

1. OK, after spending a chapter telling the Israelites about a future messiah (not the one, but "a" one) who'll rescue the Israelites from the Babylonian captivity, where should Isaiah go from here? Let me start by considering this issue from Isaiah's perspective. He wrote this book roughly 100 years before the Babylonians were even a significant player. When he wrote this book, Babylon was just another city in the Assyrian Empire. Yes it was famous to religious Israelites as the location of the tower of Babel. Yet Isaiah predicted it would be the center of a great empire that would dominate the Middle East and much of the surrounding world. It will also take the Israelites into captivity. Then Isaiah tells us in the last chapter about a "savior" who'll bring to an end that empire as to let the Israelites go back home if they choose to do so.
 - a) My question is where does Isaiah go from here and why should we care? That leads to my title for this lesson, "A dirge for the defeated". I think of these two chapters as a sad poem to commemorate the fall of Babylon. It's Isaiah effectively speaking to the Israelites living in the Babylonian Empire as if to say, "Just who are you going to trust in anyway? All the gods of Babylon are about to be defeated and their idol statues will be taken into captivity away from Babylon." If Chapter 45 described Babylon's fall from the perspective of those who conquered it, Chapters 46 and 47 describe that defeat as if to say to the Babylonians, "You losers got what you deserved, now deal with it."
 - b) OK, John, too bad for them. They lived 2,500 years ago. I don't know of any Babylonians and I suspect you don't either. Why should I care about any of this stuff? Great question.
 - i) For starters, it's a reminder that if God's "sticking it to the losers" saying you've got just what you deserve, what does that say about His plans for us "winners" who're trusting in Jesus as being God, and paying the full price for every sin we'll ever do commit in our lifetimes and trust in Him to guide our lives?"
 - ii) My point is these two chapters are a series of backhanded compliments to those of us who are trusting in God despite all the things happening around us.
 - iii) Think about it from the standpoint of the Israelites living in Babylon at that time. It had to be a great temptation to them to walk away from God to worship the things that the Babylonians did. If you're familiar with the story of Daniel Chapter 3, that was when the Israelites living in that empire were told to worship a giant idol that Nebuchadnezzar (the emperor of Babylon) made of himself. The point is when we are "away" from God there is always the temptation to worship other things.
 - iv) In Daniel Chapter 3, his three buddies got thrown in the fire, and lived for refusing to bow to that statue. I suspect most Israelites living in the Babylon Empire at that time we're thinking, "when in Rome, live like a Roman" which means ignoring the God who called them to live differently from everyone else around them.
 - v) OK John again, we are not Israelites living in Babylon, we're Christians trusting in Jesus. What does this have to do with us? It's warning us of the danger of turning to other things as a substitute for God. When we start thinking, I can skip going to church for a few weeks, or I can skip reading my bible for awhile or I don't need to seek God for a bit, that's when the danger comes of effectively turning our back on the God we claim we worship. The reason Isaiah gives us this two-chapter lecture here is to remind us who'll win and lose big time, in the end.
2. With that speech out of my system, let me explain why the text was separated into two chapters a few millenniums after Isaiah wrote it. That's because Chapter 46 focuses on the Israelites as if it is saying, "don't do this". Chapter 47 focuses on the ultimate fate of false gods. Personally, I think it is just Isaiah "getting on a role" after the last chapter. In the last chapter, we discussed the rise of a great historical figure, the leader of an empire that covered most of the known world at that time. I consider these chapters the epilogue as if to say, "let me tell you about the losers in that war".

- a) The reason Isaiah goes into such details about the "losers" is that God knows His chosen people will be captive there for a long time. He knows that many Israelites will continue to live where they were taken captive for millenniums. Having these chapters here are a reminder to them of who's really in charge of their lives despite the fact they're no longer living in Israel. There a reminder to us Christians that despite the fact we're not all living together in one land, we're still "one family", and still united under God's rule. Therefore we get this back handed compliment for two chapters by reminding us what is the results of the choice we made to follow Jesus by reminding us of the fate of those who chose to go after other gods.
 - b) So is this a "too bad for them" lecture? Of course not. As I state every now and then, God didn't call us to just sit here and say, "I'm in, your out, too bad for you!" He calls us to tell others about Him as if to warn them about the fate that awaits them if they continue to go down the path in life they have chosen. It's a reminder to us that how we live is a witness for Jesus whether we realize it or not. We Christians are united in our common belief that Jesus is God, He paid for all our sins and He's in charge of our lives. We don't have to be gathered in one spot to realize we all have that in common. What we do have to do is be a witness to others around us of the fate that awaits them if they continue to turn from God in the first place.
 - c) With that tough point made, it's time to read about the fate of false gods the Israelites had to face back then and what the proper response to be when we see people turn to go after things other than the true and living God. With that said, it's time to get started.
3. Chapter 46, Verse 1: Bel bows down, Nebo stoops low; their idols are borne by beasts of burden. The images that are carried about are burdensome, a burden for the weary.
- a) Let's start with the question, "who are Bel and Nebo" and why should I care if they were taken away somewhere?"
 - i) The short version is they were the prominent gods that the Babylonians worshiped at that time. If you've read through much of the Old Testament, you might recall a false deity called Baal that many Israelites worshipped on and off for centuries. All I'm saying is "Bel" is the same deity as "Baal". However you spell that name, it was the original "Health, wealth and prosperity" god. In other words, if you trusted in that god, he promised a life of good health, good wealth and prosperity. This god is famous for requiring child sacrifices to prove one's loyalty. Baal never promised eternal life, just a good life here and now if we bowed down to it. All I'm saying is one can see the appeal of a "Baal" (or "Bel", same thing) back then as well as today.
 - ii) As for Nebo, I don't know much about it's origin, but it was so popular that kings would take "Nebo" as part of their title. Let's just say Nebuchadnezzar among the Babylonian leaders was a typical name and "Nebo" was part of that title. His name means worshipper of "Nebo". I'm speculating that the god "Nebo" is considered to be a source of power.
 - iii) My point is the false gods "then" are not that different from what many people still seek today, which is health, wealth, prosperity and power. While we don't have a name for those false gods today, in effect they're alive and well as people choose to seek those things instead of seeking the true God who can give them eternal life.
 - b) Now that we've got the "who" established, let me talk about why they're taken away as it's a big topic in this text. The literal issue is when the Persians conquered the Babylonians a prize for them was the gold and silver statues made to those idols. The Persians took out of Babylon the valuable stuff there, which includes statues made to these false gods.
 - i) That is the image in the second sentence, of "beasts of burdens" (camels or oxen) as they are loaded with captured goodies out of Babylon to the Persian headquarters.
 - ii) The point for you and me is if we value things other than God, realize we can lose them just as easily as we gain them. Or at the most, they only last a lifetime.

4. Verse 2: They stoop and bow down together; unable to rescue the burden, they themselves go off into captivity.
- Remember that the residents of the Southern Israelite Kingdom were taken into captivity about 70 years prior to this time. Here's God promising the Israelites, "You know all the people who took you into captivity? Well, they're about to go into captivity themselves."
 - OK, so what? Remember this is a dirge for the fall of Babylon. The point for you and me is we are to see people as either spending eternity in heaven, or they will be taken away to spend eternity in hell, which is an eternity away from God's presence. The point is we can see people as those who've hurt us, or we can see them as people as needing to draw close to God or suffer for a failure to do so. My point is God does not want us to see unbelievers as those who've hurt us or hurt those who we've loved, but as people needing help.
 - Let me think of a tough example: Suppose we're caught in the middle of a gang shootout and now we have to suffer due to an injury from that shootout. The reason God wants us to forgive those who hurt us, is not so the guilty won't be punished. We forgive others as to not let them keep hurting us by reminding ourselves of what they did. That takes time, but that's why we pray for those who've hurt us. Such people should still pay the price in this lifetime. I don't have a problem with prosecuting them so they don't harm any more people. At the same time, we forgive others so we don't let them keep on hurting us.
 - With that little speech out of my system, we get reminded here that God does take care of us by "taking care" of those who've harmed us. As I said in the introduction, this lesson is a "back handed compliment" of how God cares for those who are His, even as He'll allow us to suffer due to either our own sins or the sins of others. That's the point here.
5. Verse 3: "Listen to me, O house of Jacob, all you who remain of the house of Israel, you whom I have upheld since you were conceived, an have carried since your birth. ⁴ Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you.
- To understand Verse 3, remember that Jacob was the name of the common ancestor of all Israelites. It's Isaiah's colorful way of saying, "Hey all of you (Israelites) who I've called to separate yourself to be a living witness for Me? Well I'm still with you despite the fact all of you are not living in the land of Israel right now. I'll continue to be with all of you and still desire that you use your life as a witness for Me."
 - The point of course is how different is that statement from what God has called you and I to do as Christians? If God's cared about us since we were born and promised to guide us through our old age, why do we fail to trust in Him? Why do we worry about our future knowing He is there to guide us? In effect, this is similar to a statement Jesus made when He said, the "hairs on our head are numbered" and how we are very valuable to God just as we are. (This is my rough translation of Matthew 10:29-31.)
 - Stop and put yourself in the sandals of the Israelites living in Babylon at that time. Their parents were literally taken out of Israel and forced to live in that empire. It'd be natural to think God had abandoned them. That's why Isaiah reassuring them that God still cares for them and wants to guide them. The obvious point for you and me is in toughest times of our life when we think God's abandoned us, He's reminding us that He's still there and still wants to guide our lives for His glory if we're willing to let Him. I've learned that He won't do for us what we can do for ourselves, but at the same time He'll guide us and do for us what we can't do for ourselves.
 - Remember that a lot of this is about attitude. At any moment in our life we can sit around and feel sorry for ourselves. Or we can trust that God's still there, still willing to guide us and use our lives for His glory. He promises that just as He's been with us since our start so He'll be with us to the end our life here on earth. It always amazes when people realize how God's been guiding their lives "since the beginning" even before we realized who He was and dedicated our lives to Him. Realizing He is there is the best way to live life out.

6. Verse 5: "To whom will you compare me or count me equal? To whom will you liken me that we may be compared? ⁶ Some pour out gold from their bags and weigh out silver on the scales; they hire a goldsmith to make it into a god, and they bow down and worship it. ⁷ They lift it to their shoulders and carry it; they set it up in its place, and there it stands. From that spot it cannot move. Though one cries out to it, it does not answer; it cannot save him from his troubles.
- a) I admit that it seems like Isaiah gets fixated on the issue of idols. One has to realize what the world was like that Isaiah lived in: The Israelites living in the Southern Kingdom were taken into captivity, because their world was filled with idols. As they became captives in a foreign land, "idols" were all around them. My point is the temptation to worship those idols must have been tremendous, especially when everyone else around them was doing it at that time.
 - b) I can just hear many of you saying, "I'm a devout Christian and I would never worship an idol." While we don't make statues out of silver and gold to represent what we worship, I would still argue that idols are alive and well today. If one is seeking divine help in order to be prosperous in life. If one seeks power to rule over others, whether we're aware of it or not, we are seeking an idol. At the least, we need to remember that God never wants us to have the attitude of "I'm saved, your not, and that's your problem." He expects that we use our lives as a witness for Him which is a key underlying point when we deal with life in a world full of "idols" whether we call it that or not.
 - c) Back in Isaiah's day, at least people were honest about the idols they worshipped. They'd have statues made of silver and gold and literally pray to them in their homes. A modern example would be like one having a Buddha statue in one's home or a similar shrine to an idol of some other god. The point being that those statues can't really help us through our life because they're not real. People may feel better after spending time bowing to them as they think those gods are guiding them. However the power of the true God is far greater than anything those statues represent. To put it simply, those gods can't give one eternal life. They may make us happy or give us joy in this life, but in the end they can't satisfy a desire that all of us have to worship the true and living God.
 - d) My point is I'm convinced that all people have a built in desire to worship God. As I was taught a long time ago, if you want to find out what is someone's god, see how they spend their income or their time. You'll always find their god. While household idols aren't as common as they were in Isaiah's world, they very much exist today.
 - e) Now that I've beaten that point to death, time to move on.
7. Verse 8: "Remember this, fix it in mind, take it to heart, you rebels. ⁹ Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me.
- a) Notice the word translated "rebels" at the end of Verse 8. Is God speaking to nonbelievers or believers here? One can argue either based on these verses. Either way it's describing any person who's chosen to walk away from trusting in God to trust in other things as to have joy in one's life. So what is it that God wants us to "take to heart?" That only a trust in God Himself for the complete payment of our sins will get us into heaven. Trusting in Jesus to guide our lives is also the best way to live as a witness for Him. To rebel is when we're trusting in things other than God at any moment of time.
 - b) OK then, so how do we know God is God? In effect, He's asking us to study the evidence of His existence. Can we look at the world around us and think it just made itself? If we think there are multiple gods like the Babylonians did, wouldn't there have to be an entity greater than all the gods who made all things? One of the great things about studying our bible is it's full of evidence that can be studied by archeologists. It's full of predictions that came true long before it was ever written. Again, the reason many "so-called" scholars try to late date this book is they can't stand the accuracy of its predictions. The more you do study the bible, the more you realize it's history written in advance, just as God said He'd do in this book. That's why it says, "I am God and there's no one like Me" here.

- c) John, you're preaching to the choir again. The reason we're reading this is we already do believe Jesus is God and the bible is the word of God. The reason verses like this are here is not only for unbelievers to grasp that, but to remind ourselves of that fact when we go through our own moments of doubts. We live in a world today where most information is instantly available to us at our fingertips. It's easy to study things and develop doubts of God or His plans for our lives. It's easy to think, "The bible must be wrong about this as the "world" no longer cares about what the bible says." Having God write history long before it occurs reminds us of the realities that this book came from outside of time as we know it and can help us during our own moments of doubts.
- d) Speaking of God claiming He knows the future before it happens, I present Verse 10:
 - 8. Verse 10: I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.
 - a) Pause and consider all the money spent on fortune-tellers or even people who study say their horoscopes to figure out what the future holds. Another problem we can face is we may say the bible does explain how the world as we know it began and how it'll end, but it still doesn't say what my own life will be like tomorrow. My point is many people turn to all sorts of things to figure out what their future will hold as opposed to just trusting in the God who created us in the first place and desires to guide our lives for His glory.
 - b) I just read a study about Europe today. As they grow more secular, the desire for fortune-tellers increased. The desire to worship something is still there when God is ignored.
 - c) Meanwhile we still have God effectively yelling at us through Isaiah reminding us that He and He alone knows the future and we're wasting our time and money trying to discern it from any other source. The other aspect of this verse is God's going to do what He wants when He wants and we have to accept it.
 - d) I was thinking about this verse from of all things, Satan's perspective. Why oppose God's plans if Satan knew God will win in the end? I have no doubts that Satan knows his bible better than me. I have no doubt that he'll lose in the end. What he desires is to rule here as long as possible before his inevitable demise occurs. It's the ultimate example of living only for this life as opposed to living to please God.
 - e) Think about this verse this way: if we know God's going to do what He wants with what He made in the first place, why do we oppose Him? Why do we choose to do our will as opposed to His will at any given moment? My point is the desire to rebel against Him is built into all of us due to the desire for free will. What He desires is that we turn our will back over to Him so He can use our lives for His glory. That's why we obey Him, not so we can earn points with Him, but because we realize He's in charge and the best way to live our lives is to use them for His glory.
 - f) My loose and simple translation of Verse 10: "God's in charge, deal with it". If we learn to keep that idea in mind, it's amazing how much easier life can be realizing God's in charge and desires to use our lives for His glory. With that principal in mind, He does desire we make the best decisions we can living by His rules and let Him do what we can't do for or by ourselves. That's living the Christian life in a few thoughts. Meanwhile Verse 11:
 - 9. Verse 11: From the east I summon a bird of prey; from a far-off land, a man to fulfill my purpose. What I have said, that will I bring about; what I have planned, that will I do.
 - a) OK, "who's the bird of prey" and why should I care? I'm convinced that Isaiah's describing Cyrus, the emperor who overthrew the Babylonians. It's an example of God reminding us that when life is at it's worse God still has a plan for our lives and can bring us help at any time. Just as God used Cyrus to bring an end to the Israelites living in captivity, so He can and does use people to accomplish His will in our world. I remember being taught that in life, people are both the pawns and the prizes. We are "pawns" in that God uses people in order to accomplish His will. We also the "prizes" as God wants to spend eternity with us so He can draw close to us (and vice versa) through our lives.

- b) The essential idea of this verse is that "God's going to win, deal with it, and we might as well join the winning team". It's another reminder of the benefit of dedicating our life to serving God as we'll then be part of "the winning team".
10. Verse 12: Listen to me, you stubborn-hearted, you who are far from righteousness. ¹³ I am bringing my righteousness near, it is not far away; and my salvation will not be delayed. I will grant salvation to Zion, my splendor to Israel.
- a) Even with the text translated from Hebrew to English, the text comes through very clear of God's desire (through Isaiah) to have people to turn to Him.
- b) When the text says He brings his righteousness near, what does that mean? For starters it refers to the idea that there is no magic formula to seek God. We don't have to go say, to Jerusalem or throw ourselves down at the nearest church. We've had to learn that being a Christian cost us nothing and everything at the same time. It costs us nothing in the sense that all we have to do is accept Jesus payment for our sins, trust that He's God and trust in the fact that He's in charge of our lives. There are no magic words to say, to be saved. It's simply a matter of believing in those facts. At the same time if we make that commitment, it also costs us everything, because we are now to live as if God is in charge of all aspects of our life and we're to live by His desires in order to please Him. My whole point here is simply that everybody who's ever lived is never far away from God. Anyone can make a commitment to Him at any time and at any place.
- c) Remember that Isaiah's writing this message to the Israelites scattered throughout the vast Babylonian Empire of that day. It was literally a seventy-year time frame from when all of them were taken into captivity until the time Cyrus conquered Babylon and the Israelites were allowed to return to their homeland. There is a literalness to His salvation not being that far (free from slavery) into their future from the time when Isaiah was written.
- d) What about today and the fact that Israel's back in the land again? Do they have salvation today? It's another "yes and no" answer. Once again God has allowed Israel to exist as an independent nation after roughly 2,500 years. It's "salvation" in that they can be a witness to Him in that land of His existence. It's not "salvation" in that we as people are still living in an era where salvation comes from that trust that Jesus is God. Israel as a nation today is mostly secular. The bible teaches there will be a future day when Jesus returns and He will once again primarily work through the nation of Israel in a "post-Jesus" time era.
- e) My point of all this commentary is that salvation for anyone is always a "confession" away but at the same time, just as that nation's rebirth was a literal event about 2,500 years ago, as it was again in 1948, God's still working on people in that land just as He did back then. It's proof that God is still working "through His people" as well as anyone willing to trust in Jesus for the complete payment of one's sins.
11. Chapter 47, Verse 1: "Go down, sit in the dust, Virgin Daughter of Babylon; sit on the ground without a throne, Daughter of the Babylonians. No more will you be called tender or delicate.
- a) Recall that I said my lesson title was a "dirge for the defeated". In the last part of Chapter 46, the focus was on the "defeated Israelites" living in the Babylonian Empire. As we start Chapter 47, the focus is on the defeated Babylonians. The big picture idea is despite all of the suffering the Babylonians had in their defeat, they are always welcome to come join in "The winning team". It's a not so subtle reminder that until our life ends in this world it is never too late for us to switch to "God's side" no matter how one has lived in this lifetime. We'll lose heavenly rewards if we delay our choice to serve God now, but we can be saved if we do wait until later to commit our life to God. As the old saying goes, "If we can't live for God now, what makes us think we can easily switch later in life?"
- b) With that tough point made, the focus of Chapter 47 is on those living in Babylon as if to realize what lowly condition they were living in at that time. The underlying point is for any person who's wasted their life ignoring God and what are the consequences of living that way. With that said, I can start on the text itself.

- c) OK, who's the "virgin daughter of Babylon"? Think of her as the privileged class living in Babylon at that time. A little history may help here. As I love to state, Babylon was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. The city had walls over 300 feet high and over 80 feet thick. Chariot races were held on top of the walls. A river ran through that city. They had enough food stored up for years. As that empire sent an army to conquer places, they would bring back riches to that city. My point is just like Rome at its power peak, this city was the place to be with things one would desire to have.
 - d) As we discuss it's literal fall, consider all of the things one can live in this world other than living to please God. If one desires money, or power or stuff, Babylon had it all. Of course Babylon lost it all just as those living for "stuff" today will lose it all when one dies. That's the key point of this chapter. With that said, let's read on in this dirge:
12. Verse 2: Take millstones and grind flour; take off your veil. Lift up your skirts, bare your legs, and wade through the streams. ³ Your nakedness will be exposed and your shame uncovered. I will take vengeance; I will spare no one."
- a) Again, remember that we're reading a sad poem (a "dirge") for the defeated. The story is of a woman who was once successful and didn't have need of anything. Now this woman has to essentially live like the lowest of slaves and do the work herself that she once asked of hired servants or slaves to do. The picture of "wading through streams" as having to go hand wash clothes in a source of running water. Then in the second sentence, it describes of this woman's nakedness being exposed and the last thought is "no one will be spared".
 - b) Now that we understand the "what", let's focus on "why". The Babylonians were guilty of not sparing people or cities as they would kill who resisted them and literally dragged the survivor hundreds or thousands of miles away from their homes and families away. They would take anything of value they wanted. The point is those riches didn't last forever as they're kingdom came to an abrupt end when Cyrus conquered that city roughly around 500BC. The point is Isaiah is stating history as accurate fact hundreds of years before any of this ever occurred.
 - c) Every now and then I'd argue that the reason we can trust the bible with all of its end time predictions is because it's also accurate with its "short term" predictions. In other words if we can trust God's word to come true say 200 years before it was written, why lack a trust in His word for what'll happen about when Jesus returns to rule over the world? All this ancient history is well, ancient history. The point for you and me is we can live for stuff in this lifetime or we can live to make a difference for God who'll rule eternally. People who are living to have lots of stuff like those in Babylon at the peak of power may at best get to enjoy it for one lifetime. Those who are patiently waiting for Jesus to return and rule over this world will get far greater rewards than those living in luxury can ever imagine.
 - d) The point is our "delayed gratification" of living for Jesus is well worth the wait as we will not suffer the eternal fate of this suffering woman who chose to enjoy the benefits of what was gained by innocent people suffering. Those who only live for luxury or power to be gained this lifetime will lose eternally as they refuse to acknowledge the God who's ruling over all things. So does this mean no successful person can ever be saved or we shouldn't work hard in order to have a better life? In both cases, the answer is no. The real question is, are we trusting in those things more than God? The bible never says that money itself is evil, just that the love of money is the root of evil. (1st Timothy 6:10) That's the message given within this story of a woman losing everything.
13. Verse 4: Our Redeemer--the LORD Almighty is his name-- is the Holy One of Israel.
- a) Buried in this sad story of the fall of Babylon is a reminder of who's really in charge here.
 - b) Verse 4 is here to remind us, "If to live for this life is not the answer, what's the alternative to that choice?" Yes that's written for the Israelites to remember through all of the drama of the "change of the guards" between the Persian Empire taking over the Babylonian one and that God's really in charge behind the scenes, "pulling the strings" of the whole show.

- c) I'm reminded of a book I read years ago called "The Invisible War" by Donald Barnhouse. The essential point is that within the world we do see, is another world where the forces who want God's will done battle those who want their will done. So if "God is God" why does He allow this battle to go on? The short answer is He allows free will so that we will freely choose to follow His will as opposed to being forced to do so.
 - d) The point is as we read this little tragedy of the fall of Babylon, it's not so much the literal history that's important as much as the point that God created us with a need to worship Him and Him alone. When we ignore that "need" we turn to other things to worship in a world around us.
 - i) For example, I mentioned earlier a study that was recently done about Europe as it turns away from Christianity. What that study found was fortune telling and even taking horoscopes seriously was on the rise as Christianity falls. All of us are made with a desire to worship something greater than ourselves. When we turn from a worship of the true God, there will always be something else to take its place. That is what's happening all over Europe at this moment. Unfortunately if that doesn't change, they too will suffer the same eternal fate as those in Babylon suffered as it is described here in Isaiah so long ago.
 - ii) That's why we get the reminder here in the middle of this story of who's really in charge and who we should focus our time worshipping so we don't eternally have to suffer like the example of the Babylonian woman here in this story. Speaking of her, time to get back to what she's going through.
14. Verse 5: "Sit in silence, go into darkness, Daughter of the Babylonians; no more will you be called queen of kingdoms.
- a) One has to realize how powerful Babylon was at that time. There was a good reason it is referred to as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Just like Rome as it peaked, and maybe just like the United States at it's height of power, so we have to remember that God can bring down what He allowed to be raised up. So do I believe this prophecy over Babylon was completed 2,500 years ago? Yes. I also believe it was written 2,700 years ago before that city ever grew to fame.
 - b) I'll also argue it's future: Let me put it this way, Revelation was written near the end of the 1st Century AD. In that book, there are a few chapters describing the fall of Babylon once again. Some think John wrote in code, to describe the fall of Rome they persecuted those who were Christians as when John wrote that book. While there are some similarities of the rise and fall of Rome versus Babylon, it doesn't exactly fit as Rome didn't go in a quick moment of time like the fall of Babylon. The Romans who enjoyed their power didn't die and have to suffer the way the Babylonians did when they fell. That's why I hold the view that this is also "end times" as well. The classical question debated among bible scholars is whether or not the "Babylon" John wrote of was literal or it representing another city.
 - c) My personal view is that it is literal. It will somehow rise and fall again. If I'm wrong, so be it. I'll argue the bible is right about its predictions to date and I can trust it to be right of what'll occur in the future. I figure I am on safe grounds if I argue for being too literal as opposed to being not literal enough.
 - d) In the meantime, Isaiah's reminding believers who'll be living amongst the Babylonians of how they will fall in a sense as quickly as they rose to power. That's why they and us are still to trust in "The" God despite all that occurs over human history.
15. Verse 6: I was angry with my people and desecrated my inheritance; I gave them into your hand, and you showed them no mercy. Even on the aged you laid a very heavy yoke.
- a) A good question Israelites could ask at that time is "If You (God) claim to love us as much as You claim You do, then why did You allow us to go into captivity in the first place? We get that answer here in Verse 6. The Israelites had to suffer "nationally" as they refused to trust in God over idols and that's why He allowed them to go into captivity back then.

- b) That same question can be asked by us Christians today: Why does God allow us to deal with so much suffering today? Why does He allow people to die tragically, especially of those who claim to follow Him? Why does He allow nonbelievers to have success in this life? (The answer to that question is that's all the enjoyment they'll have for eternity.) As to why God allows believers to suffer is that somehow, ultimately it honors Him. To give a few examples, some years back there was a horrible set of killings where a man shot up kids in a high school. If those kids claimed to be Christians they were shot immediately. What that shooter didn't know is many people later gave their lives to Jesus based on the testimony of what those died for Jesus did there. I know people who died horribly due to cancer and their testimony inspired others to make a commitment for Jesus or get closer to Him based on that testimony.
 - c) All I'm saying is that God allows His people to go through tough things for His glory. It's what Romans 8:28 is all about when it says, "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."
 - i) My point is God allows those who He's called (us) to go through all sorts of things, ultimately for His glory.
 - ii) I remember once being told when we get to heaven, the only word we will get out of our mouth is the word "Oh", as in "Why did you allow this event to occur?" Oh, that's it.
 - iii) All of that leads me back to this verse. It describes how God allowed the Israelites to suffer by being taken into captivity. Did a lot of innocent people have to suffer due to that event? Of course. That's why we trust in an eternal God that gives us an eternal reward or punishment based on our trust in Him despite all of "this".
 - d) Let me ask a similar question to the one being asked in this verse? Why did God permit the "Holocaust" to occur in World War II? Part of the answer is to understand what will happen when we let evil run its course. Another part of the answer is it allowed Israel to have their own homeland again after the war was over. It took a tragedy that horrid as to allow the world to see the danger of ignoring God's people and the cost of allowing evil to run its course. Unfortunately most people fail to learn from history, which is why Israel's mostly secular today. The point is God often allows the innocent to suffer in order for His will to be accomplished in the world.
 - e) Speaking of suffering, time to get back to Babylon.
16. Verse 7: You said, 'I will continue forever-- the eternal queen!' But you did not consider these things or reflect on what might happen.
- a) This verse is pretty much quoted (paraphrased) in Revelation 18:7. The last part of that verse reads, "or she says in her heart, 'I sit as queen, and am no widow, and will not see sorrow'" (Again, Revelation 18:7b, NKJV).
 - b) Before I discuss the verses meaning, this is a good time to mention that if you have never studied Revelation, realize it's written in "code". That is, it has hundreds of references to other parts of the bible and a good study of that book will lead you to go through most of the other books of the bible to learn those references. This is just one of those times here.
 - c) Now that I've gotten that statement out of my system, what does this verse mean?
 - i) Those in power in Babylon and those who benefited from that power thought it'd go on that way forever, or at least as long as they'd be alive. They didn't see their fall coming. As I stated some lessons ago, the city fell without a battle. All those who benefited from Babylon's power were soon to see sorrow, due to its fall.
 - ii) The reminder to us is that if we only live for this life, "this life" is all that we'll get as far as enjoyment. I'm not saying, "Sit there and suffer" as God says our reward is in the next life. The point is even as we work to provide for ourselves we need to remember why God created us, to use our lives as a witness for Him!
 - iii) Those living in Babylon didn't consider their fall and suffered the consequences.

17. Verse 8: "Now then, listen, you wanton creature, lounging in your security and saying to yourself, 'I am, and there is none besides me. I will never be a widow or suffer the loss of children.'
- If you haven't figured it out by now, the reason this "dirge" for the fall of Babylon is here is not to remember how they've suffered, but for us to realize the consequences of when we turn from God with our lives and how we suffer for that decision.
 - That's why it's worth taking a little time to learn why Isaiah wrote all of this and how it is relevant to our lives today.
 - With that said, remember how I quoted Revelation 18:7 a moment ago? Part of that quote was "I sit as queen, and am no widow". Now compare that phrase to what Isaiah wrote in Verse 8 here. Think of the woman in Babylon who got rich because their husbands fought in wars and won and brought home all the "goodies" to enjoy. This verse is claiming that the Babylonian women wouldn't suffer the loss of husbands or children like those places that they conquered in order to have these luxuries.
 - Again the key point is when we only live for "today", we suffer the consequences of living for that choice. Those in Babylon at that time were thinking, "We've got this great wall as protection, we've got food and water stored up for years. We've got each other and plenty of stuff, we don't have to worry about anything." It was in that type of thinking that made Jesus state, "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'" (Luke 12:20, NIV).
 - Bottom line is when we think all is well and life will go on forever just as it, that is when we need to realize that "this" is not all there is to life. That's the point of the quotes here.
 - Meanwhile, we still have seven more verses of the dirge to get through.
18. Verse 9: Both of these will overtake you in a moment, on a single day: loss of children and widowhood. They will come upon you in full measure, in spite of your many sorceries and all your potent spells.
- Remember how I said that Babylon fell without a battle? Now picture those in power in Babylon losing their husbands and children as they were either killed or dragged off into slavery somewhere. It happened just as it was predicted it would about 200 years before Babylon rose and fell from power.
 - Realize that Babylon was a "religious" society. They believed in many gods and trusted in the power of sorcery and casting spells in order to accomplish their will. Remember how I said that Europe is turning to similar things today as it collectively turned away from its Christian history? My point is history is repeating itself as it always does when people do turn from the true and living God in order to follow other things. Just as the sorceries and spells failed to help the Babylonians back then, so will all the so called "gods" fail today as people try to trust in things other than the true and living God. My point is all this ancient history will repeat itself as the world we live in turns to things other than God in order to guide our lives.
19. Verse 10: You have trusted in your wickedness and have said, 'No one sees me.' Your wisdom and knowledge mislead you when you say to yourself, 'I am, and there is none besides me.'
- Hopefully by now, you can sense where I'm going with all of this. God's condemning the people of Babylon for trusting in "things" other than God. What about the argument that they didn't know any better? The answer is they should see the world around them as to realize that there must be a single God that created all of it and all their sorceries etc., is no match for the God who created all things. As for the Israelites living there, they should be all the more aware that despite the fact they weren't living in Israel, He's called them to be a separate "entity" as a witness for God just as He's called us Christians to live differently enough so that we too, are a living witness for Him in all that we do.
 - It's almost comical as those in Babylon think, "No one sees me". We think we can get away with sin. A God who judges us fairly never lets anyone get away with anything, period!

- c) Picture people saying or thinking, "This life is all there is to life and if I want to do "that", who are you to stop me?" If a ruler or a powerful person thinks they can get away with a sin they are committing or a law they are breaking because of who they are, they're sadly mistaken. Even if they get away with it in this lifetime, or get away with it in this lifetime there is a God in heaven who judges us based on how we've lived here and now.
 - i) That leads to two important points. What about Christians and sin? The answer is we're forgiven of every sin we've ever committed or ever will commit. We still can still go to jail for committing something wrong or suffer in this lifetime, but we are completely forgiven as far as God's concerned. We are to live as He desires we live not to earn points with Him, but out of gratitude for what He did, as a witness for Him in the world around us.
 - ii) The second point is about the "naïve". What about babies who die and obviously don't know any better? To state the obvious, if "God is God", He'll do what is fair and judge people accordingly. All we can do is make a difference where we can in situations around us. Things that are beyond our ability to control such as a child dying in an accident and their eternal judgment is "His problem" and not ours. All we can do is be a living witness to others around us.
 - d) In the meantime, we're discussing the fate of those who think they can get away with stuff based on who they are in this life. Let's get back to it.
20. Verse 11: Disaster will come upon you, and you will not know how to conjure it away. A calamity will fall upon you that you cannot ward off with a ransom; a catastrophe you cannot foresee will suddenly come upon you.
- a) First let's remember the literalness of how this verse came true. When that empire fell in a moment of time, realize that the benefactors of that empire couldn't ransom their way out of that trouble. Those who did survive became slaves and went from luxury to slavery in essentially a moment in time.
 - b) The point for us is we can't buy our way out of sins. We can't look at God and say, "Don't you realize who I am?" I remember a famous rock star once joked, "When I face God, I'm going to ask Him, "Don't you realize who I am?"" Little does that person understand who he is messing with. That's the sad reminder in this verse in the middle of this dirge about those who suffered in the fall of an empire.
21. Verse 12: "Keep on, then, with your magic spells and with your many sorceries, which you have labored at since childhood. Perhaps you will succeed, perhaps you will cause terror.
- a) I am convinced that God allows some power to exist through things like sorcery. That is how God shows that His power is greater than any and all powers that oppose His will.
 - b) Christians and religious Jews are taught to avoid such things as sorcery and verses exist that tell us to avoid such practices. (See Exodus 22:18.) That's because such practices get us to trust in "it" as opposed to God.
 - c) Like I said a few times in this lesson, as Europe is turning away from Christianity, other practices such as horoscopes and even sorcery are on the rise. We're all built with a need to worship something and if we turn from God, we'll turn to other things.
 - d) That leads to the second sentence that reads, "Perhaps you will succeed, perhaps you will cause terror." My loose translation: "You have no idea of the powers you're messing with at this time." Yes there are legitimate powers to sorcery, but we're to avoid using them as God wants us to depend upon Him and not other "powers" to make a difference for Him in the world around us.
 - e) I'm convinced such powers are real, but again people have no idea what they are messing with when they get into those things. When the plagues started on Egypt, magicians did duplicate the first few as if to point out, "We can do what your God can do". That's why the Pharaoh wasn't impressed when Moses "got started". My point is such sorcery could cause terror or succeed temporarily just as the Egyptian sorceries did at that time.

22. Verse 13: All the counsel you have received has only worn you out! Let your astrologers come forward, those stargazers who make predictions month by month, let them save you from what is coming upon you.
- a) Speaking of trusting in things other than God, horoscopes were big way back then just as they are today. It never ceases to shock me how many people read their horoscopes in the paper and take them seriously. It never ceases to shock me how many people will turn to fortune-tellers to try to learn of the future. Again I'm convinced it's not all a "con game" as God allows some legitimate power in some of those cases as if to remind us whose power is greater. To state the obvious, some of those predictions are so nonspecific we can make them apply to any situation.
 - b) One of my favorite "comebacks" when people ask me what is my "sign", I tell them that I don't follow astrology, but I use "jet-strology". That's the made up idea of our fate in life is based on the positions of airplanes in the sky at any given time. Yes it's ridiculous but no more say than thinking our fate is determined by astrology. It's also a great line to use say at parties when one asks us what is our sign.
 - c) The point of this verse is such astrology predictions couldn't save the Babylonians from a destruction that was coming. "Doom and gloom" predictions always sell well. The secret is to live to make a difference for God and then no matter what comes, we can have joy in life despite the circumstances of the moment.
23. Verse 14: Surely they are like stubble; the fire will burn them up. They cannot even save themselves from the power of the flame. Here are no coals to warm anyone; here is no fire to sit by. ¹⁵ That is all they can do for you-- these you have labored with and trafficked with since childhood. Each of them goes on in his error; there is not one that can save you.
- a) The chapter ends by essentially saying that no matter what they try to do, without God in the center of one's life, they will burn up like fire. Yes it's a word picture of eternal hell, as it is also a reminder of what is the "end" when we live a life for any purpose other than to serve the living and true God. To sum up these verses in a thought, "They got what they deserved because they refused to honor the single entity who created all things." Because they looked for other things for guidance (such as astrology or fortune telling as described in the last few verses), people will suffer for the choices they've made in life.
 - b) I remember a comedian talking about hell and he essentially said, "Even if you're in flame and other horrid things, don't you eventually get used to it and say, here I am, living in a hell, and there's nothing I can do about it?" The answer is no. I don't know what hell will be like, but I can guarantee it never gets easier. I believe hell is best described as an eternal separation from God. It's essentially giving people what they want, which is life without Him for all of eternity. Since we don't know who is saved and who isn't that's why God's called us to be a witness to all people as some will turn to Him once they realize the error of their ways. On that positive note, we'll wrap this up in prayer.
24. Heavenly Father, first we thank You that You've separated us from the world so we can use our lives to make a difference for You. Help us to rely upon Your power so that we do make an effort to lead other people to You and closer to You in the time you've given us. Make it obvious to us, what it is You desire of us today and help us to trust more and more in You as You're guiding us to make that difference in the world around us. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.