

Isaiah

Playing God

Lesson #6 for February 6, 2021

Scriptures: Isaiah 13; 14; 24-27.

1. This lesson will skip over a large part of the book of Isaiah between chapters 14 and 24. Those chapters cover God's predictions regarding the futures of a group of pagan and idolatrous nations surrounding Judah and Jerusalem. So, this lesson will review a lot of ancient history and help us to understand some of the reasons why God blessed certain groups and why He allowed other groups to go into oblivion.
2. Pride and sin began in the heart of a mighty angel in heaven as he was standing next to the throne of God. He began to think proud and rebellious thoughts which, eventually, led to the great controversy and will lead to the destruction of millions of people in our world.
3. Our only safety is in turning away from following Lucifer/Satan to following Jesus Christ. He died for us and died to show us the stark contrast between evil with its consequences and good with its results.
4. In Isaiah's day, the big bully nation was Assyria. We started the book of Isaiah noting that King Ahaz of Judah appealed to Tiglath-Pilezer III of Assyria to get him to attack Syria and the northern kingdom of Israel so they would stop attacking Judah.
5. Sometime later in Isaiah 13, Isaiah began to write about Babylon. While we have no way to date the writing of Isaiah 13 exactly, it is possible that this followed the experience of Hezekiah with the Babylonian emissaries as recorded in 2 Kings 20. At that time, Babylon was a far-off nation with little power. But, with His ability to see the future, God revealed that Babylon would, one day, be the superpower and a terrible threat to the people of Judah. Judah would "howl in pain." Read Isaiah 13.
6. Isaiah made some startling statements in Isaiah 13.
Isaiah 13:10: Every star and every constellation will stop shining, the sun will be dark when it rises, and the moon will give no light.—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., Isaiah 13:10). New York: American Bible Society.
7. No human power could have that effect on heavenly bodies. This should remind us that God is the One who is in charge and can use even the heavenly bodies as signs of what He is planning to do. Isaiah went on to describe shaking heavens and earth. (Isaiah 13:13)
8. He then described the terrors that would befall foreigners living in Babylon.
Isaiah 13:16: [The LORD said:] "While they look on helplessly, their babies will be battered to death, their houses will be looted, and their wives will be raped."—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}
9. He then described the fact that the Medes—and as we will later discover, the Persians joining them—would attack Babylon and destroy it without causing any damage to the city. But, that would be during the decline of the city of Babylon to the point where:
Isaiah 13:20: [The LORD said:] "No one will ever live there again."—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}
10. So, we have seen that Isaiah 13 begins a new section in this book, primarily focusing on judgments against various nations.
11. Knowing what we know about history, one would expect that Isaiah would begin his discussions of powerful nations by talking about Assyria. However, he had already spelled out God's words against Assyria in Isaiah 10:5-34. And do not forget Jonah! In that passage we are told:

Isaiah 10:17: God, the light of Israel, will become a fire. Israel's holy God will become a flame, which in a single day will burn up everything, even the thorns and thistles.—*Good News Bible*.*

12. Then, Isaiah went on to describe the fact that while Judah would suffer a lot of problems, they would survive while other nations around them would be destroyed.
13. After speaking about the downfall of Assyria, Isaiah discussed the fact that Judah would be taken captive to Babylon; but, eventually a few would come back. What do we know about Babylon?

Endowed with a rich and ancient cultural, religious, and political legacy, Babylon later emerged as the superpower that conquered and exiled Judah. But from the human perspective of Isaiah's time, it would not have been readily apparent that Babylon would threaten God's people. During much of Isaiah's ministry, Assyria dominated Babylon. From 728 B.C., when Tiglath-pileser III took Babylon and was proclaimed king of Babylon under the throne name Pulu (*or Pul*; see *2 Kings 15:19, 1 Chron. 5:26*), **Assyrian kings retook Babylon several times** (710 B.C., 702 B.C., 689 B.C., and 648 B.C.). Babylon, however, eventually would become the great superpower in the region, the power that would destroy the Judean kingdom.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Sunday, January 31.^{†§}

14. In many places in our lesson for this week, the language speaks of God in His anger, reaching out and destroying nations and peoples. Could a God of love actually do that? We need to remember that **the God of the Old Testament was Jesus!** (1 Corinthians 10:1-4; John 5:39; Luke 24:44) So, let us rephrase our question: **Would Jesus actually destroy nations?** Does this say anything to us about sin and its results? What is the relationship between sin and God's *wrath* or *anger*? **We need to remember that God's wrath is simply His turning away in loving disappointment from those who do not want Him anyway, thus leaving them to the inevitable and awful consequences of their own rebellious choices.**
15. While it is true that God has ultimate control over everything that happens in the universe, He chooses not to have control over our rebellious choices. That can apply not only to individuals but also to entire nations. So, if God allows a nation to suffer the consequences of its collective rebellious choices, does that make God responsible for their deaths or defeat?
16. We have already mentioned the fact that Babylon did not amount to much from the days of Abraham until 648 B.C. But, what do we know about the history of Babylon after that date?

In 626 B.C. the Chaldaean Nabopolassar restored Babylonian glory by making himself king in Babylon, beginning the Neo-Babylonian dynasty, and participating (with Media) in the defeat of Assyria. His son, Nebuchadnezzar II, was the king who conquered and exiled Judah.

How did the city of Babylon finally end? (*See Daniel 5.*)

In 539 B.C., when Cyrus the Persian captured Babylon for the Medo-Persian Empire (*see Daniel 5*), the city lost its independence forever. In 482 B.C., Xerxes I brutally suppressed a revolt of Babylon against Persian rule. He removed the statue of Marduk, the chief god, and apparently damaged some fortifications and temples.

Alexander the Great took Babylon from the Persians in 331 B.C. without a fight. In spite of his short-lived dream to make Babylon his eastern capital, the city declined over several centuries. By A.D. 198 the Roman, Septimus [*sic*] Severus, found Babylon completely deserted. So, the great city came to an end through abandonment. Today some Iraqi villagers live on parts of the ancient site, but they have not rebuilt the city as such.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide**

for Monday, February 1.[§] [Those villagers sell souvenirs to tourists.][‡]

17. Cyrus, the king of Medo-Persia, finally allowed the children of Israel to return to their home in Judah. We read about that prediction or prophecy by God through Isaiah in Isaiah 14:1-3.

Isaiah 14:1-3: The LORD will once again be merciful to his people Israel and choose them as his own. He will let them live in their own land again, and foreigners will come and live there with them. ²**Many nations will help the people of Israel to return to the land which the LORD gave them, and there the nations will serve Israel as slaves.** Those who once captured Israel will now be captured by Israel, and the people of Israel will rule over those who once oppressed them.

³ The LORD will give the people of Israel relief from their pain and suffering, and from the hard work they were forced to do.—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

18. In several places in these chapters, we notice that the terrible judgments that fall on some of these nations are referred to as *the day of the Lord*. (Isaiah 13:6,9) More than that, God's anger is so powerful that it has effects on the stars, sun, moon, heavens, and earth. (Isaiah 13:10,13) Even in our day, terrible disasters are referred to as "acts of God."

19. Right in the middle of chapter 14 of Isaiah, we read these incredible words:

Isaiah 14:12-15: ¹² **"King of Babylonia, bright morning star,** you have fallen from heaven! In the past you conquered nations, but now you have been thrown to the ground. ¹³You were determined to climb up to heaven and to place your throne above the highest stars. **You thought you would sit like a king on that mountain in the north where the gods assemble.** ¹⁴You said you would climb to the tops of the clouds and be like the Almighty. ¹⁵But instead, you have been brought down to the deepest part of the world of the dead."—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

20. There are several places in the Bible where it suggests that God comes out and even shakes the earth, pours down rain, and conquers His enemies. For example, see the experience of Deborah and Barrack as recorded in Judges 5:4,20-21.

Judges 5:4,20-21: LORD, when you left the mountains of Seir,

when you came out of the region of Edom,

the earth shook, and rain fell from the sky.

Yes, water poured down from the clouds....

²⁰The stars fought from the sky;

as they moved across the sky,

they fought against Sisera.

²¹ A flood in the Kishon swept them away—

the onrushing River Kishon.

I shall march, march on, with strength!—*Good News Bible*.^{*}

21. Someone living in Isaiah's day and reading what he wrote in Isaiah 13:19-22 would probably have thought Isaiah had lost his mind. It would have seemed impossible. Babylon had been a powerful nation back in the days of Abraham; but, then it declined and declined and declined even more until nobody thought it was of much account.

22. So, in response to Babylon's ultimate fall, God gave a clear taunt against its proud king. See Isaiah 14:3-9. God concluded by saying:

Isaiah 14:23: [The LORD said:] **"I will turn Babylonia into a marsh,** and owls will live there. I will sweep Babylonia with a broom that will sweep everything away. I, the

LORD Almighty, have spoken.”—*Good News Bible*.*†‡

23. To understand more about the kings of Babylon, we need to turn to the book of Daniel. Daniel 3-5 repeatedly talk about the self-esteem and bragging of the king of Babylon. But, not even Nebuchadnezzar would have claimed any direct connection with the gods.

This was dramatically demonstrated every year on the fifth day of the Babylonian New Year Festival, in which the king was required to remove his royal insignia before approaching the statue of Marduk so his kingship could be reaffirmed. The idea of displacing even a lesser god would have been looked upon as crazy and suicidal.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Tuesday, February 2.

24. The proud statements about the king of Babylon should be placed in parallel with another statement about the king of Tyre as written in Ezekiel 28.

Ezekiel 28:12-18: [The LORD said:] ¹² “Mortal man,” he said, “grieve for the fate that is waiting for the **king of Tyre**. Tell him what I, the Sovereign LORD, am saying: **you were once an example of perfection**. How wise and handsome you were! ¹³You lived in Eden, the garden of God, and wore gems of every kind: rubies and diamonds; topaz, beryl, carnelian, and jasper; sapphires, emeralds, and garnets. You had ornaments of gold. They were made for you on the day you were created. ¹⁴I put a terrifying angel there to guard you. You lived on my holy mountain and walked among sparkling gems. ¹⁵Your conduct was perfect from the day you were created until you began to do evil. ¹⁶You were busy buying and selling, and this led you to violence and sin. So I forced you to leave my holy mountain, and the angel who guarded you drove you away from the sparkling gems. ¹⁷**You were proud of being handsome, and your fame made you act like a fool**. Because of this I hurled you to the ground and left you as a warning to other kings. ¹⁸You did such evil in buying and selling that your places of worship were corrupted. So I set fire to the city and burnt it to the ground. All who look at you now see you reduced to ashes.”—*Good News Bible*.*†‡

25. For any human being to have made these kinds of boasts or for God to state such things about any mere human being would have been impossible. Clearly, **both of these individuals, the one in Isaiah 14 and the one in Ezekiel 28, are representative of the person who stood behind them—Satan himself**. And while both Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 talk about the final demise of this Satan, what do we know about his final demise from other sources?

Revelation 20:10: Then the Devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of fire and sulphur, where the beast and the false prophet had already been thrown; and they will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.—*Good News Bible*.*

26. Those of us who have studied the great controversy in some detail recognize the absolute contrast between the character of God and the character of Satan. Notice just a few places where the Bible describes God’s behavior.

John 13:5: Then he poured some water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and dry them with the towel round his waist.—*Good News Bible*.*

Philippians 2:5-8: ⁵The attitude you should have is the one that Christ Jesus had:

⁶ He always had the nature of God,
but he did not think that by force he should try to remain equal with God.

⁷ Instead of this, of his own free will he gave up all he had,
and took the nature of a servant.

He became like a human being
and appeared in human likeness.

⁸ He was humble and walked the path of obedience all the way to death—his death on the cross.—*Good News Bible*.*

27. Isaiah's book was written about 700 years before Christ; the book of Revelation was written about 100 years after Christ—a span of 800 years. But, notice the very interesting parallels between Isaiah 14:12-14 and Revelation 12:1-9. **In the Revelation passage, the dragon sounds very much like the king of Babylon described in Isaiah.**

28. One of the puzzling things that has confused some Bible scholars is the fact that John talked about Babylon—and Peter did as well—as if it was a current entity in his day.

1 Peter 5:13: Your sister church in Babylon [Footnote: **Babylon: As in the book of Revelation, this probably refers to Rome.**], also chosen by God, sends you greetings, and so does my son Mark.—*Good News Bible*.*†§

Revelation 14:8: A second angel followed the first one, saying, “She has fallen! Great **Babylon has fallen!** She made all peoples drink her wine—the strong wine of her immoral lust!”—*Good News Bible*.*†

Revelation 18:2,10,21: ² He cried out in a loud voice: “She has fallen! Great Babylon has fallen! She is now haunted by demons and unclean spirits; all kinds of filthy and hateful birds live in her....”

¹⁰They stand a long way off, because they are afraid of sharing in her suffering. They say, “How terrible! How awful! This great and mighty city Babylon! In just one hour you have been punished!”...

²¹ Then a mighty angel picked up a stone the size of a large millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, “This is how the great city Babylon will be violently thrown down and will never be seen again.”—*Good News Bible*.*

29. It is clear that, like literal Babylon in Daniel's day, Rome and the “Babylon” of Revelation are proud, ruthless powers that oppressed and destroyed many of God's people. Revelation 17:6 actually described this Roman power as being “drunk with the blood of the saints.”

30. These entities are/have been in open rebellion against God.

In the Babylonian language, the name is *bab ili*, which means: “the gate of god(s),” referring to the place of access to the divine realm. Compare Genesis 11, where people built the tower of Babel (Babylon) so that by their own power they could rise to the divine level of immunity from any accountability to God.

When Jacob awoke from a dream in which he saw a ladder connecting heaven and earth, he exclaimed: “This is none other than **the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven**” (*Gen. 28:17, NRSV*). Notice that the “house of God” is “the gate of heaven”; that is, the way of access to the divine realm. Jacob named the place “Bethel,” which means “house of God.”

The “gate of heaven” at Bethel and the “gate of god(s)” at Babylon were opposite ways to reach the divine realm. Jacob's ladder originated in heaven, revealed from above by God. But Babylon, with its towers and ziggurat temples, was built by human beings from the ground up. These opposite ways represent contrasting paths to salvation: divinely initiated grace versus human works. All true religion is based on the humble Bethel model: “For by grace you have been saved through faith” (*Eph. 2:8, 9, NRSV*). All false “religion,” including legalism and “secular” humanism, is based on the proud Babylon model. For the contrast

between the two approaches, see Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and the publican (*Luke 18:9-14*).—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Wednesday, February 3.^{†§}

31. We will now jump to Isaiah 24-27. The intervening chapters are a list of curses against the pagan and idolatrous nations in the Middle East in Isaiah's day.

32. Read Isaiah 24. Notice the language in Isaiah 24:6.

Isaiah 24:6: So God has pronounced a curse on the earth. Its people are paying for what they have done. Fewer and fewer remain alive.—*Good News Bible.**

33. And Isaiah continued with Isaiah 24:21-23.

Isaiah 24:21-23: ²¹ A time is coming when the LORD will punish the powers above and the rulers of the earth. ²² God will crowd kings together like prisoners in a pit. He will shut them in prison until the time of their punishment comes. ²³ The moon will grow dark, and the sun will no longer shine, for the LORD Almighty will be king. He will rule in Jerusalem on Mount Zion, and the leaders of the people will see his glory.—*Good News Bible.**

34. In Isaiah 25, we find a hymn of praise for the fact that God protected His people.

Isaiah 25:3-5: ³ The people of powerful nations will praise you;

you will be feared in the cities of cruel nations.

⁴ The poor and the helpless have fled to you
and have been safe in times of trouble.

You give them shelter from storms
and shade from the burning heat.

Cruel enemies attack like a winter storm,

⁵ like drought in a dry land.

But you, LORD, have silenced our enemies;

you silence the shouts of cruel people,

as a cloud cools a hot day.—*Good News Bible.**

35. So, God will prepare a banquet for those who remain faithful to Him while He “punishes” those who have been His enemies, the enemies of His people.

36. And in the end, as Isaiah described in Isaiah 26, God will give His people victory. Isaiah wrote:

Isaiah 26:20-21: ²⁰ Go into your houses, my people, and shut the door behind you. **Hide yourselves for a little while until God's anger is over.** ²¹ The LORD is coming from his heavenly dwelling place to punish the people of the earth for their sins. The murders that were secretly committed on the earth will be revealed, and the ground will no longer hide those who have been killed.—*Good News Bible.*†*

Isaiah 27:7-9: ⁷ Israel has not been punished by the LORD as severely as its enemies, nor lost as many people. ⁸ The LORD punished his people by sending them into exile. He took them away with a cruel wind from the east. ⁹ **But Israel's sins will be forgiven only when the stones of pagan altars are ground up like chalk, and no more incense altars or symbols of the goddess Asherah are left.**—*Good News Bible.*†*

37. So, what was the relationship between the fact that Israel was still worshiping pagan gods and God's blessings or curses against it? God cannot bless those who continue to rebel.

38. In our study for this week, we have noted that the **king of Babylon and the king of Tyre were both described in terms that could only apply to Satan who is/was actually the power behind them.** Now we have seen that the future things that Isaiah prophesied in these chapters will take place only after the thousand years of the millennium described in Revelation 20. Just as Babylon fell in ancient times and never amounted to anything since then, all traces of evil will be destroyed, never to return.
39. Isaiah probably thought that these powerful messages about Jerusalem would apply to the Jerusalem of his day. But, **we now know that they apply to the New Jerusalem.**
40. One of the biggest questions raised by these passages in Isaiah is a question of whether God really destroys the wicked.

Isaiah 28:21: The LORD will fight as he did at Mount Perazim and in the valley of Gibeon, in order to do what he intends to do—strange as his actions may seem. He will complete his work, his mysterious work.—*Good News Bible*.*

Look at Isaiah 28:21, where God’s work of destruction is His strange “deed” (*NRSV*). *It is strange for Him, because He doesn’t want to do it, but it is, nevertheless, a deed, or an act. It is true that sin carries the seeds of self-destruction (James 1:15). But because God has ultimate power over life and death, and He determines the time, place, and manner of final destruction (Revelation 20), it is pointless to argue that He ultimately terminates the curse of sin in a passive way, by simply allowing cause and effect to take its natural course.*—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Thursday, February 4.^{†§}

41. Is that a pagan idea expressed in the *Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*? Does God need to add punishment to sin? Or, is the final end of sin and sinners a natural consequence?

James 1:15: Then their evil desires conceive and give birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

Romans 6:23: For sin pays its wage—death; but God’s free gift is eternal life in union with Christ Jesus our Lord.—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

God destroys no man. Everyone who is destroyed will have destroyed himself. Everyone who stifles the admonitions of conscience is sowing the seeds of unbelief, and these will produce a sure harvest. By rejecting [85] the first warning from God, Pharaoh of old sowed the seeds of obstinacy, and he reaped obstinacy. God did not compel him to disbelieve. The seed of unbelief which he sowed produced a harvest of its kind. Thus his resistance continued, until he looked upon his devastated land, upon the cold, dead form of his first-born, and the first-born of all in his house and of all the families in his kingdom, until the waters of the sea closed over his horses and his chariots and his men of war. His history is a fearful illustration of the truth of the words that “whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.” Galatians 6:7. Did men but realize this, they would be careful what seed they sow.—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons** 84.4.[†]

42. In Isaiah 24-27, we see that those who are on God’s side will ultimately triumph while those who are opposed to God will ultimately be destroyed. So, how can we protect ourselves?

Proverbs 3:5-7: ⁵ Trust in the LORD with all your heart. Never rely on what you think you know. ⁶ Remember the LORD in everything you do, and he will show you the right way. ⁷ Never let yourself think that you are wiser than you are; simply obey the LORD and refuse to do wrong.—*Good News Bible*.*

Romans 10:9: If you confess that Jesus is Lord and believe that God raised him

from death, you will be saved.—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

Acts 16:31: They [Paul and Silas] answered, “**Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your family.**”—*Good News Bible*.^{*†‡}

43. How do we prepare ourselves to be on God’s side? Many down through the ages have thought this depends on a lot of good works. However, our salvation depends completely on our relationship with Jesus Christ and not on any collection of good works that we might do.
44. **Sin began in heaven with pride and arrogance in the heart of Lucifer.** Why are those sins so dangerous? It is primarily because pride feels no need. The proud think they are okay. They do not need to change! But, the Bible goes on to say that people of all nations will have an opportunity to be saved. (See Isaiah 25:6.)
45. So, what do we think of when we talk about *the day of God’s judgment*? For many people this is a very scary idea. But, in light of our studies this week and in light of all that we read in Scripture, we need to remember that **God’s judgment will not only be a terror for the evildoers, but also a time of salvation for those who do what is right.** And this is true throughout the universe. While God gives victory to His children and even prepares a banquet for them, (Isaiah 25) those who rebel against Him will be punished. See the example of Moab. So, is it true that God destroys His enemies? Or, is it true that God just allows people—and angels—to reap the results of their own choices, either good or evil? (Revelation 20:12-13)
- Isaiah 2:12:** On that day the LORD Almighty will humble everyone who is powerful, everyone who is proud and conceited.—*Good News Bible*.^{*}
46. What have you learned from this lesson? Three points should be discovered: **(1) Judgment comes by God’s initiative.** (Isaiah 13:3) In the final judgment just before the second coming of Christ, we are told that each person will be given an opportunity to make his/her choice. Those who have chosen for God will be safe; those who have chosen against God will perish. But, it is God who finally says the time has come for us to draw a line between the good and evil when everyone will have made his/her final choice.
47. **(2) God’s judgment is imminent.** What do we mean by that? All the way back in the days of Isaiah and Joel in the Old Testament, God’s judgment was spoken of as being very near. That idea is traced all the way to the very end of the book of Revelation. “Even so, come Lord Jesus.” (Revelation 22:20, *KJV**) So, for each one of us, our judgment might be settled at the point where we individually die.
48. **Finally, (3) it will be seen that the good will be rewarded with eternal life in God’s presence while the wicked will be left to suffer the fate of those who have chosen to separate themselves from the only Source of life.** And while we are the ones making the decisions, God is the One who will draw the line to say everyone has at that time made up their minds. The whole world will be involved. God’s faithful people from all nations will be rewarded; those who have chosen against God and His ways will suffer the fate that they have chosen for themselves.
49. Does the fate of Babylon described in Isaiah 14 scare you? While fear is not the right motive because it will not ultimately last, nevertheless, fear has led many people to turn from evil to God. Whose side will we ultimately be on? **Have we seen the truth about God’s character to the point that we love Him and want to serve Him?** Or, do we look at the world’s pleasures and find them more attractive?

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