



Preaching Through The Bible, Michael Eaton

Isaiah

Part 66

God's Consuming Fire (47:1-15)

• **Babylon was used by God but will ultimately be judged**

Isaiah insists that Cyrus the Persian will triumph. Babylon will be degraded and punished. God may have used Babylon to chastise his people. But Babylon was not wanting to please God, and they were not conducting their military invasions with a view to doing God's will or being a blessing to anyone! God judges us not for what are his motives but for what are our motives. Babylon was used by God but in due course will be judged by God for their wicked pride.

Pride is eventually judged by God

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*¹Go 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 and delicate.
²Take millstones and grind flour;
take off your veil.
Lift up your skirts, bare your legs,
and cross the streams.
³Your nakedness will be exposed
and your shame uncovered.'*

• **Babylon will be humiliated**

The day will come when Babylon will be humiliated in a most extreme manner. It will not be an 'accident'. It will be the judgement of God. God says:

*'I will take vengeance;
I will favour no one.'
⁴Our Redeemer – Yahweh Almighty is his name –
is the Holy One of Israel.'*

• **The 'redemption' of Israel involves the putting down of its enemies**

The 'redemption' of Israel involves the putting down of its enemies. Babylon will no longer be admired as the superpower that is envied by the world.

*⁵Sit in silence, go into darkness,
Daughter of the Babylonians; no
more will you be called the
powerful lady over kingdoms.
⁶I 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.'*

• **Sinners tend to admire themselves – but God asks us to reflect on the outcome of our ways**

God enabled Babylon to rise to power and be a means of disciplining Judah. But Babylon had no humility in what it did. The nation was proud and self-confident. Sinners — we ourselves included — tend to admire themselves but God asks us to 'take to heart' what he is doing, and reflect on the outcome of our ways.

*⁷You said, "I will continue for ever –
the eternal queen!"
But you did not take to heart these
things or reflect on its outcome.'*

(i) **Sinners' self-confident spirit of superiority**

God uses sinners but their particular sins are punished eventually. Isaiah mentions (i) **their self-confident spirit of superiority.**

*⁸Now then, listen, you wanton creature,
lounging in your security*

*and saying in your heart,
"I am, and there is none besides me.
I will never live as a widow;
I will never know the loss of children."*

• The very thing we swear will never happen to us is likely to be the thing God will do

But the very thing we swear will never happen to us is likely to be the very thing God will do.

⁹Both of these will come upon 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.'

• (ii) Sinners' feeling that they can act as a law to themselves

Isaiah mentions (ii) **their feeling that they can act as a law to themselves.**

¹⁰You have remained confident despite 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."'

• Isaiah promises certain judgement

But the prophet promises a certain judgement that will be unexpected, unavoidable, unbribable.

¹¹Disaster will come upon you, and you will not know when the evil day will come. A calamity will fall upon you that you cannot escape by paying a ransom; a catastrophe you do not know about will suddenly come upon you.'

(iii) Sinners' idolatrous trust in pagan religion

Isaiah mentions (iii) **their idolatrous trust in pagan religion.** The Babylonians were very devout.

• The Babylonians were very devout

*¹²Keep on, then, with your magic spells and with your many sorceries, which you have laboured at since childhood. Perhaps you will be able to profit, perhaps you will cause terror.
¹³You are wearied by the abundance of the advice you get! Let your astrologers come forward, those stargazers who make predictions month by month, let them save you from what is coming upon you.'*

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Isaiah insists **their punishment will involve eventual extermination.** God's holiness will come upon them as inextinguishable fire. They will be like stubble burnt to nothing in the fierce holy fire of God.

¹⁴Look! They are like stubble; the fire will burn them up.'

• God's holiness comes as a fire – they cannot save themselves

Nothing will be able to hold back what God will do. They cannot save themselves. They can be saved by no one else.

'They cannot even deliver themselves from the power of the flame. Here are no coals to warm anyone; here is no fire to sit by.'

• God's judgement is good news – the extermination of evil

God's judgement is actually part of the gospel. It is good news not bad news! The biblical picture of judgement is one of the extermination of evil. That, surely, is good news! Men and women complain about the injustices of the world. They sometimes complain against the

• Judah was purified and Babylon faces extinction

justice of God. But Scripture is clear. Justice is to be done! Evil will be abolished. God is slow to anger. Sinners get ample opportunity to consider their ways. Babylon was tolerated by God for centuries. Israel's idolatry went on for centuries. But eventually God acts. Sin is judged. What was given out is received back. The judgement takes as long as it has to. It cannot be resisted. Judah was purified. Babylon faces extinction. In the long run, sin is consumed to nothingness.

• No friends for Babylon on the day of judgement

Babylon had lots of trading partners, but there will be no friends around to help in the day of God's judgement.

*¹⁵There is nothing anyone at all can do for you.
Those you have laboured with,
and those who have traded with you since childhood –
each of them wanders off, making his exit,
there is not one that can save you.'*

• Eventually there will be a new heavens and new earth – meanwhile we can plead for mercy before justice is done

Isaiah is almost sarcastic. Judgement is not a cosy chat. 'Here are no coals to warm anyone; here is no fire to sit by.' God's anger will be a consuming fire. Sin will be punished — for as long as is necessary – but eventually there will be a new heavens and new earth in which righteousness dwells and sin is removed for ever. Meanwhile, time goes on and we have the opportunity to plead for mercy – before justice is done for ever.

Dr Michael Eaton (1942-2017) was highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. Born in the UK, he lived for many years in Kenya where he became a citizen. He was one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship in Nairobi. His Preaching through the Bible books are highly popular worldwide, written in a clear and down-to-earth style but underpinned by rigorous scholarship. Some of these books have been reformatted as individual sheets for personal and group study and preaching. The New Testament volumes have been re-edited and combined in the Branch Commentary. The Old Testament, including previously unpublished material will follow. More details: www.slices.org.uk.