

Chapters 13-14 – John Karmelich

1. I was debating whether to call this lesson "A tale of two cities" like the title of the famous Dickens novel or "We may be bad, but what about those guys?" I decided on the later. I'd like you to bear me out while I describe why both titles fit these two chapters, but why I thought the second one's a better choice. Hopefully after about a page of reading this you'll find this discussion interesting enough to read the entire lesson. OK, here goes:
 - a) "The tale of two cities" is also a nickname for the bible itself. That's because there's a lot of bible text discussing the origins, history and final destinations of two cities. The first one's the obvious one of Jerusalem. I've discussed through lots of lessons how that city's where the Israelite kings ruled from and it's also where Christians believe that the Messiah (that is, Jesus) will rule over the world one day from. I'll make it brief and just say that a lot of the bible directly and indirectly discusses the history and destiny of Jerusalem. In fact we will get a brief reference to the future destiny of Jerusalem when we get to Chapter 14.
 - b) The other city believe it or not is Babylon. There are six chapters in the bible among a few other passages that are dedicated to discussing the future of a city called Babylon. Two of them happen to be, this lesson, Isaiah 13-14. The other two chapter pairs are Jeremiah 50-51 and Revelation 17-18. If you read all six of those chapters together in one sitting, you'll get a pretty good picture of Babylon's destiny. First a little history: It's first mentioned in Genesis 11 when the Tower of Babel was built. When it was at it's power peak around 600 BC, it was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. When the Persians conquered it without a battle, it stayed occupied. When Alexander the Great conquered the world, it is where he lived out the end of his life. Although it's much smaller today, it still exists. All I'm saying is if you read those six chapters I listed about Babylon's ultimate destruction, it hasn't happened yet. Because we're about to study two of those six chapters on Babylon, I considered calling this lesson "A tale of two cities".
 - c) OK, time for lesson title choice #2: In the previous few chapters, Isaiah "beat up" Israelites pretty hard. The short version of the last few chapters is the Israelites failed to live as God desires they lived, and now they're suffering for that choice. That's where I got my second lesson title, "We may be bad, but what those guys?" The point is God may punish us if we fail to be a good witness for Him, but what about those nonbelievers who hurt us? What's God going to do about them? In effect, Chapters 13 and 14 answer that question.
 - i) In fact, while most of the text focuses on the destruction of Babylon, which wasn't a significant power at the time Isaiah wrote, the text also focuses on the demise of the Assyrian Empire as well as the Philistines, which was Israel's main enemy for many a century. The short version is Isaiah uses these chapters to describe what'll be the destiny of those nations that have harmed God's people. We also get some text about the demonic power behind Babylon when we get to Chapter 14.
 - ii) Therefore, you can see why I liked the title, "What about those guys?"
2. OK, John good for the ancient Israelites. Even if we accept the concept of God's future plans for the ultimate destruction of Babylon, what does any of this that have to do what I'm dealing with at this moment? Good question.
 - a) First it's a reminder of how much God loves us. If He's going to destroy those who harm us or want to harm us, doesn't that prove God loves us as He's hurting those who've done harm to us? Let me think of a horrible tragedy: Suppose we're crippled due to a situation where we weren't at fault, like maybe hit by a drunk driver. Supposed we know someone who was killed due to a terrorist or injured for life due to an evil act? Remember that God knows all things and allows evil to exist if for no other reason than to prove free will. As I like to point out, even atheists have to explain the existence of evil. Just because they don't believe in God, doesn't mean they can explain away evil as a "natural cause of life".

- b) The reason I'm getting all "hot and heavy" here, is to realize that whatever suffering we do suffer in this life, at the worst that's all we'll receive. To those who commit evil and ignore God, will suffer for eternity for the harm they have caused let alone turning from Him.
 - c) My main point is to realize how blessed we are, when God punishes those who turn from Him with their lives. To believe in a God of Justice is to realize people ultimately can't get away when they harm those called to make a difference for Him. One thing I learned as I started this ministry is that when you're really making a difference for God, you'll know it as "stuff happens". The reason I desire prayer so much and a reason I pray a lot for people in ministry is I know to really make a difference for Jesus means that bad stuff happens as a form of resistance to our ministry. To quote an old saying, "If you don't believe Satan is real try opposing him for awhile!" My point is while we should always do what we can to avoid danger, a price of being in the ministry is again, bad stuff just happens when you're working to make a difference for Jesus.
 - i) OK, and what does all of that have to do with these two chapters? They remind us that God's still there despite all the suffering caused by attacks of the enemies. The plans of ultimate destruction to those who harm us is far worse than anything and everything we have to suffer as a witness for Jesus. These two chapters are simply the first of a series of examples of proof of how God loves us as He destroys those who wish to prevent us from being a witness for Him.
 - d) Therefore you can see why it's tempting to call this a "tale of two cities" but a better title is, "We may be bad, but what about them?"
3. In a sense I've already described these two chapters. They're two of the six bible chapters that do focus on Babylon's destruction. The reason there is so much to say about them is about realizing who is the power behind Babylon and the reason this city is singled out. The short version is this is where an organized resistance to God's plan for mankind was first organized. (i.e., the Tower of Babel). The Babylonians were known as the historical home of the multiple God system that is prevalent in the ancient Egyptian, Babylonian, Greek and Roman systems. Isaiah will discuss the power behind those systems as He explains how Satan himself used Babylon as a launching place against the will of God's plans for humanity. Therefore as we read about the nations that harmed Israel way back then is to realize the demonic power behind those nations and they harm they do to those who are trusting in God to guide their lives.
- a) In summary, a reason to study these chapters isn't just to learn about the demonic powers that harm God's people. It's not just to learn the ultimate fate of those who desire to harm those God chooses to be a witness for Him. It's to realize that God does bless us by taking care of those who desire to hurt us as we trust in God and to make a difference for Him.
 - b) On that positive thought, time for the details.
4. Chapter 13, Verse 1: An oracle concerning Babylon that Isaiah son of Amoz saw:
- a) The word "oracle" refers to a speech. The text is saying let me tell you what will happen in the future to Babylon that Isaiah say. As I've said in earlier lessons on Isaiah, when the text says Isaiah son of Amoz, that's how Israelites stated their full name back then.
 - b) Now that we've got the "who" this chapter is talking about and who gave it, the rest of the chapter will focus on the "what and the why". Before we start, remember that Babylon at this time was not a major power. They were a minor power as they did join in an effort to stop the spread of the Assyrian Empire. They never threatened what was left of Israelites living in the land until a hundred years after Isaiah's time. Realize that Isaiah's looking in the future to see Babylon's rise to power and eventual fall from power.
 - i) So how do we know all of this isn't just describing the fall of Babylon when it was conquered by the Persians? As I explained in the introduction, Babylon didn't end its history as a city at that point. The Persians and even Alexander the Great made it his capital. My point is simply that the scope of these prophecies go well beyond the rise and fall of Babylon as an empire.

- ii) All that I ask at this point is we keep the "double scope" in mind as we study these two chapters. As I love to state, prophesy often has "double fulfillment". There is a short-term fulfillment to validate the speaker and a long term destiny fulfillment.
- 5. Verse 2: Raise a banner on a bare hilltop, shout to them; beckon to them to enter the gates of the nobles. ³ I have commanded my holy ones; I have summoned my warriors to carry out my wrath-- those who rejoice in my triumph.
 - a) Before the days of the internet, and before electronics, if you wanted to get the attention of a large group of people, how would you do that? Besides shouting, you may raise a thing up on a hilltop for everyone to stare out. You may call out to the leaders. My point is that Verse 2 is describing ways of getting the attention of a large group of people.
 - b) Ok, who's attention is Isaiah trying to draw? Well in Verse 1 Isaiah said that this "dirge" is directed at Babylon. When Isaiah wrote it, Babylon was a large city, but it wasn't the main center of power. At that time the "big kid on the block" was the Assyrian Empire and their headquarters was "Nineveh". God knew that Babylon would rise to power soon. There is a famous historical battle around 600BC where Babylon became the main power to rule in that part of the world. My point is simply that Isaiah is predicting not only the rise of this great power, but it's fall. Remember Chapter 13 is effectively a "dirge" (a sorrowful poem) describing the fall of Babylon. That'll become more obvious as we go through it.
 - i) I'm stating all of that in order to say that the people being referred to here in these verses are those that conquered Babylon. Again, I need to state a little more of the ancient history of that city just to understand the short-term fulfillment. Babylon was conquered by the Persian Empire without a battle. They captured areas just outside of Babylon, cut off the water supply and entered under the gate when the moat was dried up.
 - ii) The point of all of this is simply to say the destruction of Babylon like a lot of bible prophecy has a double fulfillment. The short term is the history as I just described it. The long term is someday in the future to us when it'll be completely destroyed as I said early. For millenniums bible scholars think the ultimate destruction of the Babylon refers to Rome or New York or pick your city. My view is when in doubt, take the text seriously. Therefore, even though Babylon is "nothing" today, I think it will rise and fall again. The bible has way too much space discussing its destiny to have it "only die" by being used by other nations over the millenniums.
 - c) OK, I don't want this to be a history lesson. I just want you to understand that when these verses describe altering a group and raising an army, in the past tense sense, it did refer to the Persian Empire that conquered Babylon without a battle. That'll become more clear as we go through the rest of this chapter. Keep in mind God wants us to learn this not just to prove He knows history in advance, but that God cares for His people (think you and me) as He deals with those who have or want to harm us. With that said, Verse 4:
- 6. Verse 4: Listen, a noise on the mountains, like that of a great multitude! Listen, an uproar among the kingdoms, like nations massing together! The LORD Almighty is mustering an army for war. ⁵ They come from faraway lands, from the ends of the heavens-- the LORD and the weapons of his wrath-- to destroy the whole country. ⁶ Wail, for the day of the LORD is near; it will come like destruction from the Almighty.
 - a) It'll help as we go through all of this if we keep the big picture in mind. The lesson title I choose was, "We may be bad, but what about them?" The point is God's describing what will happen to those nations that mess with God's chosen people. Let me put it this way: Remember all my past lessons on Isaiah about the danger of ignoring God or if we just go through the motions of serving Him without putting our heart into it? Well among all of that bad news is the good news that God cares about us and cares about those who serve Him. The concept of God wiping out those who are called to be His people is a principal that applies all through history as well as eternal judgment.

- b) OK with the big picture out of my system, back to the verses themselves. These verses are describing gathering together an army for destruction. Stop and ask, how do you conquer a large city? How does one destroy an empire? It takes a large army and planning. From God's all knowing perspective, it's a "done deal". The point is Babylon wasn't just a city it was the headquarters of a large empire the Middle East as well as more distant lands. For it to fall, it took another army headquartered somewhere else. If you prefer modern terms to describe the Persian and Babylon, remember that Persia is essentially Iran today. When we speak of Babylon, think Iraq today. Also realize that the city of Babylon wasn't wiped out in the fairly recent wars in Iraq, as the modern "Babylon" wasn't a significant target.
 - c) OK, let's make this much easier: From our perspective, this is all ancient history. I also see it as future as it describes some sort of ultimate destruction of Babylon that'll occur as part of God's end time scenario, when the Messiah "sets up shop" to rule the world.
 - d) The reason the bible has at least six chapters dedicated to Babylon's destruction is for us to know when the "end times" is truly occurring as this place is completely destroyed. That's why I think it's literal and not referring to the destruction of any other city or system.
 - e) In the meantime, it's time to get back to the text.
7. Verse 7: Because of this, all hands will go limp, every man's heart will melt. ⁸ Terror will seize them, pain and anguish will grip them; they will writhe like a woman in labor. They will look aghast at each other, their faces aflame.
- a) Keep in mind we're not talking about Israel. The chapter is a "dirge" about Babylon's fall. Therefore when it says "all hands will go limp" and they'll be in pain and anguish, all this is talking about Babylon itself and it's destruction. Again the "short-term" fulfillment was the ancient history of the fall of that city, and the future "long-term" fulfillment is about its ultimate destruction, which again, historically has never occurred.
 - b) Remember that we're reading poetry. We're reading God say in effect, "These people have done harm to those I love and they'll suffer far more and far longer than those who I have called to be my witnesses to the world. What about the innocent who suffer when a place is conquered? That's why I trust in a fair God who judges all people fairly. Meanwhile, I see the big message all through this text of "Who I love, I love, who I called, I protect, and even though many suffer for trusting in Me, those who harm them suffer far worse". That is the essential message of this chapter. Meanwhile back to the details.
8. Verse 9: See, the day of the LORD is coming --a cruel day, with wrath and fierce anger-- to make the land desolate and destroy the sinners within it. ¹⁰ The stars of heaven and their constellations will not show their light. The rising sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light. ¹¹ I will punish the world for its evil, the wicked for their sins. I will put an end to the arrogance of the haughty and will humble the pride of the ruthless.
- a) A good question to ask is, "How do we know this is not all past tense?" After all, history records the destruction of the Babylon Empire by the Persians millenniums ago. How do we know we're not just reading a dirge about its fall so long ago? To answer it, consider the following facts about these verses and history:
 - i) The dirge said the land will be desolate. As I said, when the Persians conquered it, they occupied that city. When Alexander the Great conquered the Persian Empire he lived out the end of his life there. In recent history Saddam Hussein rebuilt part of it, he hired local workers to do so. My simple point is God's describing Babylon as being desolate. That didn't happen in ancient history and hasn't happened yet.
 - ii) Also notice Verse 10 describes the stars, the sun and the moon in a way that people can't see their light. Remember that Babylon was conquered without a battle. All I'm saying is to take these verses seriously realize they haven't occurred in history.
 - iii) Back when I started the book of Isaiah, I said the scope of the book goes from the time Isaiah lived all the way to the end of this age. All I'm saying is I'm convinced these verses have the end time aspect of human history in perspective.

- b) Remember why we're reading this. It's to show that God will make suffer those who've harmed those who are called His people. To put this another way, if you think it's hard to be a Christian that dedicates his or her life to serving God, look at how those who want to harm God's chosen people will suffer. As hard as life can be for those of us trusting in His words to guide our lives, life for those who want to harm those trusting in Him is going to be far worse. If you get nothing else out of this lesson, just remember that key point.
 - c) These verses end with a statement that God will put an end to the haughtiness (pride) of those who refuse to trust in Him. The way I put it is, "As much as I've sinned and messed up my own life, I'd still rather be in my shoes trusting in God's complete payment for my sins than to be in the shoes of those who trust in their own ability to succeed in life."
9. Verse 12: I will make man scarcer than pure gold, more rare than the gold of Ophir.
- a) I don't know how rare "pure" gold became in Ophir or where that city was, but the text is saying it'll be pretty hard to find something that pure. Again, remember we're reading a dirge talking about the fall of Babylon. Since it remained occupied after it was conquered, I see some sort of future long-term prediction being stated in this chapter.
10. Verse 13: Therefore I will make the heavens tremble; and the earth will shake from its place at the wrath of the LORD Almighty, in the day of his burning anger.
- a) If you read through bible commentaries through the past few millenniums, they will state that Babylon refers to whatever the most powerful city in the world was at that time. Or, they may refer to Babylon as a world empire that God will judge. Whatever Babylon is, it is a future event that the bible is so sure will occur, that again, you can read six chapters in it dedicated to it's destruction. Personally, I'd rather be too literal, than not literal enough, which is why I make the argument that it refers to some future day when literal Babylon will be a center of power again, and it's ultimate destruction. Remember my alternate title for this lesson is "A tale of two cities", as the bible has a lot of text explaining what will be the fate of the cities of Jerusalem and Babylon. Just as I think Jerusalem will have a literal destiny in God's plan, so I'll argue that literal Babylon has an ultimate destiny that'll be a part of human history.
 - b) If you have that picture in mind, Verse 13 makes a lot more sense. It's describing how the heavens (in this case what we see in the sky above us) and the earth will shake when this ultimate destruction of Babylon occurs in the future. Again, if I have the choice of either being not literal enough or too literal, I'd rather play it safe and be too literal. That's why I argue for the literal fall of Babylon to occur sometime in the future.
11. Verse 14: Like a hunted gazelle, like sheep without a shepherd, each will return to his own people, each will flee to his native land. ¹⁵ Whoever is captured will be thrust through; all who are caught will fall by the sword. ¹⁶ Their infants will be dashed to pieces before their eyes; their houses will be looted and their wives ravished. ¹⁷ See, I will stir up against them the Medes, who do not care for silver and have no delight in gold. ¹⁸ Their bows will strike down the young men; they will have no mercy on infants nor will they look with compassion on children.
- a) I can just hear a lot of you saying, "I hate all this prophecy stuff. Just tell me how any of it affects my life today!" At the least keep in mind the God we worship cares for us and will punish those who want to hurt us eternally. Even if we get that, why should we read all of this stuff? So we know the ultimate destiny not only for literal Babylon but for those who don't care for God and whether they realize it or not, such people are trying to stop God's ultimate plans from happening.
 - b) Let me put it this way: Jesus said in effect that anyone who is not for us is against us. The idea of that passage (Mark 9:40, et. al.) is that anyone not working to make a difference for the kingdom of God, is at that moment working against His desire to develop an intimate personal relationship with what He created (us). All I'm saying is all this judgment about Babylon is literal, but it also represents the ultimate destiny of those who oppose His plan to spend eternity with those of us willing to draw close to Him as well.

- c) Meanwhile, back to these verses. Remember they are describing Babylon. Verse 14 says "each will return to his native land". Again, think of Babylon being desolate. The verses describe soldiers and innocent women and children being killed. Then Verse 17 says the Medes (part of the Medo-Persian Empire) won't care for whatever silver or gold is there in Babylon, but will just destroy Babylon's inhabitants as that is their marching orders.
 - i) Verse 17 is the short-term fulfillment of when the Persians taking over the empire. Whatever the long-term implication is, we'll have to see in the future.
 - d) Here's another question to ponder: How do we know Isaiah's isn't just exaggerating in his description of the Medes conquering Babylon? How do we know Isaiah is just using a lot of colorful language to over emphasize what happened millenniums ago? For starters, in order to be a bible prophet, one has to be 100% accurate in order to be accepted as a bible prophet or be killed. (Deuteronomy 18:22). Remember all of this history was in the future by about 200 years to Isaiah's time. While a lot of what Isaiah described occur in history a lot of it as we read here never happened. Again if you read all six of those chapters at one time, you can see the pattern that whatever Isaiah, Jeremiah and Revelation discuss isn't a complete history lesson, but is something in the "end time" future.
 - e) If you don't care for all this prophecy stuff, hang in there. As we get into Chapter 14, it'll get more interesting as the scope of these predictions discuss the demonic powers behind them. My point is this lesson is about to get a lot spookier in the next chapter.
 - f) However, we still have a few verses left in Chapter 13 to get through.
12. Verse 19: Babylon, the jewel of kingdoms, the glory of the Babylonians' pride, will be overthrown by God like Sodom and Gomorrah.
- a) If you know the story of Sodom and Gomorrah from Genesis 19, the short version is those cities were so wicked, God made an example out of them by completely destroying them. The point is Verse 19 describes the complete destruction of those two cities. Again, this is some sort of future prediction, as the City of Babylon was never completely destroyed. Let me now go to the last few verses of this chapter as they describe the destruction details.
13. Verse 20: She will never be inhabited or lived in through all generations; no Arab will pitch his tent there, no shepherd will rest his flocks there. ²¹ But desert creatures will lie there, jackals will fill her houses; there the owls will dwell, and there the wild goats will leap about. ²² Hyenas will howl in her strongholds, jackals in her luxurious palaces. Her time is at hand, and her days will not be prolonged.
- a) The short version is Isaiah's describing the destruction of Babylon as being so complete, it will only be a place for wild animals to dwell. By the way, there is some controversy over the exact types of some of the animals listed. What isn't a controversy is what's the intent of these verses: To describe the ultimate destruction of this city.
 - b) OK, John, suppose you're wrong. Suppose Isaiah was just being colorful as he described what did happen millenniums ago. If that's the case, then you're saying we can't trust the bible to describe history in advance. That's saying the bible is not 100% accurate as to its future predictions. Remember Isaiah wrote this centuries before Babylon's rise and fall of power. The true answer is we have to watch history unfold in the future to see if this will play out as Isaiah describes it here. Personally, I'd rather bet on taking the bible seriously than bet on those who ignore God and suffer a fate similar to what's described here.
 - c) Now the good news: We've finished the "dirge" that describes Babylon's destruction and fall from power. Chapter 14 will focus first on "God's people" based on what will happen to Babylon. Then it discusses the demonic power behind Babylon and finally the chapter ends with the other "enemies of the moment" (during Isaiah's time) and what happens to them ultimately. In other words, "Don't bet against God, you may win in the short run of this lifetime, but ultimately to harm God's chosen people or to harm those using our lives to make a difference for God, has bad consequences as described in these chapters. As we go through the next chapter, keep that positive thought in mind through this "bad stuff".

14. Chapter 14, Verse 1: The LORD will have compassion on Jacob; once again he will choose Israel and will settle them in their own land. Aliens will join them and unite with the house of Jacob. ² Nations will take them and bring them to their own place. And the house of Israel will possess the nations as menservants and maidservants in the LORD's land. They will make captives of their captors and rule over their oppressors.
- a) Whenever I hear the question, "How can we know for sure the bible is the word of God, at that point I like to answer, "Look at the history of Israel". In the history of the world, there has never been a nation that was conquered, scattered (key point) and then reunited to be a nation again. Yet after it was completely conquered by the Babylonians, about 100 years after Isaiah wrote this, seventy years later, Israel was allowed to return to that land, albeit part of the Medo-Persian Empire. About 40 after Jesus; time, the Romans destroyed Israel again, and the survivors were scattered. Israel wasn't an independent country again until the year 1948. All I'm saying is a proof that the bible is God's word is to learn the history of the nation of Israel.
 - b) Which surprisingly, leads me to this verse. Here is Isaiah, 100 years before the destruction of Jerusalem as a city and the end of the Southern Kingdom, predicting that a new power on the scene that hasn't risen to power when Isaiah wrote this would conquer and destroy the Southern Kingdom. Despite all of that, these verses are saying there'll be a future day when as God will once again have "compassion" on Jacob. That's the original name of the common ancestor of all Israelites before God changed Jacob's name to Israel. When God's invoking the old and new name for Israel's common ancestor in one sentence, it's there to remind us that even though the Israelites still sinned by not collectively worshipping God as He demands, He will still allow them to return and prosper one day in that land. So is 1948 the fulfillment of this verse?
 - i) Yes and no. Yes it's the start of what I believe is God's desire to have His chosen people live, where He desires they live. No, in that most of Israel today is secular. Remember the ultimate destruction of Babylon has never historically occurred. I don't see modern Israel as the complete fulfillment of this verse, but I believe it is a start to God's final plan for mankind.
 - ii) OK, John what if you're wrong. What if the modern state of Israel gets destroyed as say it did in Roman times? In effect that's God's business. He promised that the Messiah will rule the world one day from Jerusalem, and by watching how God's worked in history and how He's working today, I see the rebirth of the Israel as a nation as the start of God's final plans. As to how it's happen, we'll have to watch the details play out.
 - c) Finally the verse says aliens will join them. What does that mean? The point is when the Messiah comes to rule the world from Jerusalem it won't be a Jewish only state. There'll be Gentiles there working for Jesus as He rules the world from there. Some bible versions imply that Gentiles will be slaves of the Jews in that day. The way I view it is all who say Jesus is the Messiah will effectively be slaves to His will as He rules over the world. The point is if we believe in Jesus as non-Jews we don't suffer whenever this day does occur.
 - d) Let' return to Isaiah's time for moment. The fear of Israelites around him at that time was being conquered by the Assyrians. God's saying to those Israelites, "Don't fret over that empire. However, there will be another group that will conquer them and you. However after they conquer you, your descendants will return to this land as He will destroy those who wish to harm you. Eventually your descendants will rule with the Messiah from this land. As to your descendants, they'll make those foreigners suffer who don't want Him to rule over this land.
 - e) Keep the big picture I mind. God's called us to live as a witness for Him. The world as we know it will end one day when the Messiah rules over it. We can tell when this will occur by Israel living as God desires despite them being greatly outnumbered by nonbelievers.

15. Verse 3: On the day the LORD gives you relief from suffering and turmoil and cruel bondage, ⁴ you will take up this taunt against the king of Babylon: How the oppressor has come to an end! How his fury has ended! ⁵ The LORD has broken the rod of the wicked, the scepter of the rulers, ⁶ which in anger struck down peoples with unceasing blows, and in fury subdued nations with relentless aggression. ⁷ All the lands are at rest and at peace; they break into singing.
- a) Keep in mind God's moved the focus of the text from a dirge about Babylon's destruction to what about the Israelites after all of that has occurred. While the last chapter discussed Babylon's fate, this section discusses life after whenever this future event occurs.
 - b) Stop and read Verse 7 by itself for a moment. Ask when in history has "all the lands" been at peace? If you don't know history, this is a very rare event. I remember reading about a study of human history that said there has only been a few short times in history where a war wasn't occurring somewhere. My point is I'm pretty positive this is a future event.
 - i) How do we know this isn't just talking about Israel after Persian Emperor decided to let the Israelites go live in that land again? (If you don't know your history, the Babylonians emptied Israel of its people. When the Persians conquered Babylon, and became the next great empire in that region, they let the Israelites return. This event is covered in the Old Testament books of Nehemiah and Ezra.)
 - ii) Again, Verse 7 says all the lands (plural) will be at peace. I believe it's a prediction with a dual fulfillment. The "short term" fulfillment is 70 years after the Israelites were taken into captivity they were allowed to move back to that land. The "long term" fulfillment is when the Messiah "sets up shop" (i.e., Jesus returns to rule the world from Jerusalem) is when all the lands will be at rest. One of themes that has run through much of Isaiah so far is about a world without war once the Messiah does come to rule. I believe that's the long-term fulfillment of these verses.
 - c) With all that said, we can now reread all these verses and notice how they're describe the violence that comes from war being brought to an end. This is a double prophecy written in a few verses.
16. Verse 8: Even the pine trees and the cedars of Lebanon exult over you and say, "Now that you have been laid low, no woodsman comes to cut us down."
- a) To explain Verse 8, first we have to remember it's an illustration. To state the obvious, no tree can literally talk. What this verse is implying is if there is no more wars, nobody will be cutting down trees to make "battering rams" or fuel to keep warm. In other words, it is common to use trees for various purposes in ancient warfare. Isaiah's trying to describe a world of peace from tree's perspective.
 - b) Also realize the country of Lebanon had a lot of forest areas. For example, a few hundred years earlier when Solomon was king, you can find references to trees from that place cut down to be used to build Solomon's palace as well as for the temple construction. (That's in 1st Kings 4:33). OK, enough about trees. Time to get back to Babylon's destruction.
17. Verse 9: The grave below is all astir to meet you at your coming; it rouses the spirits of the departed to greet you-- all those who were leaders in the world; it makes them rise from their thrones-- all those who were kings over the nations. ¹⁰ They will all respond, they will say to you, "You also have become weak, as we are; you have become like us." ¹¹ All your pomp has been brought down to the grave, along with the noise of your harps; maggots are spread out beneath you and worms cover you.
- a) I have to admit, I really enjoy Isaiah's colorful way of using exaggerations to describe life when the Messiah comes. First he describes a lack of war from tree's perspective. Here in these verses, Isaiah is describing life in hell from the perspective of those already there, as they greet the new inhabitants. Does that mean the leaders of hell greet new people? My view is it's a colorful way of saying how much life will change from how we know it now.
 - b) Let me say a few words about "hell" while I'm in the neighborhood. First of all, Satan isn't king over it, he'll be the chief prisoner of the place.

- i) I believe literal hell as a place of eternal separation from God. I don't think of it as literal torture as much as I see it as those who desire to spend eternity away from God's presence and He gives them "what they want". Is it possible the text of these verses is more literal? Could be. Personally, I see it as Isaiah using word pictures that those living in his time era could relate to.
 - ii) For example, Verse 11 describes hell as a place where maggots are all below you as you are also covered in worms. Yes that's disgusting, but again, it's trying to paint the picture of something horrible as well as eternal.
 - iii) Then we have the "hell greetings" of other kings welcoming the Babylonians there as they effectively say, Hey, remember all of that glory you enjoyed as leaders, you have now lost all of that and you're suffering here in hell with us!
- c) I don't know how literal this is, but personally I never want to get close enough to find out about it. It's disgusting enough as it is without having to ponder it further. Let's put this another way: Do you want an incentive to serve God, look at the consequences we suffer if we use our lives to ignore Him and His will for us.
- d) At this point, Isaiah "widens his scope" as to ask, "who's the power behind all of this? So you know from Verses 12-21, we're going to discuss Satan himself. OK, here goes:
18. Verse 12: How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations!
- a) Let's start with the question: How do we know this is describing Satan himself? Verse 12 describes whoever this is, "falling from heaven" and "cast down to earth" and "laying low the nations". I remember when my daughter was little she asked me why did God create Satan in the first place? She understood evil existed and there is a powerful source behind that evil. My answer was for us to have free will, God had to allow a powerful alternative to exist. It's the idea that power, fame and accumulating stuff has appeal, but to only live for this lifetime is truly a waste of life. God allows evil is due to the fact that this world is corrupted by the existence of sin. That's why we need a world with a Messiah ruling over it as to bring evil to an end.
 - b) In the Gospel accounts Jesus states that "I saw Satan falling from heaven" in Luke 10:18, I believe that's talking about the same thing Isaiah's talking about here. Yes I believe Satan still has access to heaven in the sense that he's the prosecuting attorney for our sins. (See Job 1:6). He did fall from heaven in the sense that Satan was created to be the top angel to lead in the effort to worship God. However, Satan wanted to exalt himself above others, which is the point of the next several verses. Before I move on, a good parallel passage to this one is Ezekiel Chapter 28 as it also describes Satan's power and his fall from heaven.
19. Verse 13: You said in your heart, "I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. ¹⁴ I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High."
- a) Verses 13-14 are five fairly famous "I will" statements. The essential point is they show how Satan wanted to be "God like" and why he rebelled against God.
 - b) As I thought about these verses and listened to a few commentaries about them, I realized something I never thought about before. Satan knew he wasn't God himself. The last one said he wants to be "like (key word) the Most High". This is Satan wanting to be God like in the sense that he wants to call the shots. Satan is well aware that God is God and in the end Satan will lose. Therefore, he, along with all the demons who joined in his rebellion, are doing whatever they can to delay as long as possible God's redemptive plan for man to occur. Why do you think much of the world is so "hell bent" on Israel's destruction?
 - c) Stop and consider that Jesus said to be great in heaven, means we should desire to be the lowest of servants in this lifetime. (See Matthew 5:19). My point is that Satan's desire to raise himself above others is what God calls us to avoid doing in this lifetime. Does that mean we can never lead? Of course not. It's about thinking we're better than others!

- d) In the book of Revelation, there are a few strange references to the "Nicolatians" we read in Chapters 2 and 3. The short version is whoever they were, they desired to seek power over the church. Jesus condemned them for thinking they're better than everyone else. I bring that up here only to show the similarity between Satan wanting to raise himself to be greater than others and people today thinking they're better than others. God doesn't want us to avoid leadership, it's about thinking and acting like we are better than others and living as subject to God's laws and desires as we live as a witness for Jesus.
- e) With all of that in mind, read again these five "I will" statements and one can see why God demoted Satan from being the top angel to being an enemy as Satan desired to be greater than others. That's a warning to us about not only thinking we're better than others, but also to fail to live as God desires, by using our lives to make a difference for Him.
20. Verse 15: But you are brought down to the grave, to the depths of the pit.
- a) I'm pretty positive that Verse 15 is future. To share a classic joke, "If Satan's already down in hell, then his chain is too long as he's still doing damage in this world!"
- b) One of the classic questions to ponder is why does evil exist? Even if one is an atheist, one still has to explain the existence of evil. There is no earthly explanation for someone going into say a school and just start shooting people at random. Yes some are mentally messed up but what's the power behind people being that way? In short, we can't explain evil by looking at our natural world.
- c) The point is Verse 15 is describing Satan's ultimate destiny. Does Satan believe the bible is the word of God? Yes he knows it well. The reason he and his legion of demons work so hard to oppose people becoming Christians is he's trying to delay as long as possible the Messiah from setting up His kingdom. To put it another way, there's a specific unknown number of believers that'll be in heaven. Whenever that number occurs, that's when God will start this "wrap up" plan for the world as we know it. The longer Satan can delay it from happening, the longer it will take for Verse 15 to occur.
21. Verse 16: Those who see you stare at you, they ponder your fate: "Is this the man who shook the earth and made kingdoms tremble,¹⁷ the man who made the world a desert, who overthrew its cities and would not let his captives go home?"¹⁸ All the kings of the nations lie in state, each in his own tomb.
- a) Verse 16 uses the word "man". The scope of this prophecy has shifted a little to describe the fate of "The" antichrist and how his ultimate destiny is in hell. Realize that antichrist just refers to one who opposes Jesus. "The" Antichrist is a specific person who is lead by Satan to do his will some date in the unknown future.
- b) So are these verse saying "the" antichrist will be in hell or Satan? The answer is both. We have to realize that Satan isn't the guard of hell, but will be the top prisoner there. Again we have this colorful language of other world leaders "welcoming their new bunkmates" in hell. Actually all the text is saying is that other kings who have had power, who would be amazed at how much power this "antichrist" has, will be shocked at how he's brought down from power.
- c) So when it says the man "who made the world a desert...and not let his captives go home" what does that refer to? Realize that whenever this man is on the scene, one way we will know it's him, is it'll be a time of war bigger than anything we've ever scene. A lot of the world as we know it will be destroyed. A lot of survivors have to be permanently moved to other cities. Bottom line, all the "bad stuff" we read about in Revelation, occurs after whoever this man is, takes power and desires more power and world control.
- d) Also realize that this is not a "solo effort" by one man. Whoever this antichrist is, he's the leader of a world army. He will come in peace as to say, "I want all people to live in peace and do whatever they feel like doing with me as their leader". Like all in power, he wants more power and conquers more and more of the world. I'm stating all of this as to realize that the text here is also describing those leaders under him who'll fall from power.

22. Verse 19: But you are cast out of your tomb like a rejected branch; you are covered with the slain, with those pierced by the sword, those who descend to the stones of the pit. Like a corpse trampled underfoot, ²⁰ you will not join them in burial, for you have destroyed your land and killed your people. The offspring of the wicked will never be mentioned again.
- a) Remember the focus of these verses is either on Satan himself or more likely "the" world leader who we commonly call the Antichrist. The point here is simply that when he dies he won't have a normal burial. He will be so despised by God for what he did, he won't even get a normal burial.
 - b) Here's a question to ponder: The text says, "You have destroyed your land and killed your people." OK, what is his land and who are his people? His land is whatever land he does control in the future and his people are those who trusted in him. Remember that he'll be a popular charismatic figure who essentially says, "I just want world peace where all of us can live however we like without having to obey any specific religion let alone any of the bible's commandments." We have to understand from a non-Christian perspective how'd that be appealing to much of the world's population. The point is a way we can recognize when all of this is occurring is "the" antichrist will be a popular world leader who'll first be a man of peace and then cause war to get what he wants.
 - c) The reason Isaiah is predicting all of this millenniums ago, is for us to recognize this when it will occur. It's also to tell the Israelites of his day, that no this isn't the end of us as we do have to deal with our enemies and our problems of the moment.
23. Verses 21-22: Prepare a place to slaughter his sons for the sins of their forefathers; they are not to rise to inherit the land and cover the earth with their cities. ²² "I will rise up against them," declares the LORD Almighty. "I will cut off from Babylon her name and survivors, her offspring and descendants," declares the LORD. ²³ "I will turn her into a place for owls and into swampland; I will sweep her with the broom of destruction," declares the LORD Almighty.
- a) These last two verses in effect return to the "end" of Babylon. A reason I suspect Babylon is going to be literally rebuilt one day, is because the text is not only describing the end of the antichrist, but the land he controls. Another way to tell it's "him" is that Babylon will be a headquarters for him. That's why through the millenniums, people have argued that say Rome, or New York or pick your city of power will be the headquarters of whenever this antichrist appears. Again, I think a safer bet is to take it literally and argue it refers to the literal destruction of Babylon in some future date.
 - b) My point here is simply that if you read these verses with literal Babylon in mind, they do make more sense. So how do we know it's not talking about the historical fall of that city? The answer is it was conquered without a battle. It fell by a foreign army crawling under the city gate and taking its leaders without a battle. There is an ancient tradition that the residents of that city didn't even know for days that it was taken over. These verses tell of a great slaughter of the lands that Babylon controlled. Yes these verses have come true in the past tense, but I've always argued that prophesy is "patterns" and there'll be a future destruction of that city that will be exactly like it's being described here.
 - c) My final proof of a future literalness of this prediction is Isaiah is describing the future of that city as being a place of desolation. As I've beaten over our heads this whole lesson, it was not destroyed when it was conquered. It still has people living there today. All that I am saying is Isaiah's describing the city of Babylon as being desolate and that event hasn't happened anytime in history. OK, enough on that, time to change the topic a little.
24. Verse 24: The LORD Almighty has sworn, "Surely, as I have planned, so it will be, and as I have purposed, so it will stand. ²⁵ I will crush the Assyrian in my land; on my mountains I will trample him down. His yoke will be taken from my people, and his burden removed from their shoulders."
- a) Put yourself in the shoes of Israelites listening to Isaiah. They might think, "OK, all of this is well and good, but what the Assyrians knocking on our door now, what about them?"

- b) In effect Verses 24 to 27 are the answer to that question. It's God's way of telling us that not only do I know the distant future and I'm telling you how the world as we know it will wrap up one day, but I as God still care about the problems you're currently dealing with at the moment. Speaking of problems of the moment, let's get back to the Assyrians.
 - c) Recall that the Assyrian Empire lasted for about 700 years. They were headquartered out of another part of what is Iraq today just as Babylon was another city in Iraq today.
 - d) At the time of Isaiah's writing, the Assyrians were expanding and were moving south to where Israel was located. They did conquer the Northern Israel Kingdom and they also conquered parts of the Southern Kingdom. As I've mentioned in previous lessons, God's going to wipe out their army at the doorsteps of Jerusalem. When Isaiah wrote this, none of this has happened yet. Yet the bible has several references to 185,000 Assyrian troops who were killed right before they reached Jerusalem. (See 2nd Kings 19:35 or Isaiah 37:36.)
 - e) I'm stating all of this because if you reread the last two verses with that fact in mind, they will make a lot more sense.
 - f) Also notice that God refers to the Assyrians as "him". The him is the demonic power who is behind their attack on God's people. Just as Isaiah spent much of this chapter telling of the ultimate fall of the antichrist and the power behind him, so God's also telling us who's "pulling the strings" of the Assyrians desire to conquer Israel. The point is as we learn of bad stuff (evil) happening in our world, we have to realize there are dark forces behind all of that, and we're reading of God destroying the forces behind those acts of evil. Much of this chapter focuses on the coming Babylon issue. Still, for the Israelites their issue of the moment was the Assyrians and God wanted to describe their destruction here as well.
25. Verse 26: This is the plan determined for the whole world; this is the hand stretched out over all nations. ²⁷For the LORD Almighty has purposed, and who can thwart him? His hand is stretched out, and who can turn it back?
- a) These verses are simple: God has plans and no matter how hard Satan tries, he can't stop what God has planned. So if Satan knew in advance he'd lose, why did he bother to do all that damage to Israel? Again, from his perspective, it's about delaying as long as possible for his rule to end. If Satan can wipe out God's chosen people before the Messiah comes to rule over the world then he wins. That's why he works so hard to destroy Israel from its existence both in ancient history as well as today.
26. Verse 28: This oracle came in the year King Ahaz died: ²⁹ Do not rejoice, all you Philistines, that the rod that struck you is broken; from the root of that snake will spring up a viper, its fruit will be a darting, venomous serpent. ³⁰ The poorest of the poor will find pasture, and the needy will lie down in safety. But your root I will destroy by famine; it will slay your survivors.
- a) Remember my lesson title was effectively, "What about those guys?" When Isaiah began his ministry, there were other "those guys" around. Most scholars said Ahaz died in the year 715BC. That leads us to the Philistines who were the enemies of Israel for centuries. They were living in the Promised Land since the days of the judges. It'd be natural for the Israelites to wonder, "Well, what about them, will they ever die out?" They officially came to an end when the Babylonians conquered Israel. As I've stated both the Babylonian and the Assyrian empires would separate and relocate prisoners so they won't unite to rebel against those empires. My point is simply that the Philistine nation came to a formal end when the Babylonians conquered that area. Therefore, all these verses are "past tense" for us and to the Israelites of Isaiah's time, this is still over a hundred years in the future.
 - b) The text ends with the fact that some poor people will survive this onslaught, the nation of Philistine as it was known for centuries, died at that point.
 - c) I can't resist sharing, for those who don't know: When the Romans conquered Israel, they wanted to insult them by renaming Israel "Palestine". That word is a Latin translation of the word "Philistines". All I'm saying is when you hear the word Palestine, it was given as an insult to the Jewish nation as to not recognize who controls that land.

27. Verse 31: Wail, O gate! Howl, O city! Melt away, all you Philistines! A cloud of smoke comes from the north, and there is not a straggler in its ranks. ³² What answer shall be given to the envoys of that nation? "The LORD has established Zion, and in her his afflicted people will find refuge."
- a) I know I'm running long, but hang in there, as these are the last two verses in this lesson. The simple point is the "Philistines" who were a thorn in the side of the Israelites for many a century will come to an end by the Babylonian empire. They attacked the Philistine area from the north, which is what's being described in a colorful way in Verse 31. The idea is a large army moving appears like a cloud of smoke in the distance from all the dust being kicked up as it moves. Verse 32 gives the impression that the Philistines tried sending an envoy to the Babylonians to prevent its destruction. God effectively answers that request by saying, "This is My land and I decide who'll be here. Since the Israelites have failed for many a century to remove you (Philistines) I (God) will take care of business by using this big herd of an army to destroy you."
 - b) OK John, that's all interesting ancient history, why should we care and make it quick? The answer is it shows that God cares for those who trust in Him and in His timing will wipe out those who desire to harm us.
 - c) Want a good summary of this entire lesson? It's worth the trouble and risk to use our life to make a difference for God not only because we'll have a wonderful destiny for making that choice, but because God in His timing will destroy those who wish to harm us as well as the powers behind those nations. Therefore, use your life to make a difference for God as that's the best use of the time that God's given us. With that thought in mind, let's close in prayer.
28. Father, this lesson is a vivid reminder that the most valuable thing you've given us is our time to live in this world. May we use that time to make a difference for You. Guide our lives to live as You desire we live and give us the boldness to do Your will and make it obvious to us what it is You desire of us as we use that time for Your glory. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.