

Pretending to Be God



SABBATH—JANUARY 30

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Isaiah 13; Isaiah 14; Revelation 14:8; Revelation 16:19; Isaiah 24–27.

MEMORY VERSE: “At that time people will say, ‘Here is our God! He is the one we have been waiting for. He has come to save us. We have been waiting for our LORD. So we will rejoice and be happy when he saves us’ ” (Isaiah 25:9, ERV).



The woman said, “I sat for an hour in front of my mirror a few days ago and admired my beauty.”

“**A PASTOR** preached a sermon about pride. When he was done, a woman who heard the sermon waited to talk with him. She was very upset. She told him that she needed to confess an awful sin.

“The pastor asked the woman, ‘What sin is that?’

“The woman said, ‘Pride. I sat for an hour in front of my mirror a few days ago and admired my beauty.’

“Oh, said the pastor. ‘That was not the sin of pride. That was a sin of believing false ideas!’ ”—C. E. McCartney in *Encyclopedia of 7,700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times*, edited by Paul Lee Tan (Rockville, MD: Assurance Publishers, 1979), page 1100, adapted.

Sin was born in the heart of a mighty angel named Lucifer. Ever since, sin has been a problem for evil angels and for people. The worst sin is pride. And the worst pride is spiritual pride. But how can we be filled with any pride at all when we do not have any power to save ourselves?

This week, we will look at how pride got started.

AN UNHAPPY END FOR SOME COUNTRIES (Isaiah 13)

Isaiah 13:1 starts a new part of the book. Chapters 13–23 are warnings. Isaiah warns that God is going to punish some of the countries near Israel in the future.

Read the warnings of Isaiah in chapters 13–23. Why do Isaiah’s warnings start with Babylon?

In Isaiah 10:5–34, we read about how God will punish Assyria. Assyria was the biggest danger to Israel in the time of Isaiah. Isaiah 14:24–27 tells us about the plan of the Lord to break Assyria. Chapters 13–23 talk about other dangers to Israel. The most important one is Babylon.

Babylon is a very old city, even in the time of Isaiah. The religion and way of life in Babylon are known to people who live everywhere on the earth. Babylon has a deep history. Later, in the time of Jeremiah, Babylon will become a superpower. Then Babylon will beat Judah in war. The Babylonians will carry the people of Judah away as prisoners to Babylon. But in the time of Isaiah, no one sees that Babylon will be any danger to the people of God. In the time of Isaiah, Assyria controlled Babylon. From 728 B.C., Assyrian kings took control of Babylon many times. The first time it happened was the time when Tiglath-pileser the Third took Babylon and was made king of Babylon. He used the name Pulu (or Pul; 2 Kings 15:19 and 1 Chronicles 5:26) in Babylon. Even so, Babylon will become the mighty superpower in the area. This mighty kingdom will destroy the kingdom of Judah.

Read what Isaiah writes in chapter 13. Do you see how strong his words are? Why does a loving God do these things? Why does He allow them to happen? For sure, some innocent people will suffer, too, right (Isaiah 13:16)? So, how do we understand the action of God? This verse shows us the anger of God against sin and evil. What should this show us about sin? How evil is it? We must remember that this is Jesus who gives these warnings to Isaiah. This same Jesus forgave, healed, and warned sinners to turn away from sin when He was on earth. So, how do you understand this angry part of God? Do you think that maybe the anger of God against sin comes from His love? How does the suffering of Jesus on the cross help us answer these difficult questions?



Isaiah warns that God is going to punish some of the countries near Israel in the future.

THE POWERFUL CITY OF BABYLON (Isaiah 13:2–22)

In 626 B.C., Nabopolassar of Chaldea made Babylon a powerful city. He made himself king in Babylon. He also fought with the kingdom of Media against Assyria. Together, Babylon and Media beat Assyria in war. The son of Nabopolassar was Nebuchadnezzar the Second. Nebuchadnezzar beat Judah. Then he took the people of Judah as his prisoners. He carried them away to Babylon.



Isaiah 13 talks about the end of Babylon.

How did the city of Babylon end?

In 539 B.C., Cyrus the Persian took Babylon. He made it part of the kingdom of Media-Persia. Then Babylon lost its freedom forever. In 482 B.C., Persian King Xerxes the First stopped the Babylonians who fought against the Persian government. Xerxes took away from the city the statue of the Babylonian god Marduk. Marduk was the most important god of Babylon.

Later, Alexander the Great took Babylon from the Persians in 331 B.C. No one tried to stop him. Alexander dreamed of making Babylon the capital of his eastern kingdom. But that never happened. Babylon died out over the next several hundred years. By 198 A.D., the Romans found the city empty. Today, some Iraqi villagers live on parts of the old city. But they have not rebuilt the city.

Babylon used its power to hurt the Jews (Isaiah 14:4–6). Isaiah 13 talks about the end of Babylon. Cyrus makes this happen when he takes Babylon in 539 B.C. Then the people of God are made free. Cyrus does not destroy the city. But this is the beginning of the end for Babylon. The city will not be a danger to the people of God again.

Isaiah 13 shows why the fall of Babylon happens. God judges the city. The warriors who take the city are chosen by God (Isaiah 13:2–5). This time when God punishes Babylon is named “the day of the LORD” (Isaiah 13:6, 9, KJV). The anger of God against Babylon is so powerful. It causes the stars, the sun, and the moon to stop giving light. The anger of God also makes the sky and the earth shake (Isaiah 13:10, 13).

Compare what happens in Isaiah 13 to Judges 5. In Judges 5, Deborah and Barak tell us what happens when the Lord marches to war. The earth shakes. The sky pours down water (Judges 5:4). Judges 5:20, 21 shows nature and the stars the same as warriors. They fight against the enemy from another land.

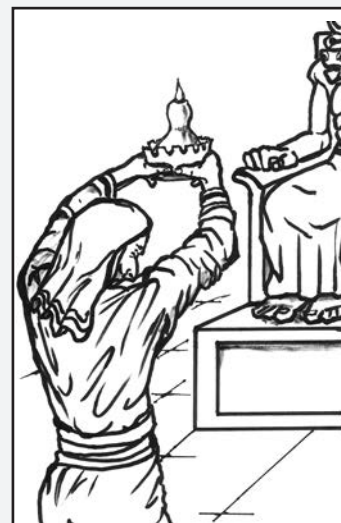
THE MOUNTAIN “KING” LOSES POWER (Isaiah 14)

The fall of Babylon (Isaiah 13) makes the people of God free (Isaiah 14:1–3). Isaiah 14:4–23 shows what will happen to the king of Babylon. (Read also Micah 2:4 and Habakkuk 2:6.) These verses are a word picture. They show dead kings welcoming the king of Babylon to the kingdom of death (Isaiah 14:9, 10). In this kingdom, the king of Babylon sleeps on worms and maggots. Maggots are very young and small flies. The Lord uses this word picture to show the king of Babylon that he will fall from power the same as other kings.

Babylonian kings have hearts filled with pride (Daniel 4; Daniel 5). But this king has more pride than most kings! He brags about what he will do. “ ‘I’ll make myself like [the same as] the Most High God’ ” (Isaiah 14:14, NIV). We can see that this king thinks very well of himself! Kings often announced their strong connections to gods. But the kings were always the servants of the gods. An example of this happened every year on the 5th day of the Babylonian New Year Celebration. On this day, the king must take off his royal crown before going to stand in front of the statue of the god Marduk. Then the king is allowed to continue to be king. So, no king in Old Testament times will ever think about getting rid of any god and taking his place. This idea is crazy.

Ezekiel 28 shows us a leader of a city who is full of pride too. As we saw in Isaiah 14, this leader is more than a human king. Ezekiel tells us that this leader was walking in the Garden of Eden. He was an angel too on the holy mountain of God. This angel was perfect from the first day God made him. Then God found sin in the heart of this angel and threw him out of heaven. In the end, God will destroy this angel with fire (Ezekiel 28:12–18). Who can this be? We cannot understand the verses if we say that the person here is a real human. In Revelation 12:7–9, we read about a mighty leader who is thrown out of heaven with his evil angels. He is “the devil, or Satan. He leads the whole world [the people on the earth] astray [away from God]” (Revelation 12:9, NIV). This same devil lied to Eve in Eden (Genesis 3).

Satan has a heart filled with pride. He brags that he is a god (Ezekiel 28:2). But his death will show that he is no god. He will die in a sea of fire (Revelation 20:10). Then he will not hurt anyone in heaven or on earth again.



The kings were always the servants of the gods.

HEAVEN'S GATE (Isaiah 13; Isaiah 14)

In Isaiah 14, we see that the warning that God gives to Satan is blended with a warning against the king of Babylon. Why does Isaiah mix the two warnings together? Compare Revelation 12:1–9. In these verses, a dragon named Satan (Revelation 12:9) tries to destroy a child as soon as it is born. Revelation 12:5 shows us that the Child is Jesus. But it is King Herod who tries to kill Jesus when He is a child (Matthew 2). This helps us see that the dragon is a word picture for both Satan and the Roman power. Satan uses humans to do his work. In the same way, Satan is the power behind the king of Babylon and the prince of Tyre.

Later, the Bible uses the name “Babylon” for Rome (1 Peter 5:13). The Bible also uses “Babylon” as a word picture for an evil power in Revelation 14:8; Revelation 16:19; Revelation 17:5; and Revelation 18:2, 10, 21. Why?



In Revelation, Babylon is shown as a woman.

The kingdom of Rome and “Babylon” in Revelation are much the same as Babylon in the Old Testament. Both Rome and Babylon use their power to hurt the people of God. In Revelation, Babylon is shown as a woman. This woman is “drunk with the blood of God’s holy people” (Revelation 17:6, NIV). Both Rome and Babylon fight against God. We can see this idea in the name of Babylon itself. In the Babylonian language, the name Babylon is “**bab ili**.” It means “the gate of god(s).” This shows that Babylon is a place where people can reach God. Compare Genesis 11. In this chapter, people built the tower of Babel (Babylon) by their own power. They try to rise as high as God. If they can reach heaven, they will be equal with God. Then they will no longer need to obey Him.

Jacob dreamed about a ladder that connected heaven and earth. Then he woke up. He “was afraid and said, ‘This is a very great [holy] place. This is the house of God. This is the gate to heaven’ ” (Genesis 28:17, ERV). Do you see that the “house of God” is the same as “the gate to heaven”? So, this is the way to reach God. Jacob names the place “Bethel.” Bethel means “house of God.” The “gate to heaven” at Bethel and the “gate of god(s)” at Babylon were two very different ways to reach God. Jacob’s ladder came from heaven. But Babylon was built by humans. So, “Babylon” is a word picture for all false religion and for people who try to reach heaven by their own good behavior.

ZION WINS IN THE END (Isaiah 24–27)

Isaiah 24–27 shows that God will beat His enemies at the end of time. Then He makes His people free forever.

Isaiah shows us that the earth will be empty at this time (Isaiah 24). John also says that the earth will be empty during the 1,000 years after the Second Coming (Revelation 20). Are these two chapters talking about the same thing? If yes, explain.

In Isaiah 24–27, we see that Old Testament Babylon is a word picture for other powers on the earth. The “king of Babylon” is a word picture for different leaders and for the one who controls them: Satan himself. That is why the message that the real Babylon has been beaten (Isaiah 21:9) is said again at a later time (Revelation 14:8; Revelation 18:2). Then Satan will be destroyed 1,000 years after the Second Coming (Revelation 20:10). God destroyed Old Testament Babylon. That punishment was named the “day of the LORD” (Isaiah 13:6, 9, KJV). Another “‘great [important] and fearful [awful] day of the LORD will come!’ ” (Joel 2:31, ERV; Malachi 4:5; compare Zephaniah 1:7). It is on the way.

In the same way, Isaiah has a dream about his time that also is about the future. At that time, “the LORD will rule [sit on His throne] as king on Mount Zion in Jerusalem” (Isaiah 24:23, ERV). For sure, Isaiah thought the dream was about the Jerusalem that he knew. But the book of Revelation shows that the dream of Isaiah is about the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:2). “The city did not need the sun or the moon to shine on it. The glory of God gave the city light. The Lamb was the city’s lamp” (Revelation 21:23, ERV).

Does God really destroy evil people who do not turn away from their sins to be saved?

Look at Isaiah 28:21. Isaiah tells us that the Lord “will do what he must do. It will be what some stranger should do, but he will finish his work. Yes, this is a stranger’s job” (Isaiah 28:21, ERV). The work He must finish is the job of destroying evil people. Why is this work the job of a stranger? Because God does not want to do it. He has the final control over who lives and dies.



The book of Revelation shows that the dream of Isaiah is about the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:2).

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: “People will ask, Are we saved by doing anything special? The answer is no. If we come to Him, then what does He ask us to do? We must take hold of Jesus in living faith. We must trust fully in the blood of our Savior. He died for us on the cross. He woke up from the dead. When we trust in Him, then we will live holy lives. But when God invites the sinner to come to Him, the sinner does not need to do something special. The invitation to come to God comes from Jesus. You do not need to answer to come to God. The sinner comes. As he comes, he views Jesus high on the cross of Calvary. God stamps this picture in the mind of the sinner. The sinner sees love there on the cross. This love is more than anything that he ever dreamed about. That is the love that the sinner grabs hold of.”—Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, volume 6, page 32, adapted.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:



“The sinner sees love there on the cross.”

- ① Look at the quotation from Ellen G. White above. Read it and think about what you learned on Wednesday. What is Ellen G. White telling us? Do you see that she talks about both parts of our Christian walk with God: faith and then works? How are they different?
- ② Why is pride a danger to our spiritual lives? Why is pride so difficult to let go of? Is it because pride blinds us to our need to put pride away? If we are filled with pride, we think we are OK, right? So, why should we change? How can thinking about the Cross “heal” us from the sickness of pride?
- ③ Does Isaiah see hope for people from other countries? Explain. (For the answer, read Isaiah 25:3, 6; Isaiah 26:9; compare Revelation 19:9.)

Summary: Isaiah sees that Babylon will be the next big kingdom on the earth after Assyria. Babylon will beat Judah. Satan and his angels will use the enemies of God to do their work. But the Lord will win in the end. He will bring everlasting peace to our suffering planet.

MISSING COMMANDMENT

Valentina Shlee is surprised when her older sister, Galina, announces that they are not keeping all of the Ten Commandments. The two women live in the country of Kazakhstan.

Valentina opens her Bible and starts reading the Ten Commandments. She comes to the 4th Commandment and reads the words that the Lord says to His servant Moses:

“ ‘ “Remember to keep the Sabbath as a holy day. You may work and get everything done during six days each week. But the seventh day is a day of rest to honor the Lord your God. On that day no one may do any work: not you, your son or daughter, or your men or women slaves. Neither [not] your animals nor [and not] the foreigners [people from another country] living in your cities may work. The reason is that in six days the Lord made everything. He made the sky, earth, sea, and everything in them. And on the seventh day, he rested. So the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy” ’ ” (Exodus 20:8–11, ICB).

When Valentina is done reading the fourth commandment, she stops. Both Valentina and Galina decide to find a church that keeps the 7th-day Sabbath. But where shall they look? Valentina says, “The Bible is the Word of God. So, there must be a church that keeps all Ten Commandments. Let us pray that God will lead us to this church.”

Soon after, Valentina decides to visit Nelly, a family member. Valentina is not sure why she goes. Most of the time, she stays home all day with her 2-year-old son. But she feels that she must visit Nelly. Valentina arrives at the home of Nelly. They are talking when Olga rings the doorbell. Olga is another family member. But Valentina and Olga are not close. Valentina heard an awful story about Olga. Olga joined some strange religious group named the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Olga comes in and wastes no time or words. “What do you think about God?” she asks Valentina.

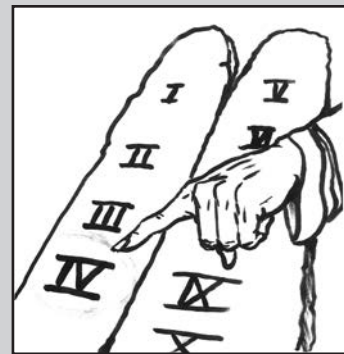
Valentina does not answer the question. She asks Olga a question of her own. “Do you keep all the commandments?” Then she adds, “Do you keep the 7th-day Sabbath?”

The answer Olga gives Valentina is the answer to the prayer she and her sister prayed not long ago. Hours later, Valentina tells Galina that the Seventh-day Adventist Church keeps all Ten Commandments. Several months later, the sisters were baptized together.

“God led my sister and me by His Holy Word, the Bible, to the right church,” Valentina says. “This is the church that keeps all Ten Commandments.”

INSIDE *Story*

by ANDREW MCCHESENEY



Galina announces that they are not keeping all of the Ten Commandments.

