

Universal Judgement

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[0 : 01] Immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

The Oracle Concerning Babylon, Which Isaiah the Son of Amoz Saw On a bare hill, raise a signal, cry aloud to them, wave their hand for them to enter the gates of the nobles.

I myself have commanded my consecrated ones, and have summoned my mighty men to execute my anger, my proudly exalting ones.

[1 : 09] The sound of a tumult is on the mountains as of a great multitude. The sound of an uproar of kingdoms, of nations gathering together. The Lord of hosts is mustering a host for battle.

They come from a distant land, from the end of the heavens, the Lord and the weapons of his indignation to destroy the whole land. Wail, for the day of the Lord is near.

As destruction from the Almighty, it will come. Therefore all hands will be feeble, and every human heart will melt. They will be dismayed.

Pangs and agony will seize them. They will be in anguish like a woman in labor. They will look aghast at one another. Their faces will be aflame.

Behold, the day of the Lord comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the land a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it.

[2 : 16] For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light. The sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light. I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity.

I will put an end to the pomp of the arrogant, and lay low the pompous pride of the ruthless. I will make people more rare than fine gold, and mankind than the gold of Ophir.

Therefore I will make the heavens tremble, and the earth will be shaken out of its place at the wrath of the Lord of hosts in the day of his fierce anger.

And like a hunted gazelle, or like sheep with none to gather them, each will turn to his own people, and each will flee to his own land. Whoever is found will be thrust through, and whoever is caught will fall by the sword.

Their infants will be dashed in pieces before their eyes. Their houses will be plundered, and their wives ravished. Behold, I am stirring up the meads against them, who have no regard for silver and do not delight in gold.

[3 : 33] Their bows will slaughter the young men. They will have no mercy on the fruit of the womb. Their arms and Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the splendor and pomp of the Chaldeans, will be like Sodom and Gomorrah when God overthrew them.

It will never be inhabited or lived in for all generations. No Arab will pitch his tent there. No shepherds will make their flocks lie down there.

But wild animals will lie down there, and their houses will be full of hair. There ostriches will dwell, and there wild goats will dance. Hyenas will cry in its towers, and jackals in the pleasant palaces. Its time is close at hand, and its days will not be prolonged. For the Lord will have compassion on Jacob, and will again choose Israel, and will set them in their own land, and sojourners will join them, and will attach themselves to the house of Jacob.

And the peoples will take them, and bring them to their place. And the house of Israel will possess them in the Lord's land as male and female slaves. They will take captive those who were their captors, and rule over those who oppressed them.

[4 : 57] Isaiah is a very big book. Some parts are well known, other parts less well known.

I think up to the summer, we're going to be looking at Isaiah 13 to 27. I think these are the lesser known chapters of Isaiah. That should not put us off. It's our firm belief here at Grace Church that all of the Bible is God's word, that God is speaking for our good.

And we trust that even these parts of the Bible that we don't know that well are for our good. So with that in mind, let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we trust that it's good for us to hear your word. We ask that for each one of us, that you would address us supremely with yourself, that we might lean and trust you all the more. And we ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen. You should find an outline on the back of the server sheet to let you know where we're going. And it should come up on the screen as well. It rarely makes the news, but all over the world, the church is under threat.

[6 : 15] Last week, Christian student Deborah Samuel was stoned to death on campus in Nigeria. The Myanmar military burning down almost all the buildings in a Christian village.

China passing new regulations governing church finances to increase state control over Christian ministry. The threat here in the UK is far less violent than other places, but it is still there.

A pressure to conform to the world around. The Church of Scotland voting to allow clergy to conduct same-sex marriages.

Perhaps a warning of what might come our way quite soon. Then there are declining church numbers. According to the Church of England's Statistics for Mission Report 2020, COVID has meant church attendance dropped by 57%.

In 2019, the average Church of England church had two children in it, and now it's zero. So with all that in mind, this is the big question.

[7 : 24] Where should God's under-pressure people turn for security? When these pressures come bearing down on God's people all over the world, or the pressures that come down to us, well, the Church will always be tempted to compromise.

To, in effect, make an alliance with the world for security, protection, salvation, and, quite frankly, an easier life.

Now, that was the temptation facing God's people in the time of the prophet Isaiah. Now, we saw that in chapters 1 to 12 that we looked at last autumn.

And just a fairly brief recap, Isaiah is writing in the 8th century before Jesus was born. And God's people have long been divided at this section into two kingdoms.

The northern kingdom, which is the blue, and the southern kingdom, Judah. So, northern kingdom, Israel. Southern kingdom, Judah, which is in the yellow. And Isaiah, as a book, follows the action in the southern kingdom of Judah.

[8 : 38] King Ahaz is on the throne. And feeling the military threat of the alliance between Israel and Syria, well, they're threatening to overrun God's people.

Or a military alliance with another nation, Assyria, up the top there. Isaiah warned King Ahaz in chapter 7, verse 9, if you are not firm in faith, you will not be firm at all.

King Ahaz, sadly, though, wouldn't listen to God's word through Isaiah, and he turned to Assyria for protection. If we can have the map back up.

Sorry, James. Assyria was the greatest world superpower of the day, up in the north, flattening nations in their wake. And feeling threatened, Ahaz thought it would be a smart move to make an alliance with them.

But it will come back to haunt them. As Assyria turns from friends to foes, they attack them. Where should God's people turn now? Thanks, James.

[9 : 46] Well, in chapters 13 to 27, that we're looking at over to the summer, Isaiah speaks to God's people Judah, and proclaims a series of oracles or prophecies about all those nations surrounding them.

And effectively, God, through Isaiah, is saying, don't trust the nations. In a crisis, turn to God alone. And that message is as relevant today as it was then.

God's people, the church, are like Judah. We're threatened from the outside, compromised on the inside, vulnerable in the world. Where should God's under-pressure people turn for security?

Are we going to rely on the world out there for our future, making alliances? Or are we going to simply continue in a life of faith and trust the Lord God?

And so these chapters, lesser-known chapters, are what we need to know, what God's people need to know if they're going to put their trust and hope in God, not the world.

[11:02] Isaiah's writing to strengthen their faith, and so we need our faith strengthened too, that we would do the same. Isaiah has two big things that we need to know from this chapter.

The first thing God's people need to know is the Lord God will punish the pride of the world. Who is this first oracle about? Have a look down at verse 1.

The oracle concerning Babylon, which Isaiah, the son of Amoz, saw. Babylon is one of the surrounding nations, not quite the superpower level of Assyria, but it will take over.

It will take the crown. Babylon is the central power base of King Nebuchadnezzar, if that name is familiar to you. You may have heard it before from the book of Daniel. It's a real historical city, a real, very impressive city, by all accounts.

The hanging gardens of Babylon were one of the seven ancient wonders of the world. An impressive city, a proud city, and yet it will be brought low.

[12:13] Verse 6 gives us the headline. Wail, for the day of the Lord is near. As destruction for the Almighty, it will come.

Then scan over to verse 9. Behold, the day of the Lord comes, cruel with wrath and fierce anger, to make the land a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it.

People are told to blub their eyes out. Why? The day of the Lord is near. A day when God would come to judge. Now that phrase, the day of the Lord, can conjure up the character of a person pacing up and down the street with a sandwich board, announcing doom and destruction for all people.

And you hope the preacher then says that's a caricature. But Isaiah says, that's not so far from the truth. Because it will be a day of terror.

A day of terror. God is pictured a bit like a general of a military force. Look down at verse 4. The sound of a tumult is on the mountains as of a great multitude.

[13:29] The sound of an uproar of kingdoms, of nations gathering together. The Lord of hosts is mustering a host for battle. They come from a distant land, from the end of the heavens.

The Lord and the weapons of his indignation to destroy the whole land. What that describes pans out in history. The city of Babylon would suffer at the hand of the Medes and the Persians as we track on in history.

And Isaiah says, those things happened because God was directing it. And it's so terrifying when God comes to judge on the earth that verse 7, no one will be able to do anything because hands will be stunned into limpness.

Hearts will waste away like candle wax. And then look down at verse 8. They will be dismayed. Pangs and agony will seize them.

They will be in anguish like a woman in labor. They will look aghast at one another. Their faces will be aflame. On the day that God comes to judge, people will turn to each other in total shock.

[14:38] The awful realization of a life of foolishness. Faces will be aflame. I think that's saying with shame. They're just embarrassed that they've got life so wrong.

The day of the Lord is a day of absolute terror. Why the terror? Because it's a day of punishment. Verses 9 to 16.

In these middle verses, the prophecy about historical city Babylon telescopes out and the whole world is now in view. We can see that from verse 11 if you look down.

I will punish the world for its evil and the wicked for their iniquity. I will put an end to the pomp of the arrogant and lay low the pompous pride of the ruthless.

Why does God jump from speaking about Babylon to the whole world? Because Babylon in the Bible is not just a real historical city.

[15:46] Babylon is a symbol of human defiance and rebellion against God. And that runs all the way through the Bible. Right near the beginning of the Bible, Genesis chapter 11, humanity tries to make a name for itself and builds the tower of Babel.

And Babylon is built on the same site. It's from the same words. And then fast forward right to the end of the Bible, Revelation chapter 19, Babylon comes to stand for the whole world in proud rebellion against God.

Babylon could be any city today. London, New York, Shanghai, Moscow. Proud, self-promoting cities, defiant against the Lord.

And a day of the Lord is not just a day coming for historical Babylon but also a day in the future for the whole world as well.

Verse 10 may have sounded familiar as it was read earlier. It's because Jesus uses the same language in Matthew 24 from our first reading.

[17:00] Jesus describes his return, the future day of the Lord and he quotes verse 10 if you look down. For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light.

The sun will be dark at its rising and the moon will not shed its light. The features of creation which are for everyone's benefit one day will just be turned off like the flick of a switch.

The world as we know it will one day come to an end as Jesus returns in that day of the Lord.

Amen. In exams lots of you are taken and you see it ticking.

The teacher reminds you how long is left half an hour left 15 minutes left. Well the clock on our world is ticking. We don't know when the time will be up but it will come.

The final whistle will blow the final curtain will come down put your pen down and stop writing time.

And so just like Babylon just like Babylon the day of the Lord here both represents a particular moment in history and something far greater.

[18:17] The day of the Lord speaks first of the year 539 BC the empire of Babylon fell to the Medo-Persians of King Cyrus as well as I speaking about but that day is a prototype pointing forward to the ultimate day of the Lord that hasn't happened yet.

A day when the Lord Jesus will return to judge. Why is he judging? What's the punishment for? Come back to verse 11 with me.

We'll see what churned God up so much. It's because of evil and pompous pride. The day of wrath and anger from God is not just an irrational knee-jerk it's to punish evil.

That is simply everything that is not good. Ever done something that harms someone else? Ever said something that lacks love? Ever thought something that ignores God?

You see evil is not a separate category of people in the world it's normal people in the world. It's all people in the world.

[19:29] And the root of that is verse 11 arrogance and pride putting ourselves in charge not God essentially acting like the king of our own life.

Jeanette Charles has been a professional look-alike for Queen Elizabeth II for the past 50 years. She's appeared on TV chat shows open supermarkets assistive magicians and shot adverts all over the world.

Jeanette Charles spends her life acting like the queen in charge. Well in a similar way here God's charge against the world is that we and nations as a whole act like the king in charge.

the Lord God proudly directing our own lives without any reference to him. But on that day God will bring low those who try to raise themselves up.

Current estimates put the world's population at 7.9 billion. Verse 12 says this day will be a day where it's quite a job to find anyone actually. Verse 12 I will make people more rare than fine gold and mankind than the gold of Ophir.

[20:52] God will come to judge Babylon pointing forward that he will come to judge the whole world. It's a day of terror, a day of punishment and briefly it's a day of humiliation.

Verse 19 is how people viewed Babylon and Babylon the glory of kingdoms the splendor and pomp of the Chaldeans. It was a beautiful city, an impressive city.

People flocked to live there for the life of luxury and comfort a lot like London but it wouldn't last because of the second half of verse 19 it will be like Sodom and Gomorrah when God overthrew them it will never be inhabited or lived in for all generations.

No Arab will pitch his tent there, no shepherds will make their flocks lie down there. A city that seems so great will become a ghost town. And that's what happened in history a hundred years after King Cyrus of Persia attacked Babylon another King Xerxes came and destroyed the city.

And that same humiliation will happen on this final day when Jesus returns. Monuments today of humanity's pride and glory they will be decimated like a ghost town.

[22:18] The most elaborate homes the tallest skyscrapers in Dubai government buildings across the world they'll become homes for wild animals and nothing more all overthrown by God.

And Isaiah says that God's people need to hear this so that they don't put their trust in the world for their security because it will come to nothing.

The Lord God will punish the pride of the world. Imagine little old Judah there in the middle of these very impressive powerful nations she's being nibbled on her borders.

The threat of Assyria very vulnerable how is she going to stay secure? should she trust Babylon or Moab or Cush or Egypt should she trust the power and prestige of the world around?

That would seem obvious. As I says no because these nations are going to come to nothing. The Lord's going to punish the pride of the world.

[23 : 31] They will be destroyed. Well that's one thing God's people need to know to be firm in faith. The second thing very briefly that God's people need to know that the Lord God will settle his people in safety.

It's really the other side of the same coin. Verse 1 begins with a little word for for the Lord will have compassion on Jacob and will again choose Israel and will set them in their own land and sojourners will join them and will attach themselves to the house of Jacob.

So why chapter 13 why is the Lord going to punish the proud? Because his ultimate plan is to secure his people will be his people's salvation.

This could be alluding to the return from exile after Babylon falls. God's people resettling in the land. But the big point is judgment on God's enemies means salvation for his people.

And it's exactly the same as the cross of Jesus. The very moment of judgment is the very moment of salvation. God's goal in punishing sin is the rescue of his people.

[24 : 55] And in verse 1 the salvation is going to include a great inclusion. All sorts of people will join the people of God. We'll also include a great reversal.

Verse 2 And the peoples will take them and bring them to their place. And the house of Israel will possess them in the Lord's land as male and female slaves.

They will take captives, those who were the captors, and rule over those who oppressed them.

God's people will rule over their enemies one day.

And we'll think about that more next week in the rest of chapter 14. But here it reminds God's people not to trust the world. You're going to rule over them. Trust the Lord alone.

There is little Judah, a little bullied schoolgirl in the playground, and she's forgotten that her father is the headmaster, that her father is in control of everyone, including those giving her a hard time.

[26 : 01] Isaiah is seeking to strengthen the faith of the people of God, and he does it by showing them just who the Lord is. He is the one who rules over all nations in the world.

He reigns supreme over North Korea, Russia, Ukraine, UK, and the EU, and everywhere else. And the strongest of the world's nations are no match for him.

He will punish the pride and the arrogance of the world, and will settle his people in safety. So, says Isaiah, don't throw your lot in with the world.

With its attraction and its glory, it will come to nothing. All that matters is trusting in the Lord. Just thinking about today again, the people of God, we're no stronger than Judah must have felt.

The church across London, the country, the church across the world, is humanly speaking, very, very vulnerable and weak. We're ridiculed sometimes, we're compromised, we're weak, we seem defeated.

[27 : 14] Who will defend persecuted Christians across the world? Who will protect our ability to preach the gospel freely in the UK? What will stem the tide of decreasing numbers?

Now, maybe as a church and a denomination, if we altered historical Christian beliefs, we could form an alliance with the world, gain security, affirmation, protection.

I guess we feel that on a corporate level, as churches, denominations. We may feel that temptation on a personal level, too, to make those alliances at work, at school, in our neighbourhoods, in our friendship groups.

But can we rely on alliances with seemingly friendly powers? Not according to Isaiah. When we're tempted to turn to the world for approval and security, Isaiah calls us to continue to trust the Lord God alone.

now we continue to trust and proclaim the gospel of Christ and pray that lives will be transformed.

And even when as Christians we feel weak through times of crisis and turmoil and a temptation to turn to the world for help, God is the one we are to look to.

[28 : 44] He will settle his people in absolute safety with him. He is our only hope when the future day of the Lord comes, when God's people, those who have put their trust in the Lord Jesus, will be gathered together from all over the world when the Son of Man comes in glory.

In the end, every other power and authority, every other kingdom and dominion will fall, but God reigns forever. Let me lead us in prayer.

Father God, we praise you that you hold all the oceans in your hand, all the nations in your hand.

You are seated on your throne. You are in charge over everyone and everywhere.

Please help us to look to you when we feel threatened as your people. Please help us to look forward to that day when you will settle us in safety in a new creation with the Lord Jesus.

Amen. Amen.