonians were when they punished Judah for Judah's idolatry. After the Medes and Persians would be the Greeks and the Romans.

They were sent by God to destroy the whole land.

The Day of the LORD is at Hand – 13:6-18

The phrase "day of the LORD" has many meanings in Scriptures. It depends on the context in which the phrase is used. If it is used with reference to the Second Coming of Christ, then the day of the LORD would be the Second Coming of Christ. In this particular context, the phrase refers to

the coming of the Medes and Persians. Since they were sent by the LORD as His instrument of punishment, the Day of Judgement against the Babylonians was called the day of the LORD. The phrase "at hand" simply means that it is near. It shall come "as a destruction from the Almighty." The LORD is very precise in His description of the destruction of the Babylonians by the Medes and Persians. This is most encouraging to the Jews and Israelites who have the LORD as their God. It is most fearful to the enemies of Israel. The LORD moves earthly powers like He changes the twist and turns of a mighty river!

The reaction and response is that the hearts of these people will melt and their hands weaken. They will not have the strength to lift up their swords. Their desire to fight will be lost instantaneously. What is the point of trying to be the most powerful nation on earth when one knows that it is only a matter of time its glorious days will be soon over and be replaced by another? The only kingdom that lasts for eternity is the kingdom of Christ. Israel and Judah are part of Christ's kingdom. Will Israel and Judah realize this honour and privilege given to them by God? Or will Israel and Judah learn only after they are severely punished by exile? Will the other nations ever learn that it is futile to fight and conquer? History tells us that sinful men will never learn because of their unbelief. Israel and Judah also did not learn from these instructions but rebelled and learned the hard and painful way of exile and deaths. What

a sad but accurate revelation of the hardened hearts of all mankind.

The reaction and response to the Day of the LORD is pangs and sorrow like the pain of a woman in travail. They would look at one another and be in consternation by the pangs and sorrow that they all experienced. In other words, all of them would be in the same pain and sorrow and no one can help another. They see each other's faces as flames i.e. the sorrow and pain mixed with indignation against their enemies.

The Day of the LORD will bring cruelty, wrath and fierce anger. The Medes and Persian will devastate the land of Babylon. They will lay it waste and destroy the sinners in the Land of the Babylonians. The destruction will be so fierce that the stars of heaven and the sun and moon will be darkened i.e. the burning of the smoke of the destruction of the land and cities of the Babylonian Empire will burn non stop, day and night. The smoke clouds would be so thick, it blocks out the sun in the day and the moon at night. The LORD will punish the world i.e. the Babylonian Empire or their evil and the wicked for their iniquity. The arrogance of the proud will cease i.e. take a rest like the Sabbath and God will lay low (i.e. bring to nought) the haughtiness of the terrible (tyrannical).

God will make a man more precious than fine gold (pure gold) i.e. a man would be rarer than purest gold. The second part of verse 12 means the same thing as the golden wedge i.e. yellow gold of Ophir which was unique and very rare and precious. This

means that many would die in Babylonia. God would shake the heavens meaning to say that like a stormy weather, the commotions that God brings will be full of fear and calamity that the Babylonians have never seen before. The earth would be removed out of her place liken to an earthquake. It will shake and tremble. This will be done in the days of God's wrath and His fierce anger.

The Babylonians will be like a chased roe being hunted and had to flee for its life. They will also be likened to a sheep that no man taketh up i.e. a lost sheep with no one to care or bring back to the fold. Sheep is one of the most helpless animals in all of God's creation. For the sheep to be left alone and unwanted means certain death. All those who were captured by the Babylonians, or were brought there as mercenaries, would look at one another and realize that if they remain, they would perish too. They would leave for their respective homeland. All who were caught by the Medes and Persians will either be killed with the spear i.e. thrust through or by the sword. They shall not escape. The children of the Babylonians shall be dashed to pieces before their eyes. This was what they did to the Jews when they destroyed Jerusalem. Now the just retribution of God falls upon the Babylonians through the hand of the Medes and Persians (see Psalm 137). Their house would be plundered and destroyed and their women would be ravished i.e. raped and attacked sexually. The Medes and Persians will be stirred up by the LORD to bring forth the judgement described here in

Isaiah 13. They will not be bought with silver and gold to stop their plundering and killing. They were determined to bring devastation to the Babylonian Empire and nothing will stop them. Not even the offer of silver or gold. There is no pity in the vicious murderous rampage of the Medes and Persians. Their bows will dash the young men to pieces. They shall have no pity on the fruit of the womb and they will not even spare the children. They will all be massacred.

The Total Destruction – 12:19-22

The destruction of the great Babylonian Empire will be compared to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. The greatness of the Babylonian Empire is described as “the glory of kingdoms and the beauty of the Chaldees’ Excellency”. They will all come to nothing because Sodom and Gomorrah came to nothing! These cities vanished from the face of the earth after the destruction by fire and brimstone.

Like Sodom and Gomorrah, the city of Babylon would never be inhabited for generations to come. The Arabians were a nomadic people who lived in tents. They do not live in one place permanently. Therefore they would choose places to live for only a very brief time. They do not look for very green pastures that are good for long-term use. This means that their standard of choice is very low. Even the Arabians would find the place devastated by the Medes and Persians that once dwelt the great Babylon city so unsuitable that they would not even pitch their tents there for a brief time.

The shepherds are even less fussy in choosing a place for their flock of sheep, which lived where their shepherd places them. These shepherds would find the place unsuitable for their sheep. The once glorious city of Babylon, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, will be reduced to an unwanted and deserted place even for the animals! What a vivid picture of the total destruction of Babylon.

The wild animals will live in this wasteland. These wild animals were the wild beasts of the desert. This tells us that the land where Babylon once stood would become like the desert fit only for the wild beasts of the desert. They will build homes for these doleful i.e. mourning animals. They would mourn all night depicting the sorrowful cry of a once powerful empire now in ruins forever. Owls make a sad and eerie sound when they hoot at night and late into the night. This sound mixed with the mournful cry of the wild animals would make the place a creepy and desolate place. The satyrs refer to hairy ones which some have understood as he-goats or even wild creatures of a devilish kind. In short, it is only for demons to dance and play in such a place! On top of these wild beasts would be wild beasts of the islands i.e. fierce wild beasts that were rare and found only in coastal regions would cry in their houses. The dragons i.e. serpents like creatures would also cry in their palaces i.e. their homes. The time of the Babylonian destruction would soon come. It will not be delayed even though when Isaiah was given this prophecy, it would be about 200

years away. However, to the LORD, 200 years is but a blink of the eye. In prophecy, time is not the issue but the event prophesied.

PRACTICAL VALUE

Superpowers today? – Will the super powers of today fare better than the superpowers of yesteryears? Superpowers from all quarters of the continents had their day in the sun to shine. They showed off their military might for a brief season and then they disappeared from the face of the earth forever. When they were great, they boasted and praised one another. They built monuments and gigantic structures that boggle the minds of men. These monuments have disappeared like the great city of Babylon was razed to the ground according to God's timing.

Mighty superpowers like Russia, the United States of America and China of our time are treated and viewed by present generations as impregnable and appear to last forever. However, like past superpowers they too will fade and disappear from the scene, once their shine fades away into the sunset. This is the unchanging trend and way of all superpowers. The reason is that these super powers are ruled by sinful men. Great men might have founded and built empires so that they rise from the ashes and become dominant powers to rule and reign and destroy the previous superpowers. But when the founder dies, a new ruler replaces him. When this ruler dies, another will rise to take his place. All it needs is one

incompetent ruler to reign and that kingdom would crumble to dust and another new superpower will replace it. This goes on for centuries and it will all culminate in the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ who rules and lives forever. Believers need not fear the superpowers of today for they will fall and become the superpowers of the past. Only those in Christ will rule with Christ for eternity because their Lord Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever.

The sovereignty of God is over the whole heaven and earth! – Sinful man must realize that he is finite and very mortal. He lives and he dies. His power is nothing to the Almighty God. The Babylonian Empire had not even risen and the LORD had already revealed to His people through Isaiah that it would be thoroughly destroyed by the Medes and Persians. The Medes and Persians themselves are insignificant at this juncture. Yet the LORD describes them as His sanctified ones. They belong to God. They were not His people. They were not committed the oracles of God like the Israelites were. They do not acknowledge the LORD as their God. However, without their permission and ignoring their pomp and power, the LORD unilaterally declared that the Medes and Persian are nothing more than instruments in God's sovereign hand.

Believers have to realize and never forget that Jesus Christ is their LORD. He is not only their Saviour and Lord but He is also the God of Heaven and Earth. He not only control the life

of every believer from existence before birth to eternity but He also is absolutely sovereign over every creature, man, woman and child from the time of Adam to the day of man's existence before God destroys this old earth and old heaven and creates a new heaven and new earth as prophesied in Revelation 21. This sovereign power of our heavenly Father brings greatest peace to our hearts to know that there are no chance happenings in the believer's life. All are ordered by God for our blessing and His glory.

The Just Retribution of God – Wickedness will not prevail. All wicked men must be punished by God. If it is not in this lifetime, it will be in the life to come after death. No wicked man, no matter how powerful he may appear to other men, will escape the justice of God. Babylon was used by God to punish Judah. But the Babylonians themselves were punished by God through the Medes and Persians. What they did to the Jews they received from the Medes and Persians.

This is a stern warning from God to all mankind. No man might see man's wicked deeds but God knows them all. There is no darkness or secret chambers to hide and cover their evil deeds. They are all known to God and He will deal with every sinner! Powerful despots have escaped the judgement of man because of their powerful rule. They enjoyed this powerful rule till the day they die. They seemed to have escaped justice. It is true that they escaped the justice of man but they have not and did not

escape the justice of God. They will be justly dealt with by God and they will perish in hell and ultimately in the Lake of Fire for their sins and iniquities! AMEN.

DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Daily Readings

MONDAY: Isaiah 13:1-5;

TUESDAY: Isaiah 13:6-18;

WEDNESDAY: Isaiah 13:1-22;

THURSDAY: Isaiah 13:1-22;

FRIDAY: Isaiah 13:1-22.

Discussion Questions

- 1. What is the main difference between the concept of fatalism and the biblical doctrine of the sovereignty of God?

- 2. If God is sovereign then how does God justify punishing sinners whom He used as His instrument of chastisement? Please explain your answer.

3. If God reveals to mankind future events about their doom and destruction, why would sinful men not take heed and avoid these future prophetic consequences? Please explain your answer.

4. Can we say that from Isaiah 13, God's prophecies are revelations of future events that He is not able to control but are accurately revealed? Please explain.

5. What is the meaning of the Day of the LORD for believers now? Does it refer to a day that is past or in the future? Any biblical verse to support your view?

6. Are you confident that the Day of the LORD will be a happy day for you? If not, why not? If yes, how do you know?

7. Will the Charismatics be happy when the Day of the Lord comes? Please explain your answer with biblical support.

8. Will the Roman Catholics be happy when the Day of the Lord comes? Please explain your answer.

9. Does Isaiah 13 present to you a God who is very angry and that He delights in killing and in the deaths of sinners? Please explain.

10. How do you view countries like USA, Russia, China, and EU? Do you see them as invincible? Do you think that the world sees them as invincible?

11. What is the biblical perspective in the evaluation of the superpowers of today? Please explain.

12. What is the difference between the superpowers of today compared to the superpowers of the past such as the Babylonians, Medes and Persians, Greeks and Romans? Please give reasons for your answer.

13. What lessons can you learn from this chapter about God's Word and about yourself?
