

Lesson 7: Poetic Language in Prophecy

Objective:

👍 **To prepare you for a discussion of Jesus' Olivet discourse... the first six lessons discussed the sense of imminence that pervades the New Testament. The next four lessons will discuss the poetic language that is used in prophecy.**

1. Please read Isaiah chapter 13. There is some tough meat in this chapter because Isaiah uses a lot of poetic language, but we can chew it up and digest it. It's not milk but we can handle it. This is one of many prophecies concerning the future of nations and cities that were located near Israel. It predicts the destruction of Babylon.
2. First, please note that despite what many futurists say, this is a prophecy that has been fulfilled.
 - Babylon was a city that had established a powerful empire. Isaiah predicted that it would be destroyed by the Medes (vs. 17) and never reinhabited (vs. 20). Jeremiah writing about 100 years after Isaiah also said that the Medes would destroy Babylon (Jer. 51:11).
 - The people of Babylon were to be **“thrust through”** with swords (vs. 15), children **“dashed to pieces”** (vs. 16), and wives **“ravished”** (vs.16).
 - It is a fact, that the Medes lead by Cyrus, defeated Babylon and it has been a desolate ruin for more than 2,000 years. For a concise summary of its history I recommend an article written by Ryan Foster, titled: *A Prophecy About Babylon Confirms the Accuracy of the Bible*. You can find it at www.ucg.org. We know what happened to Babylon because the Greek historian Herodotus described it in detail.
 - Even though Cyrus **“did not know God”**, God calls him **“his anointed”** (Isa. 45:1,5) because God intended to use him to defeat the Babylonians and restore Jerusalem (Isa. 44:28). It is worth noting that these prophecies in which Cyrus is named, were written before he was born!
 - The Medes have disappeared from history, so they are not going to destroy a rebuilt Babylon on a future Day of the Lord. Babylon has been desolate for 2,000 years just as God predicted. Yet many futurists are expecting it to be rebuilt. I discuss one example of this in chapter 4 of *Bamboozled Believers*.
3. We need to recognize colorful language for what it is... I contend that the futurist penchant for taking metaphors literally, has led to a tangled web of eschatological absurdity. Let's look at some of the poetic language in Isa. 13.
 - Isaiah uses obvious metaphors elsewhere, for example: trees don't really **“clap their hands”** (Isa. 55:12) and the mountains of Edom were not **“melted”** with the blood of the slain (Isa. 34:3). Similarly in Isaiah 13, people's hearts did not **“melt”** (vs. 7) and

their faces did not **“catch fire”** (vs. 8) when the Medes attacked. This is poetic language describing a time of terror.

- The **“sanctified ones”** (vs. 3) drawn from **“the ends of the heavens”** (vs. 5) to destroy Babylon are not angelic beings. This is poetic language. Verse 17 tells us that the Medes would destroy Babylon, and that is exactly what happened. I know that it seems odd to call a pagan army **“sanctified”**, but I think that this is very similar to calling Cyrus **“my anointed”** as noted above.
- When Babylon was defeated; the sun, moon and stars did not really go dark (vs. 10). The stars did not tremble (vs.13) and the earth did not change its orbit around the sun (vs. 10). This is poetic language predicting Babylon’s doom.
- Please notice the way that the word **“world”** is used in verse 11. Read the next several verses. Obviously God is referring to the Babylonian world, not to the entire planet.
- Please notice the way that the phrase **“Day of the Lord”** is used in verses 6 and 9. You can see that it was **“near or at hand”** and you can see that the whole chapter is dealing with the defeat of the Babylonians by the Medes. Babylon’s **“Day of the Lord”** happened in 539 BC.

THERE IS MUCH MORE TO SAY ABOUT THE PHRASE “DAY OF THE LORD” AND ABOUT THE SUN AND STARS GOING DARK, FALLING, NOT GIVING THEIR LIGHTS, ETC. SO THE NEXT LESSON CONTINUES THIS DISCUSSION OF POETIC LANGUAGE.