

God Foretells Destruction

Lesson Scripture: Isaiah 47

Focus Scripture: Isaiah 47:10-15

Key Verse: Such to you are those with whom you have labored, who have trafficked with you from your youth; they all wander about in their own paths; there is no one to save you.
Isaiah 47:15 (NRSV)

ISAIAH 47:10-15 (NRSV)

10 You felt secure in your wickedness; you said, "No one sees me." Your wisdom and your knowledge led you astray, and you said in your heart, "I am, and there is no one besides me."

11 But evil shall come upon you, which you cannot charm away; disaster shall fall upon you, which you will not be able to ward off; and ruin shall come on you suddenly, of which you know nothing.

12 Stand fast in your enchantments and your many sorceries, with which you have labored from your youth; perhaps you may be able to succeed, perhaps you may inspire terror.

13 You are wearied with your many consultations; let those who study the heavens stand up and save you, those who gaze at the stars, and at each new moon predict what shall befall you.

14 See, they are like stubble, the fire consumes them; they cannot deliver themselves from the power of the flame. No coal for warming oneself is this, no fire to sit before!

15 Such to you are those with whom you have labored, who have trafficked with you from your youth; they all wander about in their own paths; there is no one to save you.

ISAIAH 47:10-15 (KJV)

10 For thou hast trusted in thy wickedness: thou hast said, None seeth me. Thy wisdom and thy knowledge, it hath perverted thee; and thou hast said in thine heart, I am, and none else beside me.

11 Therefore shall evil come upon thee; thou shalt not know from whence it riseth: and mischief shall fall upon thee; thou shalt not be able to put it off: and desolation shall come upon thee suddenly, which thou shalt not know.

12 Stand now with thine enchantments, and with the multitude of thy sorceries, wherein thou hast laboured from thy youth; if so be thou shalt be able to profit, if so be thou mayest prevail.

13 Thou art wearied in the multitude of thy counsels. Let now the astrologers, the stargazers, the monthly prognosticators, stand up, and save thee from these things that shall come upon thee.

14 Behold, they shall be as stubble; the fire shall burn them; they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame: there shall not be a coal to warm at, nor fire to sit before it.

15 Thus shall they be unto thee with whom thou hast laboured, even thy merchants, from thy youth: they shall wander every one to his quarter; none shall save thee.

KEY TERMS

- **Enchantments** – The condition of being put under a spell; something that delights or charms; great delight.
- **Sorceries** – Magic formed with the supposed aid of evil spirits; witchcraft.
- **Stubble** – The lower ends of stalks of grain left in the ground after the grain is cut; any short, rough growth.
- **Sennacherib** (sen-nack-er-ib)
- **Sweyn** (svehn)

INTRODUCTION

The summer quarter looks at creation in its broadest sense. Believers hold firm that God almighty created the world and all in the world. But that is not the whole creation story. God's creative power was on full display during Christ's earthly ministry. And still, it goes further. The divine creative power is also revealed through believers in acts of redemption and restoration, healing, resurrection, and personal peace. And for believers, the best is yet to come. The creation story climaxes in the new

earth and heaven, in ultimate glory. This latter aspect is the focus of the book of Revelation.

So, see how believers partner with God through Christ in continuing the more comprehensive creation story in these lessons. In "God Delivers and Restores," we consider Isaiah, examining the prophetic foretelling of Babylon's destruction and inspiring hope for Israel's deliverance. In the second group (lessons 5 to 9) we study "The Word: The Agent of Creation," from John's gospel. Through these lessons, look at how the *creating word* (Jesus Christ) became flesh, healed the sick, saved the lost, resurrected the dead, and granted peace. The final lessons (lessons 10 to 13) highlight "The Great Hope of the Saints" from the book of Revelation.

These lessons give a glimpse of the fulfillment of the believers' great hope for a new home and a secured eternity. Please keep this framework in mind as you work through the thirteen studies.

For lesson one, note that God allowed the nation of Israel to be enslaved by Babylon. Based on such victories, and its military power, Babylon became arrogant and despised other nations and their

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gods. Babylon's leaders missed the point that it was Israel's God who had given Babylon the victory.

There are striking similarities between how Babylon perceived its success and good fortune and how many people today view their success. Their achievements make them look down on other people and forget God. That foolish pride turned out to be disastrous for the leaders and people of Babylon. Today, people who drink from that same cup of self-centered glory taste the same ruin God planned for Babylon. In this lesson is a strong warning about the dangers of vanity and pride.

TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

To appreciate the text, we must know the status of the nation of Babylon in its historical context. Babylon was a modern equivalent of a world superpower. Isaiah points out, and historians confirmed, Babylon was a constant, worrisome threat to the existence and prosperity of Israel.

We must also highlight that Babylon was an idolatrous nation; this alone puts it at odds with God's people Israel. Babylon was such a powerful, godless

enemy; the name was and still is used by the church to describe a godless empire or culture (see 1 Peter 5:13; Revelation 17–18). As you read the text, consider how terrible a situation this created for God's people. When your enemy is more powerful than you are, has more skilled and more vicious fighters, deadlier weapons, and no scruples about your destruction, you have to take note. You must be concerned.

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Israel on its own could not engage Babylon in war and hope to win. For Israel to break Babylon's iron hand of domination, Israel had to get help. The prophet knew this, and the people understood it. Thankfully, Israel's God stepped in to do for his people what they could not do for themselves.

Bear in mind that the set text is part of a broader text in the book of Isaiah (chapters 40–66) devoted to God's planned destruction of oppressive Babylon. Also, don't miss how God spelled out the charges against Babylon. The people felt invincible, secured in their wisdom. Part of this haughty pride came from their practice of witchcraft and other idolatries. This disclosure of charges is a feature of God's judgment. No person will be able to stand before

God and say they don't know the reason for God's judgment or punishment. The statement "be sure your sin will find you out" (Numbers 32:23) is sound theology, whether for a nation or an individual.

For the next point of interest, we step back into Chapter 45. There we see Cyrus was the person God selected to break the nation of Babylon. God called Cyrus to chastise Babylon when Cyrus did not know God ("I name you though you do not know me"); this lets us know that God may use someone outside our church, outside our faith, or outside our country to reorient us. Some people used as deliverers and/or liberators were "outsiders." They were not recognized as qualified for the roles they played. God does not have to choose a religious, political, or economic liberator from our honored list of likely candidates. You have heard it many times before: God qualifies whom God calls and calls whom God qualifies.

Our focus this far was on the people of Babylon as a nation; but, be sure that on the personal level, our God will do the same. So, to use a popular cliché, when we feel we are under threat by powerful, godless, enemies; we must not watch the

size of the enemy. We keep our eyes on the size and power of our God.

SANKOFA

The text above noted that Babylon was a super-power, and Israel would be at a distinct disadvantage to take on Babylon in a war. Looking back in Caribbean history, we saw a parallel situation in Jamaica with Nanny of the Maroons (c. 1686 – c. 1733). This woman became the leader of the resistance movement called the Maroons (runaway or former slaves opposed to slavery). Under her leadership, the Windward Maroons engaged in serious guerrillawarfare against the mighty British army for many years. To the surprise of many, this loosely-organized guerrilla group inflicted heavy losses on the better-trained, better-equipped British army.

As they could not defeat the Maroons, the British agreed to a treaty in April 1740. By that treaty, the running war stopped, the Maroons got freedom from the state, and some 500 acres of land to settle and live on. This was the start of what today is called Moore Town or New Nanny Town in Jamaica. Indeed, when God is ready, God will send liberators from any corner of the earth to free his people.

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CASE STUDY

About 13 years ago, the Reverend Dr. Jeremiah Wright released a tornado of public uproar with his comment "God Damn America" in his sermon. Did people really hear the message of the sermon? It appeared that most of the people who were angered by the comments did not hear or did not understand the focal point Dr. Wright was making. Anyone who listened to the sermon would have seen that the good preacher was making the same point the prophet Isaiah made in the text. If indeed God is a God of justice, a nation cannot expect to prosper when it consciously and systematically perpetuates injustice. When injustice is the order of the day, damnation, not blessings, is the outcome to expect. To put it in Bob Marley's language:

"Until the philosophy which hold one race superior and another inferior is finally and permanently discredited and abandoned everywhere is war." (From the song *War*)

It may be hard for people to accept, but Proverbs 14:34 still holds, "Godliness makes a nation great, but sin is a disgrace

to any people" (NLT version). Psalm 89:14 reminds us that righteousness and justice are the foundation of God's rule. Therefore, it is not optional that God will judge injustice. God, by his very nature, must condemn and deal harshly with nations which maintain systems of injustice. Dr. Wright was right. National systems of injustice bring damnation, not blessings.

LIFE APPLICATION

Do you think God
is pleased with the
direction your country is
going?

When God judges a nation, everyone in the nation feels the suffering of that judgment. So, we must be intimately concerned about what is happening in our country, its direction, and the blessings or damnation hanging over it.

Second, as Christians, we must pray for our nation (see 1 Timothy 2:1-2 and Jeremiah 29:7). Against that background, take some time to consider the country's state. Based on the news you hear, the events you witness, and the political landscape, what is the state of your nation? Do you think God is pleased with the direction your country is going?

Whatever your assessment of the above, consider how often you pray and

intercede for the nation. Irrespective of social or political sympathies, our prayers for our country should be regular and constant. We must make it a habit to pray for our nation's peace, prosperity, and godliness. Is earnest prayer for the country a regular feature of your meditation or church meetings? If it is not, consider how you can improve this aspect of your Christian life.

God is always the ultimate judge of every nation. Whether a nation prospers or falls depends on the country's level of justice and righteousness. Consider how you can help expose and root out injustice and evil in your government. Likewise, find out how you can promote systems of justice and godliness in your country. Participating in national elections and supporting candidates who stand for real justice and godliness is an important start. The actions of a nation are the total of the actions of its people. Play your part. Do not undermine your importance in national affairs.

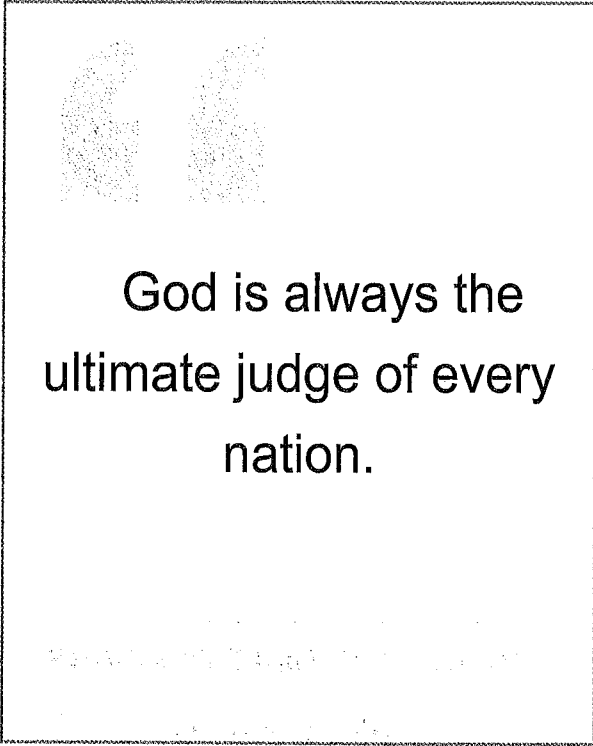
QUESTIONS

1. Name one person from history or the

Bible who God called and equipped for a special mission or contribution to their community, church, or the world, who in the eyes of his or her contemporaries was not qualified for that assignment.

2. What is your belief on guerilla warfare, and how God may use it to free a people from oppression?

3. Babylon, as a nation, was on the wrong track of justice and righteousness, and therefore God set them up for destruction. What track is your nation on, blessing or damnation?



CLOSING DEVOTIONS

Closing Hymn: "All

Hail the Power of Jesus' Name," *AMECH* #4

Closing Praise: Dear Father, I thank you for making me a part of this nation. Help me to know the roles I can play to promote your justice and righteous in this nation. In Jesus' name. Amen.