

## **The Rise and Fall of Babylon** **Isaiah 13:1-22**

Our text this morning is from the book of Isaiah, chapter 13. We'll be reading the whole chapter. Before the reading, I'll pray. Please join me in prayer.

Our Father in heaven, we do ask that you would now speak to us from your word. We ask that you would speak to us by your word, and we ask that you would speak to us by the words that I speak. Father, please give us all ears to hear, eyes to see, and hearts to understand and to obey. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Isaiah chapter 13, starting at verse 1: "The oracle concerning Babylon which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw. <sup>2</sup>On a bare hill raise a signal; cry aloud to them; wave the hand for them to enter the gates of the nobles. <sup>3</sup>I myself have commanded my consecrated ones, and have summoned my mighty men to execute my anger, my proudly exulting ones.

"<sup>4</sup>The sound of a tumult is on the mountains 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. <sup>5</sup>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.

"<sup>6</sup>Wail, for the day of the LORD is near; as destruction from the Almighty it will come! <sup>7</sup>Therefore all hands will be feeble, and every human heart will melt. <sup>8</sup>They will be dismayed: pangs and agony will seize them; they will be in anguish like a woman in labor. They will look aghast at one another; their faces will be aflame.

"<sup>9</sup>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. <sup>10</sup>For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light. <sup>11</sup>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. <sup>12</sup>I will make people more rare than fine gold, and mankind than the gold of Ophir. <sup>13</sup>Therefore I will make the heavens tremble, and the earth will be shaken out of its place, at the wrath of the LORD of hosts in the day of his fierce anger. <sup>14</sup>And like a hunted gazelle, or like sheep with none to gather them, each will turn to his own people, and each will flee to his own land. <sup>15</sup>Whoever is found will be thrust through, and whoever is caught will fall by the sword. <sup>16</sup>Their infants will be dashed in pieces before their eyes; their houses will be plundered and their wives ravished.

"<sup>17</sup>Behold, I am stirring up the Medes against them, who have no regard for silver and do not delight in gold. <sup>18</sup>Their bows will slaughter the young men; they will have no mercy on the fruit of the womb; their eyes will not pity children. <sup>19</sup>And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the splendor and pomp of the Chaldeans, will be like Sodom and Gomorrah when God overthrew them. <sup>20</sup>It will never be inhabited or lived in for all generations; no Arab will pitch his tent there; no shepherds will make their flocks lie down there. <sup>21</sup>But wild animals will lie down there, and their houses will be full of howling creatures; there ostriches will dwell, and there wild goats will dance. <sup>22</sup>Hyenas will cry in its towers, and jackals in the pleasant palaces; its time is close at hand and its days will not be prolonged." Amen.

Well a passage like the passage that we have today just doesn't work if the God in whom you believe is the god in whom the world believes. The god in whom the world believes is something a bit like Santa Claus. The god in whom the world believes is peaceful and lovey-dovey; he's easily categorized; he's easily controlled. The God in whom the world believes is just a slightly superior friend to yourselves, or to myself.

The God in whom the world believes is fluffy. He's like a favorite grandfather. All you want to do is give the poor old man a hug. And he doesn't exert himself, and he doesn't intervene, and oh! he would never, ever judge people for sinning. That's the god in whom the world believes.

Well, if that's the god in whom you believe, you can't really do anything with the prophetic passages in the Old Testament. You can't really do anything with this passage, because this passage doesn't show us this fluffy, harmless, easily understood and categorized god. This passage shows us God Almighty—God who judges, God who gets involved, God who intervenes, God who commands nations, God who commands warfare, God, indeed, who commands killing—God, indeed, who is to be feared.

My friends, don't try and introduce people to a false god. There's no value in it. There's no value in trying to introduce people to a god of human niceness. Scripture tells us that God is love, and it's true that God is love. But you've got to understand: Nothing about God in any way ever compromises His holiness, ever. His holiness is the thing that is above all.

Remember in Isaiah chapter 6, Isaiah saw the seraphim worshipping in the very presence of Yahweh, and the thing that they wanted us to know most of all about Yahweh is that He is holy, holy, holy. Everything else that we know about God must be considered in the light of His holiness. Just because we're told that God is a God of love does not mean that God compromises His holiness to express His love. He doesn't.

God is also just. He does rightly. He judges rightly. And that is also based upon His holiness. What we are forced to understand is that God is so holy and righteous that it is right when he commands death and bloodshed. That's the God whom we're trying to tell the world about. That's the God whom we are telling people to seek reconciliation with, in the Lord Jesus Christ, and to worship without reservation.

Think about it: Who wants to worship a kind and friendly grandfather figure? You might want to hug him, you might want him to give you a gift. But God wants true worship. True worship is based upon awestruck reverence.

Once again, I point us back to Isaiah chapter 6—that awestruck reverence. Isaiah: Woe is me! for I am a man of sinful lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of sinful lips. Awestruck! Awestruck fear of God. He loves God, he worships God, he knows God because God has made Himself known. And yet he fears Him. And he fears His judgments. The problem with the world is that people fear hell and don't want to think about death, but they've never learnt to fear God. And because they've never learnt to fear God, they don't fear the sins that take them to hell. They're perfectly happy to sin, and they're perfectly happy to numb their mind to reality, whatever way they can.

You know, we live in a nation where ignorance is bliss. If you wanted me to describe the religion of Australia, I'd say the religion of Australia is this: Ignorance is bliss. People don't ask the big questions, and they don't want to ask the big questions, and they don't want to be asked the big questions: Where did I come from? Why am I here? Where am I going? What's the purpose of life? Australia seems to be under this absolute conviction that you're better off not asking any of those questions, ever. Don't ask them. Just numb the mind. Do whatever you can do to numb the mind and not think, not consider anything.

But you come to a passage like this, where Isaiah speaks of what we call history, but when Isaiah was speaking, this is future history—150 to 200 years before something happened, Isaiah was speaking of it as though it was happening right before his very eyes on the big screen; as though it was all happening right before his very eyes.

It's interesting, when you go through the commentators on this passage, you very quickly find out how they approached Scripture. If they don't consider Scripture to be the word of God, they'll find a hundred different ways to tell you that this was written after the fact. Isaiah didn't really write it. Somebody amended the text. Somebody added it in after it happened. And then you find the occasional commentator who actually submits himself to the word of God and says, "No, Isaiah spoke this. He spoke this 150 to 200 years before it happened." It's just little things like that which tell you how a person approaches the word of God.

Isaiah here speaks predictively of things that he could not possibly know, other than by the Spirit of God. How would he know about a nation called the Medes, for example? If you want to try and get a geographical picture in your head, you've the nation of Palestine, or Israel. Go east from Palestine, or Israel, and you come to what we call today Iraq. Then go farther east from Iraq, and you come to Iran. And Iran is what Isaiah is calling the Medes. So Isaiah is seeing something that's 150 to 200 years in the future, and hundreds of miles away from Judah, and he's seeing that something by supernatural vision given by God, who is in heaven.

Turn in your Bibles to Jeremiah chapter 50. You see, what Isaiah is telling God's people, what Isaiah is telling anyone who is willing to listen, is that God runs the nations. Yahweh, though He is the covenant God of Israel, He is the creator of all things, He is God over all the earth, and even nations that do not worship Yahweh—nations for example like Babylon or the Medes—, even those nations are under Yahweh's command.

Turn to verse 17 of Jeremiah chapter 50. Here's the thing: God is going to use Babylon to destroy Judah, to destroy Jerusalem, and to take His people into captivity. And then the judgment that He meted out to Judah is going to fall on Babylon. Let's read what Jeremiah tells us. Jeremiah 50, verse 17:

<sup>17</sup> Israel is a hunted sheep driven away by lions. First the king of Assyria devoured him, and now at last Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon has gnawed his bones. <sup>18</sup> Therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Behold, I am bringing punishment on the king of Babylon and his land, as I punished the king of Assyria. <sup>19</sup> I will restore Israel to his pasture, and he shall feed on Carmel and in Bashan, and his desire shall be satisfied on the hills of Ephraim and in Gilead.

<sup>20</sup> In those days and in that time, declares the LORD, iniquity shall be sought in Israel, and there shall be none, and sin in Judah, and none shall be found, for I will pardon those whom I leave as a remnant.” And we’ll stop there.

“I am bringing punishment on the king of Babylon and his land, as I punished the king of Assyria.” The Babylonians are going to do what they want to do. The Babylonians were a vicious, hungry, conquering, rapacious people. You could compare them to the Nazis in World War II. They wanted to take territory. They would take their territory by any means possible. They didn’t care how many were killed. They didn’t care how they were killed, as long as they got their territory.

Well, that’s the picture of the Babylonians. And God is going to use the Babylonians to punish the covenantal unfaithfulness of His people. Judah has betrayed God’s covenant. They have turned their backs upon God. They have become idolaters. They have become unclean. That’s what we’ve learnt, I hope, in the first twelve chapters from the book of Isaiah—that God is saving a remnant, but He is judging His people.

So you have this nation of Babylon, this idolatrous, evil, rapacious nation, land-hungry, gold-hungry. He’s going to use them, according to their nature. Judah needs to be punished. Babylon will be his tool of punishment. Judah will suffer. But then, because they are evil and wicked, because they take great delight in destroying God’s people, they themselves will be punished for their wickedness. Babylon itself will suffer the same fate that God’s people will suffer.

Earlier where we read in Joel chapter 2, verse 10, did you notice the punishments which were to fall upon Judah? Just turn quickly to Joel chapter 2, verse 10. This is Joel prophesying of the fall of Jerusalem, Joel prophesying of the punishment of Judah as God sends Babylon against Judah. And here’s what’s to happen in Judah: “The earth quakes before them”—that’s the armies that are attacking Jerusalem—“The earth quakes before them; the heavens tremble. The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining.” The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining. What’s happening there? The nation is losing the light that God gives to it. The light that the city of Jerusalem once had has been taken away. Babylon is being used to bring in darkness.

Now turn back to Isaiah chapter 13, and look at what’s going to happen to Babylon in verse 10. Remember Isaiah chapter 13 is a prophecy against Babylon. “<sup>10</sup> For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light.” See the same punishment. The same thing that happened to Judah—Babylon was the means by which this punishment was dished out to Judah, and now God righteously and in judgment dishes exactly the same punishment out upon the people who, at His bidding, were conquering Judah.

What kind of God can do that? I ask you the question. What kind of God can do that? What kind of God can muster an army of conquerors, send them against His people to punish and humble His people, and then righteously and justly punish and humble the people whom He used to punish and humble His people?

You see, there's a theological debate that's been running for as long as men have been trying to understand the things of God, and that debate is, How do you reconcile God's sovereignty and man's responsibility? If God is sovereign and rules over all—for example, God is the one who raised up the Babylonians just so that they could destroy His people—how is it that God can then punish the Babylonians for their wickedness in destroying His people? Because God is sovereign, and the Babylonians are doing only that for which God created them, how then can God punish them for their immorality in doing that for which they were created?

You see, it's a hard question. It's a tough question. People have argued about it, as I said, from the time that people have tried to understand the things of God. How is that God runs all things, and yet punishes men for their wickedness? Well the answer lies in God's holiness, God's rightness, God's goodness. You see, if He were somewhat like us, if He were not perfectly good, it would not be right that He uses peoples to judge other peoples. It would not be right that He uses anyone to judge anyone.

Even justice in the court system, if we still had the death penalty in this nation, the death penalty would have been instituted by God. And if God were not perfect and holy and righteous, it would not be right that anyone be punished by death for their crimes. But God is perfect and holy and righteous. He is wholly apart and separate from sin. Humanity is fallen. Humanity is sinful. Humanity has fallen in the sin of Adam, and so a holy and righteous God has the right, the right—He is just and right in judging anyone in any way He so sees fit.

We cannot charge Him with any wrongdoing, and He has the right to raise up mighty and wicked nations like Babylon and cast them down, and He has the right to raise up mighty and wicked nations like the Medes and to cast them down. And in the modern age, He has the right to raise up mighty and wicked nations, like Nazi Germany, and to cast them down. And He has the right to raise up mighty and wicked religions, like Islam, and when the time comes, He'll cast it down. God, being perfectly good and holy and separate from sin, has every right to run the world according to His sovereign will, and no man can accuse Him of doing wrong. The thing is, God is so good and sin is so evil that God has every right to do things as He will.

We've got two problems. One, we underestimate the goodness and the holiness of God; and two, we underestimate the evil and the wickedness of sin. And that's why we have such trouble trying to reconcile the idea of God's sovereignty and man's responsibility. God is sovereign, and man is responsible for his own wickedness. God uses secondary means to run this earth. God's hand does not actually touch the wicked ones of Babylon; even so, He uses them as His servants.

That's the way the world runs today, my friends. God, in Christ, who is seated at the right hand of the Father on high, rules over all. He reigns over all. I speak to you at times and I tell you there's a wicked kingdom, a kingdom of darkness, under the control of Satan. Scripture tells us that there is. And even at the same time, that wicked kingdom is under the sovereign control of the living God, and Satan and his minions can do no more that God permits them to do. They can go no further than God commands them to go. Satan's is a conquered kingdom. God has no intention of ever saving them. Repentance has never been granted to fallen spirits. God has no intention of ever saving them, but He uses them according to their nature, according to His will, to accomplish His purposes. God reigns over all. He reigns over the nations.

And so in our text this morning, we can come to some complicated things, or some difficult phrases. For example, look at verse 3. “I myself have commanded my consecrated ones, and have summoned my mighty men to execute my anger, my proudly exulting ones.” “My consecrated ones”—that word’s used over 800 times in the Old Testament—consecrated, or set apart, or made holy, or most holy. Consecrated. God says He’s consecrated these people, He’s set them aside for a particular purpose. This is exactly the same word used to describe sacrifices, for example, when it says in the Old Testament book of Leviticus that the sacrifice is most holy. It’s the same word.

And here in this passage of Isaiah, we have these wicked men who are going to destroy man, woman, and child, and God has consecrated them for a purpose. He’s set them apart. They don’t have personal holiness. It doesn’t say He’s saved them; it doesn’t say He’s granted them repentance; it doesn’t say that they’re His holy servants, people who know the Lord. But God set them apart to use them for something. That something is to enact His judgments.

We’ll look at verse 16 of Isaiah 13: “Their infants will be dashed in pieces before their eyes; their houses will be plundered and their wives ravished.” Man, woman, and child—God’s judgment, God’s vengeance, God’s righteous wrath will fall upon these people—man, woman, and child. Even the children. God says, “I am going wipe Babylon out. By the time I’m finished with Babylon, it will no longer exist.”

Have you got any idea of how powerful Babylon was in the league of nations, or in the world roster of nations at that time? It’s almost as though God had said today, “I’m going to wipe out the USA, or China”—nations that we would call super-powers. And God is saying, “Wipe them out—man, woman, and child.” They appeared to be unbeatable, and yet God says, “Nope. Man, woman, and child—I’m going to destroy them.”

Turn to Psalm 137—By the waters of Babylon. It’s a song of lament—God’s people suffering in the land of Babylon, in the land of their captivity. Verse 1: “By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion.” God’s people remembering. What was in their minds? The good old days. The days when we lived in Jerusalem. The days when we had a temple. Move down to verse 8: “<sup>8</sup>O daughter of Babylon, doomed to be destroyed, blessed shall he be who repays you with what you have done to us! <sup>9</sup>Blessed shall he be who takes your little ones and dashes them against the rock!”

People have trouble with that. I understand why. How can that be? As I said, God’s not asking you to tell people that He’s nice and fluffy, and a generous old grandfather. God’s telling you to worship. He’s telling you to worship and to fear Him. And that’s His word to the world. “Worship—bend the knee, reverence me, be awestruck. I am God Almighty, and if I ordain that the children die, the children die.” And God’s people in Babylon, God’s faithful—they longed to see God repay their captors in like measure. That which their captors had done to them in Jerusalem when Jerusalem was conquered, they want to see it repaid in like measure. It was a brutal time. When Jerusalem fell, there was no pity. It was not an easy time. The king’s sons were slaughtered before the king’s eyes, and then his eyes were put out, so that the last thing he ever saw on this earth was the death of his own children.

If that happened to the king, what happened to the people? I ask the question, and it's fairly easy to see, isn't it? It's not hard to imagine. And here we have God's people saying, "Repay those who persecute us in like measure. Repay those who have harmed us in like measure. Blessed shall be he who takes your little ones and dashes them against the rock." You say, "But doesn't Scripture say, 'Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord'?" Yes. Scripture says, "'Vengeance is mine,' saith the Lord," and here God's people are saying, "Vengeance is yours, Lord. Please take vengeance." That's the God whom we worship in Christ.

Remember something. In the book of Revelation, when the Lamb takes the scroll with the seals on it, He exercises this dominion. As He breaks those scrolls, what happens? Conquest, famine, war, bloodshed—stars, sun, moon falling from the sky. The Lamb exercises this dominion, this power, this authority that God has given to Him, for He is now the King of all creation—King of kings and Lord of lords, our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. And He repays according to the measure of the wickedness of the people whom He is judging.

We don't like to think that way. We like to "civilize" our God; civilize according to our supposed standards. He's God. He's great. He's awesome. He's mighty. His judgments are just. We don't get to speak back to Him. We don't get to tell Him the way it should be. God deals with Babylon as God sees fit. God uses Babylon as God sees fit.

And so the prophecy is that God, having used Babylon, will destroy Babylon with another nation, the Medes—Darius the Mede, if you remember from the book of Daniel. The Medes were able to throw down Babylon, destroy it, crush. Why? Because God rules the nations, God passes judgment as He sees fit.

So what are we going to get from this? Let's see if we can lift out some kind of lessons and some kind of application from our passage. First of all, let's look at the concept of Babylon. Isaiah, in his day, was speaking of a nation in his greater geographical region. Babylon was a powerful city-state. At the time that Isaiah spoke, Babylon was not more powerful than Assyria. Remember, Assyria has taken the Northern Kingdom, destroyed the Northern Kingdom, and is on Judah's doorstep. And Assyria is a rapacious and evil and idolatrous empire. Babylon is to the northeast of Assyria, and Babylon will soon enough, in the providence of God, rebel against Assyria and destroy Assyria, and then Judah will have Babylon on their doorstep.

But when you read all of Scripture, you come to realize something, and that is that this city-state of Babylon of which Isaiah speaks, this evil place Babylon, becomes more than just a city-state in the ancient Near East. Babylon becomes a symbol of something. It becomes a symbol of the wickedness and the rebellion of humanity. It becomes a symbol, a typical name, for all that is evil and wicked in the world.

We had Revelation chapter 18 read to us. Think of the descriptions of Babylon, dealing in men's souls, dealing in idolatry, dealing in sexual immorality—all the nations of the world being perverted and polluted by the influence of Babylon. Babylon becomes symbolic of the enemy of God's people throughout all of history. It starts way back in the book of Genesis.

Turn back to Genesis, chapter 10. This is a list of nations, the genealogies, the people descended from Noah. We'll start reading at verse 6: <sup>6</sup>“The sons of Ham: Cush, Egypt, Put, and Canaan. <sup>7</sup>The sons of Cush: Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah, and Sabteca. The sons of Raamah: Sheba and Dedan. <sup>8</sup>Cush fathered Nimrod; he was the first on earth to be a mighty man. <sup>9</sup>He was a mighty hunter before the LORD. Therefore it is said, ‘Like Nimrod a mighty hunter before the LORD.’ <sup>10</sup>The beginning of his kingdom was Babel.” And that’s all we need. We stop there. “Babel,” Babylon. “Nimrod a mighty hunter before the LORD”—we can mistake that description and imagine that’s praising the man. It’s not. It’s saying that he was one who rebelled against the Lord; he was one who was proud before God.

Move on to Genesis chapter 11. The tower of Babel. <sup>1</sup>“Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. <sup>2</sup>And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. <sup>3</sup>And they said to one another, ‘Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly.’ And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. <sup>4</sup>Then they said, ‘Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth.’ <sup>5</sup>And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built. <sup>6</sup>And the LORD said, ‘Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. <sup>7</sup>Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another’s speech.’ <sup>8</sup>So the LORD dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. <sup>9</sup>Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth. And from there the LORD dispersed them over the face of all the earth.”

Just notice the character of the city. Back at verse 4: <sup>4</sup>“‘Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth.’” When the people come off the ark, they’d been told once again to go out into all the world, to fill the world. But the people of Babel said, “No. No, let’s make a name for ourselves. Let’s build a tower that reaches to the heaven. Let’s build ourselves a kingdom. Let’s have ourselves a religion, boys—a great big tower that reaches to the heavens.” The people of Babel—proud.

So Babylon, from its very inception, has been a city-state, a religious city-state, which is built in rebellion against the will of God. Not only is it a nation, but it’s a nation that is political and religious. And that religion is the religion of man’s invention. And that religion is rebellious and evil.

Turn in your New Testaments to First Peter, chapter 5. Even when the apostles were ministering and writing Scripture, even when the church was in its childhood, growing by the power of the Holy Spirit, looking down at verse 13, hear what Peter says: <sup>13</sup>“She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings, and so does Mark, my son.” “She who is at Babylon.” Who would that be? Well, there’s no reason to believe that Peter was anywhere in the region of the Middle East that we would call Babylon. It’s most likely he was writing from Rome. And the “she who is at Babylon,” sending them greetings, was the church in Rome. But Peter calls Rome “Babylon.” Babylon was in the world. Babylon’s in the world today.



Now I've heard all kinds of strange teaching, you know, people off on their little crazy tangents. I've heard someone try to tell me that the USA is Israel. That's not Israel. I've heard someone try to tell me that the USA is Babylon. It's not Babylon. The USA's the USA. But within the USA, there are the seeds of Babylon, just as they are here in Australia, and just as they are in every other nation on earth.

Any time men, mankind, humanity, in its sins joins together to set up a government that is in rebellion against God, any time that humanity joins together to set up rules and laws, iniquitous decrees that justify the wicked—my friend, there Babylon is. And Babylon is fighting in the USA for control of the USA, and it's fighting in Australia for control of Australia, and Russia, and China, and England, and you name it—there it is. And any time an evil religious thing, an evil religious invasion happens, my friends, Babylon's on the move. If you want to know what's happening in Europe, I'll tell you—Babylon's on the move.

What do we do, the people of God? We pray. We obey faithfully. We serve. We understand something. We may lose the battles, but we're going to win the war. We fight as we can fight—rightly, justly. We don't get to practice the hatred that they practice. It's very easy to become very angry about the things that happen in the world, and to desire to see death and bloodshed. Well, that's in the hands of God. Remember Psalm 137. We can hand vengeance over to God; blessed will be the one that destroys them and their children. Blessed will be that one. Trust in the Lord. We obey.

What's the problem here in Australia, or there in the USA, or there in Great Britain, or in Europe? What's the problem? The weakness of the church. The unfaithfulness of the church. How many churches in Australia are there today? I don't know. But how many of them don't actually preach the truth? How many of them don't actually give the glory to God? How many of them don't preach about God who is to be worshipped and feared? How many? Over half—I'll bet you it's over half. I would expect that there's probably only a tenth of the churches in Australia today that preach the gospel. The church is so weak!

And then even we who preach the gospel—how weak are we? I mean this. How submitted to God are we? How willing are we to let go of the things of the world in order to serve God? How much do we want for ourselves? How much are we wanting to glorify ourselves, glorify humanity, to get what we want for us? It's a tough question, isn't it? You see, the church in the book of Acts had nothing but the Spirit of God. They had the word of God, the teaching of the apostles, and the Spirit of God, and that was enough. And they were willing to die.

You see, the problem in all these nations where we look and we see this invasion of Islam—the problem is the church is so terribly, horribly weak and disobedient. We want stuff for ourselves—too much for ourselves. The church in Australia today—and I mean what we would call the evangelical, gospel-preaching church—doesn't want to fulfill the creation mandate. We're too clever for it. What do I mean by that? Well, what's the creation mandate? God made a man, God made a woman. What did He tell them to do? Fill the earth. Go out, fill the earth. Subdue it. He made the woman to be a helpmate for man.

Here's something I was thinking about this morning, and contemplating overnight, actually. You know, Eve was probably the most beautiful, intelligent woman that's ever set foot upon this earth—the most beautiful, gifted, intelligent woman that's ever set foot upon this earth. And what was she put upon the earth to do? To be a mother of the living, to have children, to be a wife to her husband.

But the modern church—we say we're a gospel-preaching church, and like to claim to be an evangelical church—we want anything other than to fulfill the creation mandate. Want to travel, want to have a career, want to do anything other than marry young and have children. We've swallowed the world's poison.

Young girls, I'll tell you what the world's telling you. I know what the world's telling you. It's telling you that if you marry young and have children, you're wasting your life. You have potential, you have wonderful gifts, you can be this, that, and the other. You won't travel, you won't see the world, you won't have a career, you won't break through the glass ceiling, etc., etc. You've all heard it. That's what the world's telling you.

God created the most intelligent, beautiful, and capable woman in the world to be a wife and a mother. In God's eyes, being the woman that He created you to be is far more important than whether or not you have a career. I'm not saying abandon all hope, and I'm not saying turn yourself into a moron. I'm not saying any of those things. But I'm saying to the church at large, not just to the few here today, we must return to being what God made us to be.

I'd love to get into some larger church in Sydney, where there's hundreds of people and that calls itself a gospel-preaching, evangelical church. I'd love to get in front of them and say, "Okay, I can solve the problem. We want to grow the church? We want to conquer this nation for Christ? It's very simple. Every young girl, be married by the time you're 19, have four children by the time you're 25. Your children—you raise them to be married by the time they're 19, and to have four children by the time they're 25." And on it goes. At least four—maybe have more.

I'm pretty sure that I'd be chased out of there with sticks. Someone would want to scratch my eyes out. How dare I say that! How dare you say that! I'd be a misogynist—a woman-hater. That's what they'd call me, because they want so much stuff for themselves. They want to prove to the world that "I'm just as good as any man." My wife's better than any man. My wife's better than any man, and she's obedient to God, as a wife and a mother. And I bet you if Joel were here, he'd say, "And my wife's better than any man. And she's obedient to God and a mother."

In the eyes of God, everybody has a role to fulfill, and that role does not necessarily include a career, great worldly success, wealth, and all the rest that goes with it. God loves Christian wives and mothers because that's what He created a woman to be.

How do we beat Babylon? By being Christians, by being the people that God created us to be. Babylon's in the world, Babylon hates us. What did it say in the book of Revelation? Turn to Revelation chapter 18, last verse, verse 24. This is what God says about Babylon. "And in her was found the blood of the prophets and of saints, and of all who have been slain on earth."

Babylon hates us. The world hates us. Babylon hates us. The world system hates us. God is holding Babylon responsible for the death of His saints, whether it's Babylon working through Islamic countries, whether it's Babylon working through communist, totalitarian countries, whether it's Babylon trying to work through the USA right now, or Australia, or England. Babylon hates us. Babylon wants to kill us. Babylon wants to shed our blood. It's just a fact; deal with it. That's what Scripture tells us. That's what we're to expect. How do we overcome Babylon? Through Christian, faithful obedience. That's how you overcome Babylon. We don't want to see it.

So what does Isaiah's prophecy say to the people of Judah when Isaiah was speaking? What's the point of telling his faithful followers these things? Because we know the rest of the nation wasn't listening, but the remnant were listening, remember? Isaiah's preaching to a nation—stopped up ears, blinded eyes, hardened hearts. That's the nation Isaiah preaches to, and they're not listening.

But he's got a remnant. "Behold, myself and the children God has given me," was the phrase he used earlier in the book. Why is he saying this to those people? Well, for those who receive the word, it's encouragement, isn't it? It's encouragement. You're going to be dragged off into captivity, but God is God over all the nations. You're going to see slaughter, mayhem, and destruction. But God is God over all the nations. You're going to suffer for being the people of God. But God is God over all the nations.

Turn to First John, chapter 2. We want to look at verses 15 to 17. John speaking: "<sup>15</sup> Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. <sup>16</sup> For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. <sup>17</sup> And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever."

Permit me to make one little change, and then you'll see what Isaiah is saying to the people of Judah. Start again at verse 15: "<sup>15</sup> Do not love Babylon or the things in Babylon. If anyone loves Babylon, the love of Yahweh is not in him. <sup>16</sup> For all that is in Babylon—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is of Babylon. <sup>17</sup> And Babylon is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of Yahweh abides forever."

You see what Isaiah is saying to the people when he tells them that Babylon is to be destroyed. He's saying, "Don't get at home there. Don't get too comfortable there. Don't become a Babylonian. Remain a faithful believing Jew in your captivity. Hold on, cling to the faith of your fathers. Cling to the word of God. Don't worry."

You see, in the ancient Middle East, this is the way it was seen: If your nation fell, it fell because the gods of the nation that took your nation were more powerful than your gods. Pretty simple, isn't it? If a war is one god versus another god, the god of the nation that wins was the most powerful god.

Isaiah is saying to the people of God, “No. No, no, no. Our God is the God of all creation. Our God is God over all. The fact that He allows Babylon to conquer Judah does not mean that the gods of Babylon are stronger than the God of Israel, Yahweh, the covenant God. Remain faithful to Yahweh, He will remain faithful to you, and you will be rescued. You will be restored. You will know life in Yahweh. You will know our God, even though you are captive in Babylon where the idols are worshipped, where wickedness is practiced on the very streets. Remain faithful to God. Cling to His word. Don’t get too at home in Babylon.”

And that’s his word to us today, isn’t it? Don’t get too at home in Babylon. That’s the Apostle John’s word: Don’t get too at home in this world. Don’t hold on too tight. We all want things. You know, I’m pleased the Lord has allowed us to buy a house to live in. I’m pleased that the Lord has granted us a house that’s comfortable. But the challenge is, How tight do we hold on to those things? How important are they to us? If this nation falls, if chaos erupts and you lose your house, will you still have your God? Will you still cling to Christ? Will you still love God?

Do not love Babylon or the things in Babylon. That’s God’s word to His people, throughout all the ages. Throughout all the ages, Babylon is once again rearing its ugly head—and doesn’t it look so mighty? Doesn’t it look so mighty? And Babylon is once again passing immoral and evil laws. And you wonder, How can it be stopped? It’ll be stopped when God stops it. They’ll get their way for as long as God says they’re going to get their way. They’ll go as far as God says they can go. They’ll do the things that God has commanded them to do.

For us, for the people of God, for we who are the servants of the living God—for us, our lot is to obey our God, even in the midst of Babylon. Even in the midst of Babylon. Consider Daniel. Consider his friends. In the face of the fire, would they worship the gods of Babylon? No. In the face of the den of lions, would Daniel pray to any god other than the God of Israel? No.

And what were the words of those young men who refused to bend the knee to Nebuchadnezzar’s image? “King Nebuchadnezzar, our King, our God is able to rescue us from the fiery furnace. But even if He doesn’t, but even if not, still, we will worship the Lord our God. Still we will worship the living God. Still we will worship the only true God. Nebuchadnezzar, your image is nothing other than an image. It’s an idol. It is nothing in our eyes. We worship the one true God. We’ll worship Him alive, we’ll worship Him if we die.”

That’s the attitude that God’s people must have. We must serve and love the Lord our God. Be prepared, my friends, for bad news along with good news. But then be prepared for bad news. Be prepared to see wicked things happen. Understand if they happen, it’s because God has ordained that they will be happening. Nothing’s outside of His control, even evil laws cast by rebellious governments. They’re not outside of His control. He builds them up to tear them down. He allows them in their pride to imagine that they can shake the fist at the living God; they can give him the finger. “We don’t need God, we’ve got all we need. Let’s drive God out. If we could just get the worship of the living God out of our society, then we’d have happiness.” And the Lord holds them in derision. We sang Psalm 2—“The Lord holds them in derision. Then he will speak to them in his wrath, saying, ‘I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill.’”

It's funny—nothing changes much, does it? In the world, nothing changes much. God has His people. God saves His people. And evil goes from worse to worse; and yet still, the purposes of God cannot be denied. And God's people may lose the battle, but always win the war. Let's close in prayer.

Father in heaven, I do indeed pray that you would help us not to hold on to the things of the world, and not to live in awe of Babylon, that great whore that sits upon many waters. May we be true worshippers of the living God, through Christ Jesus our Lord, by the power of the Holy Spirit. May we answer to you alone. I ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.