

God Foretells Destruction

“Won’t you join us, Yolanda?” asked Sherise.

Sherise, who had been at the company for only a few months, was circulating a petition in support of Kendrick Miller, a marketing manager, who was reportedly headed to the employment “guillotine.” He had been on administrative leave for one week.

Mr. Miller, after years of managerial abuse, performance mediocrity, and financial mismanagement, had arrived at an irrevocable dead end. Unbeknownst to Mr. Miller, he had been mistreating a staff member who had close ties with a top executive. The staff member’s complaint led to inquiries, which led to realizations that Yolanda and many other long-timers knew all along.

“They’re just trying to bring the poor man down,” said Sherise.

Yolanda found Mr. Miller to be charming at first. Upon closer inspection, she discovered him to be a bully, dishonest, and inept. He hid his flaws with false charm, and when that didn’t work, with mean aggression. He talked of God and goodness, but it seemed to serve only as a prop when interacting with certain audiences and to gain access as needed. Yolanda could not trust him; his professions rang hollow, especially the more she knew him.

“Do you wish him harm?” Sherise asked, visibly upset.

“I do not,” Yolanda replied. “I have my reasons for not signing the petition, and I cannot stop the repercussions that he will face.”

1. *Describe a time when your trust in someone or something has been broken or shattered. How did you react?*

2. *What factors or circumstances contribute to broken trust in relationships?*

3. *Why is it often difficult to rebuild trust once it has been broken?*

LESSON FOCUS: Closely examine who or what you trust most deeply.

Trusting in Wickedness

Isaiah 47:10-11

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.

Isaiah 47:10-11

¹⁰“You have trusted in 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.’

¹¹Disaster will come upon you, and you will not know how to conjure it away.

A calamity will fall upon you that you cannot ward off with a ransom
a catastrophe you cannot foresee will suddenly come upon you.”

Most of the time, God’s words of warning to foreign nations fell on deaf ears. This was the case of Isaiah’s prophecies to Babylon. Like all superpowers throughout history, the Babylonians had long perceived themselves as invincible. Their military forces were intimidating and relentless. So when Isaiah accused the Babylonians of trusting in their wickedness, he was pointing out their ill-placed security in the ways they were abusing their power. As far as they were concerned, no one had more power than they did, so it didn’t matter who saw what they did—they had become a law unto themselves. The notion of divine accountability did not even show up on their radar. In their minds, the Babylonians believed that their gods fully approved of what they were doing.

In response to their haughtiness, Isaiah reminds them that disaster was just around the corner. At some point

down the road, the old tricks would no longer work for them. They had become quite dependent on the illusion that their sorcerers and conjurers could manipulate their enemies into positions of helplessness. Their success up to that point had only fed that delusion. But one day, the powers of darkness who energized their magical arts would no longer be given permission by God to keep on going. In 539 B.C., the Persians would end the Babylonian Empire, and when the Persians did conquer the Babylonians, they simply took what they wanted—which ended up being everything. The demise of the Babylonians was the one event their mediums would miss in their predictions—they could not see it coming and they could not “conjure it away” (vs. 11).

4. *In what were the Babylonians trusting?*

5. *What would be the consequence for putting their security in anything but God?*

The Stargazers

Isaiah 47:12-13

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.

Isaiah 47:12-13

¹²“Keep on, then, with your magic spells and with your many sorceries, which you have labored at since childhood. Perhaps you will succeed, perhaps you will cause terror. ¹³All the counsel you have received has only worn you out! Let your astrologers come forward, those stargazers who make predictions month by month, let them save you from what is coming upon you.”

The Babylonians were masters at magic and experts at reading the stars. This is because the powers of darkness energized these sorcerers and mediums. The law of Moses forbid the practice of dark arts among the Israelites; they are simply too seductive (see Deut. 18:9-13).

Of course, Isaiah, as God's spokesman, was not intimidated by the Babylonian astrologers. He knew that any success the magicians and astrologers had would end. The spells would become empty words with no power. The Babylonians had developed a dependence on their magicians and astrologers, but according to Isaiah, all their predictions would not "save" (vs. 13) the country.

While the Babylonians might have ignored Isaiah's words, his message would have given hope to God's people. Isaiah reminds us that God is sovereign over all nations. No dark art is more powerful than He.

6. *What were some of the occult practices that had been a part of their lives from childhood?*

7. *What would become of the predictions made by the Babylonian astrologers?*

Weak Fire

Isaiah 47:14-15

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.

Isaiah 47:14-15

¹⁴Surely they are like stubble; the fire will burn them up.

They cannot even save themselves

from the power of the flame.

These are not coals for warmth; this is not a fire to sit by.

¹⁵That is all they are to you— these you have dealt with and labored with since childhood.

All of them go on in their error; there is not one that can save you.

If the wind catches the smallest smoldering ember from a campfire and carries the spark into a dry forest, the resulting wildfire can consume hundreds of thousands of acres of trees, sometimes taking months before it can be stopped. Isaiah uses this type of analogy to describe the dangers of those who play with fire—namely the flames associated with the power of darkness, and the magic arts that the Babylonians had come to depend upon. There's never anything safe about being spiritually reckless.

The Persians, who eventually fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy of Babylon's demise, were known for their fire temples, and the central role that fire played in their pagan religion. One of the Persian gods was named Atar, who was nothing more than a consuming flame. Many Persians households kept their hearths on fire, 24 hours a day, every day of the year, as an expression of worship and dependence upon their fire god. This could be one reason Isaiah focused on the fire metaphor when warning the Babylonians of their coming end. What they had depended upon would now turn on them and consume them.

We see many similar manifestations of the occult today—in horoscopes, tarot card readings that purport to predict the future, seances that claim to make connections with the dead, and popular boards that claim to pass on messages from the dead.

Granted, many of these practitioners are simply con men who use sleight-of-hand and other magician's tricks to give the illusion of supernatural power. And then, there are some who really are energized by the same power of darkness that drove the Babylonians to their demise. Isaiah makes it clear: do not trust in anything or anyone besides God, no matter what empty promises are presented.

8. *To what type of fire did Isaiah liken the Babylonian sorcerers?*

9. *Why would trusting in the sorcerers prove to be futile?*

Misplaced Trust

There are so many people and places saying, “You can trust me; I have your best interests at heart.” The Babylonians trusted in their own knowledge and wisdom. Does this sound familiar? Often, we fall into the trap of placing our trust in someone or something other than God. When we do this, we don’t see the danger of straying from God’s way until it’s too late, and we must face and live with the consequences. Isaiah’s analogy of playing with fire vividly describes what can happen when people look to anything other than God alone for salvation.

The Babylonian magicians believed they could tap into a god’s power, and they became dependent on their worship of false gods for a sense of security. Today many seek power in fame, politics, controlling other people, or wealth. This leads to a false sense of security in which people do not see a need for God and independence is considered a virtue.

How easy it is for people to trust in their own knowledge and ability. From an early age, children claim, “I can do it myself.” This self-centered thinking follows us through life, resulting in a false sense of self-sufficiency. Not only will the world let us down, we are more than capable of letting ourselves down.

The Babylonians understood human frailty, so they looked to the sky for wisdom and guidance for the future. While we are in awe of the majesty of God’s creation, we’ll want to be careful to direct our worship to God alone, for only He knows the future.

10. *What things do people today commonly place their trust in other than God?*

11. *How does seeking power or security in the wrong things affect our relationship with God?*

12. *What does it mean to trust in God as the One who has our best interests at heart?*

Choosing to Trust Him

This lesson challenges us to closely examine who or what we trust most deeply. The Babylonians trusted in their wickedness and the false promises of the powers of darkness for their future. Only God is worthy of our trust for salvation and a future with Him.

► *Consider who or what you have been trusting other than Jesus, then write a prayer to Him, expressing your confidence in His ability to keep His promises.*

KEY VERSE

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. —Isaiah 47:15, KJV

That is all they are to you—these you have dealt with and labored with since childhood. All of them go on in their error; there is not one that can save you. —Isaiah 47:15, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSONS

Week of June 6 through June 12

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** 1 Corinthians 1:18-25—God's Redemption Defies Human Wisdom.
- Tue.** 1 Corinthians 1:26-31—Righteousness, Sanctification, and Redemption.
- Wed.** Psalm 111—God Sent Redemption to His People.
- Thu.** Hebrews 9:11-14—Christ Brings Eternal Redemption.
- Fri.** Psalm 25:1-11—Pardon My Guilt, O Lord.
- Sat.** Psalm 25:12-22—Redeem Israel, O God.
- Sun.** Isaiah 49:1-17—The Lord Will Have Compassion.