

Q1 L06 - **Playing God** - 2021-02-06

Jean Ross: Good morning. We'd like to welcome you again to "Sabbath School Study Hour," coming to you here from the Granite Bay Seventh-day Adventist Church in Sacramento, California. We'd like to welcome our online members and our friends who are joining us across the country and literally around the world. Our extended Sabbath School class. If you've been joining us for the last few weeks, you know that we've been studying through the Old Testament book of Isaiah. Today, we are on lesson number six. It's got the title "Playing God," and we'll see what the Bible has to say about that subject. That's lesson number six in our lesson quarterly.

We also have a free offer entitled "The Surrender of Self," and we'll be happy to send this to anyone in North America. If you'd like to receive the book, the number to call is 866-788-3966, and just ask for offer number 153. We'll get that in the mail and send it to you. You can also request a digital download of the book, and to do so, you just need to text the code "SH087" to the number 40544 and you'll get a digital copy of the book, "The Surrender of Self."

Well, before we get to our lesson this morning, we're going to be having a special musical item from the Milson family.

♪ Lord, let Your light, ♪

♪ light of Your face shine on us. ♪

♪ Lord, let Your light, ♪

♪ light of Your face shine on us, ♪

♪ that we may be saved, ♪

♪ that we may have life ♪

♪ to find a way ♪

♪ in the darkest night. ♪

♪ Let Your light shine on us. ♪

♪♪♪

♪♪♪

♪ Lord, let Your grace, ♪

♪ grace from Your hand fall on us. ♪

♪ Lord, let Your grace, ♪

♪ grace from Your hand fall on us, ♪

♪ that we may be saved, ♪

♪ that we may have life ♪

♪ to find a way ♪

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♪ Let Your grace fall on us. ♪

♪ Lord, let Your love, ♪

♪ love with no end come over us. ♪

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♪ Let Your love come over us. ♪

♪ Let Your light shine on us. ♪

Jean: Let us bow our heads for a word of prayer. Dear Father in heaven, how grateful we are then that we can turn to You, that You're always there. In the midst of joy or sorrow or trials or victories, you are there to guide, sustain, comfort. And Lord, as we open up Your Word, we want to ask Your Spirit to be with us. Be with us here in this place, but also with those who are joining us, wherever they might be, in their home. We pray, Lord, that Your Spirit speak to their hearts as well. And we commit this time in Your keeping, in Jesus's name, amen.

Our lesson today is going to be brought to our family life pastor here at Granite Bay: Pastor Shawn Brummund.

Shawn Brummund: Well, good morning to everyone. It's nice to have you join us here as we continue to worship the Lord from Sabbath to Sabbath, and we're not going to let any pandemic get in the way of that, amen? We continue to worship, either in person in different capacities as the restrictions have lifted in the Greater Sacramento region just recently, as well as, of course, online as many people are continuing to choose to stream from their homes; in their living rooms, their kitchens, wherever it is, their cars, their phones, wherever they're located. You want to continue to worship the Lord.

And so we come together to study, and today we're looking at the Book of Isaiah. And you know, this is the second time I've had the privilege of being able to teach from the Book of Isaiah during this particular quarter, and I have to say that after going through this particular week, it reminds me what terrible, cruel treatment we have given to Dr. Roy Gane as we asked him to author this particular quarter and have asked him to cover the Book of Isaiah in just three months. And friends, very quickly, it

doesn't very-- take very long to be able to start to recognize that he can only just but touch on some of the great themes of truth.

The Book of Isaiah is just so deep, so rich, so lengthy, and so comprehensive in its message that, really, it is an impossibility to cover the entire Book of Isaiah in three months. In fact, I got a good dose of my own medicine-- of that same medicine, I should say, over the last week as I was preparing for today's lesson study, and many of you as you look through it because we are asked to look at six entire chapters. And in some of those chapters, one chapter alone could take two or three sessions on its own. And so there's just-- it's going to be impossible to be able to cover so many of the deep truths that God reveals in those six chapters. But by God's grace, we're going to look at some of them and see if God can continue to open our minds and understand how much He is involved in this world, how much He loves us, and, friends, the great rewards that are found in the Book of Isaiah.

I also hope that this inspires us, motivates us to be able to open up the Book of Isaiah in later times after this particular quarter is over, or even during it, if you have the time, to be able to spend those extra hours looking at the other chapters, digging them a little bit deeper, looking at the SDA commentaries and Ellen White's commentaries and others that give us such rich insight and understanding, because the rewards are there, much more rewards that we could even find just in the quarterly alone.

So we're looking at some very important details to start off with this particular week in Isaiah's chapter 13 and 14, and in those two chapters we find, again, just a load of gold and treasures that concern to prophetic truth, the principles, and involvement of God in the world. Sunday's lesson points out that these two particular chapters are the first of 11 chapters; that is, from chapters 13 to 23, and in that particular section in which this one week is kind of trying to encompass plus three more. You know, it's just impossible to cover it all. But in those 11 chapters and in the first initial chapters of 13 and 14, it proclaims God's judgments on several different nations.

Now, if you read through Isaiah before, in the past, this is something that probably jumped out to you-- at you just like it did with me. I still recall very clearly when I was reading through the Book of Isaiah for the first time many years ago, and when I was doing that I had discovered that God had all these prophecies not only for Israel but for multiple nations surrounding Israel in that region of the world. And so I started to read in the Book of Isaiah in these two particular chapters and the chapters following as God was addressing several nations, and it revealed to me that, very clearly, at that point onward that God is an international God, that God is not only working through the nation of Israel.

Now, Israel is obviously a key nation and we're going to talk about its place in the nations, but it only is holding one place--one of the nations of the world. God has been working through and has been working in and about the royal palaces, the different democracies and republics that have risen and fallen throughout Earth's history on all continents, in all the world. And I think this is one of the rich, important themes that Isaiah, among all the prophets, brings out more clear, more extensively than any other prophet. Yes, and those chapters in Isaiah that we looked at this week, God addresses Babylon, He addresses Assyria, He addresses Moab, He addresses Syria, He addresses Ethiopia, He addresses one of the strongest, mightiest cities on the Mediterranean by the name of Tyre. That is T-Y-R-E.

Yeah, God has messages for more than just Israel, and this is an important truth that jumped out at me, and I hope it has-- or if it hasn't in the past, that it jumped out to you over the last week because that helped me to be able to understand that God has not just developed in Israel this kind of exclusive club, this kind of--you know, kind of exclusive club that if you're fortunate enough to be born into it or maybe you're a neighbor of it and you're fortunate to be able to plug into that, then that's all that God's really interested in. He just kind of has His favorite people, and that's the really only ones that are important to Him. No, not at all. You know, now for-- unfortunately, the generation that came and had developed

up to the point of Jesus's life on Earth, that was the case and the mind of most Jewish people, that was the case and the mind of the rabbis and the priesthood and so on, that that God looked upon everybody that was fortunate to be born a Jew and then they-- you know, they were born into the Kingdom, they were born into eternity, they were born into the worship of the true God and the true revelation of God in the Scriptures and so on, the true religion.

But really, the rest of all peoples were dogs. You know, they were just unclean, common people. They were the inferior ones that God wasn't all that interested in, but that's not the case at all, and Isaiah brings that out loud and clear. And so Israel had no excuse by the time Jesus came along and tried to have--you know, did his best to be able to try to straighten that out, and sometimes I think he has to straighten it out for us as Christians and as a church at times as well. Daniel said it best in his book in chapter 2 and verse 21, where he makes that very famous and very powerful statement. He says, "And He," that is the Lord, "changes times and seasons. He removes kings and raises up kings."

Many of you are familiar with that important verse. This is an important theological statement concerning God's involvement in the world. God does not call us into an agnostic faith. God does not call us into an exclusive club within the church or within Israel. God is working through all nations, and He is the one that is deciding not only who will be king in Israel or who will be president of the United States, but He's also deciding who will be the next president or king over in Somalia or over in China and so on.

You know, God is the one that really is watching over the boundaries of all nations. God is an international God, and I think that we forget that too quickly and maybe some of us have never really comprehended that. God makes it very clear from the beginning of all nations. After all, through one blood-- Paul says, all people, all nations, and all races have come from one blood, from Adam and Eve. We all share the same grandparent and the same grandfather and the same grandmother.

And so naturally God is interested in all nations, naturally God is involved in every single people group, every nation, tribe, tongue, and people around the world. And God decides when their iniquity-- their cup of iniquity, as the prophets put it in the symbolic way, when their evil reaches a point where they cross that line in the sand where God says, "This far and no farther," that God then allows that king, and quite often that kingdom, to fall. And so God pronounces that judgment not only on Israel as he did, sadly, so many times, but on all nations, and He always has. And Isaiah, again, opens our mind to that grander scale of truth that God wants us to be able to understand.

Now, the fascinating thing is that 100-- over 100 years before Daniel came along, over 100 years before a couple of Babylonian kings came along during Daniel's lifetime, God had revealed through Isaiah that one of those two kings would be removed from his throne. He would be slaughtered by an enemy force, and He names one of those forces in the same chapter of Isaiah chapter 13, and that is found in Isaiah 13 and verse 17. He names the Medes, and He says, "Listen, one of the enemy forces that will remove that king--" even as Daniel had proclaimed earlier in Daniel chapter 2 that it's God who lifts up kings and places them on the throne. He's the one who decides when they are removed from the throne as well.

And so Isaiah names it over 100 years beforehand and says the Medes will be one of the key forces that will remove and slaughter the final king of the great Babylonian Empire. And of course, we know that to be Belshazzar. We can find that detailed in Daniel chapter 5, how he was removed and some of the powerful details that surrounded that particular circumstance that caused God to be able to draw that line and say, "This far and no further." But not only the-- are the Medes mentioned-- in this case, the Medes are mentioned in Isaiah 13.

But the Persians really were the most powerful of that alliance, as we could say, because it was not just the Medes over in what we call modern Iraq-- or not Iraq, but Iran today. And the Medes lived more in

what we call Northern Iran today, and then the Persians lived more in the southern section of modern Iran today. And they were somewhat related and so on, but-- and so they had some similar blood, but they were always battling and at heads with each other. And sometimes the Medes were the ones that were ruling and kind of making the Persians subject to them and sometimes the other way around.

Well, the time that the Babylonian Empire was destroyed and conquered, it was actually the Medes that were subject to the Persians. The Persians were ruling the roost at that time. And so the Persians actually were led by a key king by the name of Cyrus, historically coming to be known as Cyrus the Great, and he was a Persian. And he's labeled later on in Isaiah chapter 45, and you can find that in verses 1 and verses 13, two fascinating verses-- amongst the fascinating-- one of the most fascinating chapters you can find in all the Scripture are on Isaiah 45. And again it's labeling there, that the Persians actually be the key leading force that'll remove Babylon and the Babylonian king, but the Medes would be intricate in that as well.

Now, one of the fascinating things about Isaiah chapter 45 and verse 1 is where it labels, and even names, King Cyrus over 100 years before he was ever conceived. God looking forward into the future, knowing the beginning from the end as He declare so often through the prophet Isaiah indeed declares for us here that the first king--the key king, the Persian king that would actually mastermind the breakdown and the conquering of this--what was known as the unconquerable city of Babylon, and then his forces--the Persian forces along with the Median forces would actually conquer Babylon in one swift moment in one night, and indeed Belshazzar, the last Babylonian king, was slaughtered that night.

And--so fascinating chapter. King Cyrus the Great, the great deliverer of Israel-- Israel had been in captivity to this enemy of God, the enemy of true religion, the enemy of God's people, and God's people, Israel, had been in captivity there for 70 years now, and Cyrus was the key figure that turned the key and allowed--and opened the door and allowed the Israelites to be able to return to their homeland, rebuild Jerusalem, rebuild the holy temple and continue to proclaim the coming Messiah through the temple services, the salvation of the world. In fact, in 45, verse 1 in Isaiah, God actually not only named Cyrus but then He calls Cyrus His anointed one.

Now, I find this fascinating, friends. He calls him His anointed one. Now, anointed one means "messiah." This is--the Hebrew term "messiah" literally means "anointed one." "Christ" is the Greek equivalent to the same word and title "the anointed one." Now, God had a number of anointed one throughout history. He had David the Anointed One. David, several times, referred to his father-in-law Saul-- King Saul, the first king of Israel, as God's anointed one. And whenever a king in Israel was anointed as a king, well, they would kneel down and the priest or the prophet would pour some oil over their head as a symbol, as an initiation into this great responsibility of king of Israel.

But of course, Jesus never received that oil, did he? He was called the Anointed One because the Gospel of Luke-- Luke writes for us and says that he was not anointed with oil but he was anointed with the Holy Spirit on the day that he was baptized. The only other figure in all of history that God refers to as the anointed one that was never anointed with literal oil like the other kings was King Cyrus.

And so King Cyrus is clearly used by God as a figure-- a symbolic figure of the final and ultimate divine Messiah and Anointed One: Jesus Christ himself. And so we find here a very fitting figure because it was King Cyrus that was the key one that came in and delivered and freed God's people from Babylonian captivity, not only physical captivity but spiritual and moral captivity as well because the influences and the practices that were taking place in Babylon were extremely strainful upon those who wanted to remain faithful to God. Just ask Daniel. Just ask Daniel's three friends. They're very much acquainted with a very hot fire in a very hot furnace. David was very much acquainted with sleeping with lions that were very hungry.

And so it was very difficult. It was very difficult during those captive years to be able to stay faithful to God. Cyrus was a symbol of the coming-- Messiah to come, who would deliver New Testament Israel, the holy church, God's true people, from the New Testament Babylon, and we're going to expand upon this as we continue to go through our lesson study here today. And so we have a powerful figurative figure in the-- in that of King Cyrus but also his armies, his forces, and then the task that God had accomplished through him as His anointed one, again, which is to deliver God's people, Israel.

And so God has revealed He's working through and with all nations as best as He-- as possible with as many as possible to bring as many as possible to the truth and the gospel of His eternal salvation. And again, Isaiah by far writes the most on this very critical grand scale of truth. Now, if we were to back up to week number one of our quarterly, we would discover that there was a key chapter that we had to skip.

Now, this is no sleight against our author, Dr. Roy Gane, because, again, he was given a task that was insurmountable as try to cover all the key paths-- facets of Isaiah in three months. Impossible. And so he was--found himself compelled to be able to have to skip over Isaiah chapter 2. But there's a key there in Isaiah chapter 2 that is directly related to what we're looking at in the chapters of Isaiah chapter 13 through 23. And friends, that is the fact that God has a global agenda, that God is involved globally and internationally in the world. And so I want to bring us to that, Isaiah chapter 2 and verses 2 through 4.

If you have your Bibles open, you can follow along with me. Isaiah 2, verses 2 through 4. God says through Isaiah, He says, "Now it shall come to pass in the latter days," that is in the future, "that the mountain of the Lord's house--" Now, when he's referring to the mountain of the Lord's house, He's referring to Mount Zion, He's referring to Mount Moriah. This is where Abraham was called by God to sacrifice his son Isaac, in which God then intervened with a substitute, with a ram.

And it was upon that same mountain in which God then instructed God's people to be able to-- the Israelites, to build a permanent temple on top of that small mountain that was the tallest point in the Jerusalem area, in the vicinity of the city of Jerusalem. "That the mountain," Mount Zion, Mount Moriah, "of the Lord's house--" The Lord's house is none other than the holy temple of the Jewish nation. "Shall be established on the top of the mountains and shall be exalted above the hills." God is saying--His ideal, His plan for Israel was to exalt in the minds and the hearts of all nations the true God of the universe, and come and worship and see His gospel being played out in the great 3D lesson that He had in the sanctuary service.

But my favorite verse or-- not verse, but statement is in the last several words of that same verse, verse 2. And it says, "And all nations shall flow to it." Did you pick that up, friends? How many nations? All nations, it tells us. "All nations shall flow to it." What was God's plan for Israel? God's plan for Israel-- that all nations would flow to it. You see, Israel was not to be some exclusive, kind of favorite, club, some kind of country club in which you had to be born into and privileged to have.

No, it was--if you were born in-- as an Israelite, God is trying to tell Israel that you were born with the greatest responsibility on the entire planet. "You have the greatest responsibility to bring My truth and true religion and faith and knowledge of Me to all the world." Israel was intended by God to be the headquarters-- the evangelistic headquarters, the GC headquarters to bring the gospel to every nation upon the earth, and that the Word would go so powerfully that people would flow for the Passover, flow to Israel and Jerusalem for these different feasts and different ceremonies and so on, that were all pointed by faith to the ultimate Passover lamb: Jesus Christ. Verse 3, it goes on, Jesus says, "Many people shall come and say, 'Come and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.' For out of Zion shall go forth the law."

This is the Law of Moses, you know, the first five books of the Old Testament. "And out of Zion shall go forth the law and the Word, the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem." This is the same Word that you and I have, friends, the Bible, as we call it today. "And the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem shall go to all nations. He shall judge between the nations and rebuke many people. They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore."

Friends, if this was fulfilled as God gave that potential to Israel and all nations literally began to flow to it, and there's only one window that I'm aware of in all of this sacred history of the Old Testament where Israel started to--just started to taste that potential was during the first years of King Solomon.

King David blew it in a number of different ways, but his heart was after the God of the universe. He was a man after God's own heart, and God lifted him up as one of the most sincere and faithful followers of Christ throughout all the Bible. But as David came to the end of his life and he left all the plans to build a permanent sanctuary and temple before his--for his son Solomon, who then took the throne, and Solomon and his sincere faith and faithfulness to God in those first years brought to life this grand temple, and it tells us that nations around the world started to hear word, they started to hear these rumors of this great, tiny nation and all of its power and prosperity.

But even as queen--the Queen of Sheba had said, you know, "The rumors that I heard, the reports that I had been given that drew me to this particular nation doesn't even hold a candle to the reality that I have found when I actually arrived here and took the tour, when I saw it for myself." Yes, she was speaking about material prosperity as God has always intended to bless Israel with, but much more importantly than that, she says, "The mood and the attitude and the happiness of the people of Israel is grander than I've ever seen in any other nation," why? Because the fruits of the Spirit is what? Joy. Love. Friends, these are-- these were being shown and fabricated into the very culture and society of Israel when this queen came from so far away.

But sadly, Israel had failed. They had quickly declined. Even Solomon didn't make it through half his life, as you know, and half of his reign be started-- before he started to compromise and he started to adapt some of the different ways of the world and built up-- was more interested in building a harem than he was in building Israel anymore. And so we find that Israel had quickly lost that sight, but there was that small window when the potential of these prophecies of Isaiah started to take place.

Now, of course, Isaiah came after this, but nevertheless, Isaiah is still building on that and reoffering it to Israel. And he's saying as a result of that, when all nations did finally flow to the nation of Israel and worshiped God at His temple, that peace would come among the nations and we would no longer have war being covered on the news any longer. There would be peace among the peoples. Isaiah chapter 56 and verse 6 and 7 tells us the same powerful truth. In Isaiah 56 and verses 6 through 7, it says this. "Also the sons of the foreigner--" The sons of the what? "The sons of the foreigner, who join themselves to the Lord, to serve Him, and to love the name of the Lord, to be His servants, everyone who keeps from defiling the Sabbath and holds fast My covenant, even them I will bring to My holy mountain and make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on My altar, for My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations."

And so God very clearly tells us that God has always intended His temple not just to be for the Jews-- no, not at all. The Jews were built and born with the responsibility to be able to bring the temple worship to all nations, that all people groups would come and want to pray and worship and fall on their knees and spend their time with the true God of the universe. Of course, we know that Jesus had quoted this same passage as Jesus looked upon his generation and upon Israel in his time, and he looked at them and saw

what an exclusive-kind-of country club and superiority-kind-of complex they had developed. He was disgusted with the state of the mind of the religious culture of his day.

And so God--as Jesus looked around and He saw that they had just totally desecrated the temple. Now there are people yelling and trying to get customers' attention as they were selling different sacrificial animals and exchanging the currencies for the temple currencies so that they could buy the different sacrificial animals and make their offerings at the temple and so on, Jesus cries out and-- you know the story. He's not a happy camper that afternoon--or that morning. No, not at all. He cries out, "God has intended this house to be a house of prayer for all nations, but you have turned it into a den of thieves."

Jesus understood all along because He's the one that's speaking through Isaiah. He's the one that's offering this to Isaiah again before Jesus ever arrived--hundreds of years before he arrived. He's saying, "Listen, the potential is this, seize it. Run with it. Fulfill it." But of course, sadly, we find that the potential was never reached.

Well, after the Persian king, Cyrus, conquered Babylon--that is ancient Babylon in 539 BC, even as Isaiah had prophesied over 100 years beforehand, the city of Babylon forever lost its independence and its great power and its influence. It faded off into obscurity, it shrank in population, and then, finally, it was abandoned by the last several hundred that lived there about 100 AD. And so Babylon never regained its independence, and eventually, as I just shared with you, it was abandoned. It shrank in political power, in military power, and in population over the hundreds of years that followed, until, finally, 100 AD, the last straggling residents, or citizens, that were there kind of disappeared. And then the desert sand of what we now call modern Iraq came along and began to bury those buildings and bury those ancient temples, and we never discovered them until just in recent history.

And so now we can find it in Iraq, and we know where that place is. And archaeologists have found some very enlightening discoveries there. This was all according to God's but judgment. This is all according to God's plan. In Isaiah chapter 13 and verses 19 through 20-- and I'm going to open my Bible for that one. Isaiah chapter 13, verses 19 through 20, we read that fascinating prophecy that God gave, again, some 160 years beforehand. And as God looks forward into the future and judges Babylon for its great wickedness and rebellion against God, it says, "And Babylon, the glory of the kingdoms--"

And so God is pointing out rightly that, you know, Babylon was the superpower. It was the golden city of the ancient world during those years of the 6th century BC. "And Babylon, the glory of the kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldeans' pride, will be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It will never be inhabited, nor will it be settled from generation to generation." And history attests to that very fact. After it was finally abandoned in about 100 AD, again, never gained its independence and then began to be buried by the sand and was forgotten for hundreds of years until archaeologists, again, just discovered it in recent years.

But even today it's an archaeological tell, as we call it. It is a place where we can learn about history, but it's certainly not a settled and established city. As God said, it never will be until Jesus comes again. And so another fascinating prophecy that God revealed so many hundreds of years beforehand that has been fulfilled in its preciseness as God has given it. And all this history is used by God-- this is fascinating. When it come to the Book of Revelation-- all of this history is used by God in the Book of Revelation to represent a global grand battle between Jerusalem and Babylon, God's people, or the church, and those in Satan's camp, those who continue to promote false religion and false philosophies.

Now, the fascinating thing about the ancient city of Babylon is many people do not realize that Babylon is not the name of-- that the kings and the citizens of Babylon actually named it and called it, which really makes sense because Babylon means-- it means confusion. So Babylon means confusion. And so,



you know, I can't imagine, you know, any king that's establishing his city and a kingdom and so on and-- saying, "Hey, let's call our kingdom and the capital confusion." This is a derogatory term. Actually, in the original Babylonian language, the kings of Babylon, starting with Nabopolassar and maybe before that, had named it Babili, and you can find that in your quarterly lesson study, Babili. And Babili is the Babylonian name that they called it. It literally meant the gate of the gods, the gate of the gods.

Now, that wouldn't be much more fitting for what they would choose to call it because, of course, they understood that Babylon was the religious mecca of the ancient world, and really it was. When it came to false religion, Babylon was the centerpiece. It was the headquarters of false religion. Now, the Assyrians and the Medes and the Persians and others had also developed a lot of false philosophies and religion, but Babylon was the king of it. You know, you couldn't find more idols and more temples and more different forms of religion that you could in the ancient city of Babylon. And so it was known as the gate of the gods, the gateway to the gods of all divinity and all of the different forms that they had developed, man-made false forms. And so they called it something much different than the Babylon-- than the Hebrew prophets called it in what we read in the Bible, and now-- which is most commonly known as.

And so, really, what the Old Testament prophets were doing was a wordplay. And so they said, "Well, the Babylonians, or the Chaldeans, may want to call it Babili, but we're going to call it Bab-a-lon." And they played on the-- probably on the original name of what the Babylonians actually called their city, as well as the ancient Tower of Babel. And so Babel, we know it means "confusion," because God confused their languages. And so the Hebrew prophets under inspiration of God labeled that tower Babel because that was the time in which God confused their languages, that they might not be able to complete their project. God stymied their project on purpose through doing that. And so the Hebrew prophet said, "Well, you know what? The city of Babylon is the ultimate symbol of the ancient tower of Babylon. It is the ultimate headquarters of religious confusion and counterfeits, and therefore we weren't going to call it Babili. We're going to call it Babylon."

And so Wednesday's lesson in our study this last week draws a fitting comparison between the false religion of Babylon that is based on proud self-righteousness and self-produced works and the true religion that the quarterly points out concerning Jacob. And of course, his religious experience and conversion experience started at Bethel, but it didn't end at Bethel, did it? He received the vision at the beginning of his exile from home and from the homeland in which he was accustomed to in the land of Canaan, and he received this vision of a ladder that God had developed with angels going up and down.

But then several years later, when he's returning with his family and camp and so on, he hears his brother is coming with 400 armed men; and he knows what his brother's intention was, to kill him. And so he wrestles with the Lord that day. But when he arrived at that spot in which he wrestled with the Lord, it tells us that angels again appeared before Jacob. And when those angels appeared, Jacob then called that place God's camp, or referred to it as God's plant--camp. He actually named it double camp, meaning that there's humans as well as there's the population of angels that were present there. And so it was a very similar experience that he had. And when he was wrestling with God, the angel of God, God Himself, Jesus Christ-- it tells us that as he was doing so, he finally cried out and he said, "I will not let you go unless you... unless you bless me."

But there's something else that he had also shared earlier on, and it's in verse 10 of the same chapter, Genesis chapter 32. Now, we're all very much accustomed to Genesis chapter 32, verse 26, and rightly so. "I will not let you go unless you bless me." But before that, in verse 10 of the same chapter, he tells us this. He says, "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth in which You have shown Your servant." I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, of all the truth which You have shown Your servant.

Friends, this is a diametrical completely different religious experience and truth that Jake is experiencing compared to that of which Babylon offers. The Bethel and God's camp experience, the Jacob experience is one in where we must have-- we must humbly fall before a holy God confessing our sins, confessing our sinfulness, confessing our selfishness, confessing our self-centeredness, our self-serving motives; asking God for grace and mercy, that we might be changed, that we might be saved, and that we might be transformed and brought into a better light in life.

That's the true religion, amen? The apostle Paul said it this way. He says, "This is a faithful saying of worthy of all acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners of whom I am chief." Paul humbled himself before the-- before his Lord every day and said, "Lord, have mercy upon me, a sinner. I am not worthy of all the mercies and all the grace in which You bestow upon me, but please be in my heart. Let me live faithfully as You continue to work Your amazing work through my heart, through my life." 1 Timothy chapter 1 and verse 15. Then also Paul penned in Ephesians chapter 2 and verses 8 through 10, as the quarterly points out, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves. It is a gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works."

Did you catch that, friends? We are saved by grace through faith alone, not of ourselves. It's a gift that God gives to us, not of our works, lest anyone should boast. All other false religion, including the religions that Babylon had offered in ancient times, was designed to be able to point ourselves to our self, was designed to be able to look to ourselves to be able to, somehow, try to save us and save ourselves, even as they did back during the times of the Tower of Babel. And then we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works.

God has created us for good works to be certain, and we need to cooperate that if we dream of true and genuine faith before us. But friends, every good work that He works through us is not our own work. Did you know that? Every good work that you and I work are not our works. They're Christ's works, and that leads us to another deep statement that Paul himself had penned in Galatians chapter 2 and verse 20. "I have been crucified with Christ," Paul says. "It is no longer I who live, but it is," who? "But it is Christ Jesus who lives in me, and the life that I now live I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

You see, Paul understood that all his good works were not his works. Every good deed that he did, every time he obeyed the Sabbath, every time that he resisted the temptation to be dishonest, every time that he would resist the temptation to be dishonest to his wife-- whatever it was, friends, any temptation that he faced, any victory that he achieved, every poor person that he helped, every hungry person that he fed, he understood it wasn't Paul that was doing that. It was Jesus Christ, because he understood that he was crucified in Christ. It is no longer Christ who-- it's Christ who lives in me that's no longer-- I've been crucified. That's why Paul also said, "I die daily." Because if you don't die daily, friends, you're living today. But if you die and you invite Christ into your life, now Christ is living in you.

That's what God wants in our life. That's what God wanted Israel to bring to the world in opposition to that of Babylon, and so you have these two great archenemies in ancient times. You have ancient Jerusalem and Israel in which God had bestowed the holy words of Isaiah, that they might understand that they are not some exclusive country club. They have been given the highest responsibility of all the planet, to bring the truth to all the rest of the world that all nations might flow into it. And in opposition to that, Satan raises up an ancient city by the name of Babylon and develops a great empire that surrounds it, and he does everything he can to be able to propagate every possible counterfeit that would keep us from looking to God for good works and look to ourselves for good works. Self-righteousness is at the heart of all false religion in which the devil brings to this world.

Now, the New Testament Babylon is something that's much different. It's first known to be the pagan city of capital, because the New Testament authors were-- now, we have to remember by the time the New Testament authors were coming along, Babylon-- the ancient literal city of Babylon was starting to be buried by the sand. It was becoming and had become history. It was no longer relevant. It was no longer existing. And so when Peter refers to the city of Rome and says, "She greets you from Rome--" not from Rome but from Babylon.

The Christian church and the apostles leading the way under God's inspiration were starting to refer to the ancient pagan city of Rome as the new Babylon of the New Testament era. And indeed, it was the great archenemy of God's people, was it not? Now, Jerusalem was the key persecutor in the first years, but Rome very quickly surpassed that and became the longstanding--for 300 years, the city of Rome, pagan Rome, persecuted God's people and persecuted His church. In fact, Peter, who referred to Rome as Babylon, was one of the ones that met his end in the vicinity and in the city of Babel--I mean, the city of Babylon, or ancient Rome. Peter was crucified upside down in the city of Rome-- the great apostle to the Jews, as he was labeled in the New Testament.

The other instrumental-- the second most instrumental apostle of all the apostles was the apostle Paul, who was also labeled as the apostle to the... to the Gentiles. Peter was the--labeled as the apostle to the Jews, met his end in modern New Testament Babylon, the city of Rome. And then we also have the other instrumental apostle, which is the apostle Paul, who was the apostle to the Gentiles, who also found himself losing his head at the head-- at the hands of the Roman authorities in the city of Rome, Babylon, the new archenemy of God and everything that represents God, the new headquarters of propagating everything that opposes the true religion of the Bible.

Now, pagan Rome, as we know, as we look at history and as Revelation picks up as he works his--as Revelation reveals the very last years of Earth's history and the last centuries, in some ways, of Earth's history, that pagan Rome quickly was surpassed by pagan Rome-- I mean, papal Rome, and so starting with the 300s, 400s AD, we find that, indeed, by the time we come to 538 AD, the bishop of Rome is the most powerful figure in all of Western Europe. And so Rome was to continue to remain to be the New Testament Babylon. It was replaced by the figurative and symbolic ancient Babylon, which indeed was a very real and ongoing threat to all that is true and all that is God. But it is replaced now in the New Testament era first by pagan Rome, and then as it transformed into papal Rome, the papacy, the Vatican, the seat of the pope.

The same city would eventually leave what is overt idolatry behind and then introduce much of the same idolatry and paganism in the form of Christianity. It simply left idolatry and then adopted the same realities and same false teachings and same false religion and same false gospel into the Christian church. And so right from the get go, right during the life of the apostles, Rome is lifted up as the new Babylon right through to the second coming of Jesus Christ.

Do you see that, friends? This is important for us to understand. And I see that we're down to our last minute and a half. And indeed, it introduced and compromised the church, and that same church would proceed to imprison, torture, and kill millions of God's people simply for living by Bible religion and teaching the same to those around them, the exact same thing that ancient Babylon did to ancient Israel, modern New Testament Babylon and Rome has done and continues to do at every fullest capacity that it can find, an authority that it can grab on to, to do the exact same thing, to oppose everything that is God and is true and oppose all those who insist and give-- have given their hearts to Jesus, those who are truly born again and are falling after the true religion of the true Bible.

Well, friends, we're out of time. And I'm glad that we were able to look at most of it. Unfortunately, we're unable to look at Isaiah chapter 14. We have in recent quarters, so it's not something that we

haven't touched upon over the last year or so. But Isaiah 14, of course, also reveals Lucifer who is behind Belshazzar and the kings of Babylon, and that is Satan himself. And even as he is behind Rome, modern Babylon, New Testament Babylon even today. And so, friends, I hope that opened up some very important, grand themes that God intended to bring and open up for us both in the Book of Isaiah as well as Revelation chapter 14, 16, 17, and 18. We find Babylon is lifted up as the new Babylon-- as the new Rome, or the New Testament Babylon, which is what we literally call Rome and will be the enemy of all that is God and truth until Jesus comes.

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Andrew: When I was eight years old, I brought home a 5-foot rattlesnake, and it's gone downhill ever since. Rattlesnakes, sharks, cliff diving, free-diving. I wouldn't call myself an adrenaline junkie. I just realized that the closest that I've ever been to being alive is when I'm so close to death.

I was raised in the northern mountains in Mexico. I learned English because there was missionary groups that were coming from Colorado and then going to the northern mountains of Mexico, and they were all changed in this short-term mission trips and they had these unbelievable experiences in their close encounters with God and I would share their testimony. I would translate for them. And I was jealous, I was jealous because I didn't have a testimony. I didn't have something like that. I didn't have that life-changing experience, that close encounter with God. I knew He was there, I just-- I couldn't understand Him and I didn't really want anything to do with Him, and part of me wanted Him not to want anything to do with me. I felt like I was unworthy of God's love.

I left Mexico to come to college. Once I got to college, I realized how expensive college was. And so in order to pay for college, I became a commercial salmon fisherman in Alaska. And the first time that I stepped on a boat, I knew I was going to be a fisherman for the rest of my life. I met this man in Tennessee in one of the rivers, and I found out that he had an orphanage in Honduras. And he said, you know, "You can come down to Honduras. You can help us put a support video together." And you know, he was like, "Maybe you can get some college credits out of it." I said, "You know, that would be great. I would do that. I would love to do that." And so I flew down to Honduras.

And one of the conversations that we had during dinner-- we were talking about this and that and somehow I brought up Rapture, and they said, "Well, find us a place in Scripture where it talks about Rapture." And I said, "It's all over the Bible." They said, "Is it really, though?" So they gave me a DVD that said "Amazing Facts." And I remember coming back to America and I started watching. It said, "Amazing Facts Presents," and Doug Batchelor started talking.

One of the things that he said is that the word Rapture wasn't in Scripture, and that was the first time that I actually heard Pastor Batchelor speak. And then I run into YouTube, a video series called "Prophecy Code," and I said, "Oh, this is going to be good, sweet." But it was just torture because everything I knew it was just getting tossed out the window. He was just using Scripture after Scripture to take away everything and all--everything that I thought was normal and everything that I knew about the book of "Apocalypses."

Ever since, I've learned scriptural truth and I've seen the light. I feel like there's been a fire rekindled in my heart, and I have this knowledge that I want to share with people. It brings me peace, and I think

that it does that for other people we've managed to share with. My name is Andrew. I am a fisherman and a dreamer. I want to thank you for changing my life.

Ashley: I grew up in northern New Jersey, just about 35 minutes out of New York City, and I grew up in a famous family. So my father played for the New York Giants for nine years. That's how we ended up where we were. He also played for the San Francisco 49ers, and he was in the Pro Bowl. He won two Super Bowls. And I also had an older brother who played professional baseball.

So I had a lot to live up to. Everything we did was based around sports. That was my life and I loved it, but inside I was-- I struggled daily with insecurity, lacking confidence. You know, I would look at myself in the mirror and not-- and would not see good things about myself. I started to put all my energy into soccer, and I decided that I was going to go far with that. So I ended up getting a scholarship to play in the University of Miami.

I was being pulled in these, like, two directions of, you know, wanting to live this party lifestyle with my teammates and I was so engulfed in soccer and school, but I also had this, like, strong, yearning desire to serve God. And I was just struggling to figure out the balance and how to do that. I was in Sin City in Miami and I couldn't-- I felt like I was swimming upstream, and I just felt like I couldn't breathe.

I had everything everyone would have wanted. I had everything. I had a scholarship to pay for school. I was playing a sport. I was the captain of my team. I was in Miami. I was--I had a great family, I had a lot of friends, but where was God? It was--all of that is meaningless unless I had Him. And the lifeline that He gave me was this soft whisper in my ear saying, "Go." I sure remember, "Go." So I decided to go. And I spent two months in Kenya and two months in Uganda, and God was saving me by sending me there. It was God's prescription for my life, for my existence.

When I returned from Africa, I went back to school. I finished school, finished soccer. I went to the University of Tennessee to get my master's, and I met my husband. Our motto in life was we wanted to live in reckless abandon for our Creator and-- whatever that was, whatever that looked like. And you know, we've traveled and we've done mission work, but we've mostly been in Tennessee. And when we were--we spent the summer apart a year after that--we were married, and it was the summer of 2015.

When we came back together, he's like, "I have some things I want to share with you. I want you to listen to this." And we were on a 14-hour car ride and he just started playing this Prophecy Code all the way back from 2005, and it was so clear and I just was comprehending it so well. You know, after a couple, like three or four, I was like, "I need a break. My mind is going to, like, explode from all this, like, information overload." And everything that I thought I had known about the Bible and about Scripture is just completely different. I was in shock.

Everything that I was hearing was, like, Scripture is proving Scripture is proving Scripture. My heart was, like, changing in that car ride because it's like learning more about God than I ever have before. After that car ride and after listening the whole "Prophecy Code," my life was completely changed. He's become more real to us than he ever has been before, and that has pushed us to disciple and to minister to others and share with them what we know. My name is Ashley, and I want to thank you for changing my life.