

The Road to Jesus: The Gospel according to Isaiah
"The Little Apocalypse" - Isaiah 24-27
November 4, 2015

INTRODUCTION:

So far, Isaiah has criticized his people - God's people, the Israelites - for being sinful, full of iniquity, evil doers, corrupt; they have abandoned the Lord, despised the holy one of Israel and turned from him (1:4).

God has called Israel to live in holiness and righteousness, in light of the future. Isaiah, himself, was sinful until God cleansed him and made him holy (chapter 6). Then Isaiah brought a few signs before his people, two were his own sons, Shear-jashub and Maher-shalal-Hash-baz, as well as Immanuel.

This Immanuel is going to be God in the flesh and He will establish the kingdom of David in righteousness and truth (chapters 9-12). In contrast with that kingdom, man's kingdoms are going to come to an end - chapters 13-23. They will not impede the establishment of the Messiah's kingdom and, in fact, they will become members of the Messiah's kingdom. In the words of Daniel 2:44, that kingdom will break and crush all other kingdoms and it will carry the glory of the Lord to the ends of the earth.

Having spent eleven chapters, then, systematically calling God's judgment on the nations around Israel, Isaiah now steps back and looks at the entire *world* in one glance, under the eye of the God of heaven.

Understand what we mean by "apocalyptic" - It actually comes from the Greek word for the book of "Revelation." The word has come to mean terms that are used in a *cosmic* sense, typically to portray "earth-shattering events" - like a coming judgment. This section of Isaiah is often called the "Isaiah Apocalypse" or the "Little Apocalypse." This is not the first time we've sent this type of "cosmic language" in Isaiah: 5:25, 13:10, 13, 19:1. Isaiah has spent chapters 13-23 showing that God will judge *each* nation and punish *each nation*. Now, in cosmic terms, Isaiah steps back and says God will *destroy the world*, punish the *world* for their collective sin. As always, the message is: Don't trust man who will be punished; trust God who controls all.

THE EARTH'S DESTRUCTION - 24:1-23:

THE LORD IS IN CHARGE - 24:1:

In four verbs: lays waste, devastates, distorts, and scatters - Isaiah shows that God is in control of the earth. He does to it what He wills. In fact, the devastation of the earth is mentioned *sixteen times* in this chapter! I have already drawn your attention to Daniel 2:44. I also want to bring to your attention Haggai 2:6, cited in Hebrews 12:26 in reference to the kingdom of Christ on earth.

THE LORD DOES NOT PLAY FAVORITES - 24:2:

The people, the priests, the servant, the master, maid, mistress, buyer, seller, lender, borrower, creditor, debtor. "...rank, wealth, and power are of no special significance in God's sight (1 Sam. 16:7)" (Oswalt, 444). Everyone sins and everyone stands under the judgment of God. No one will escape; not even the Jews themselves. Just like in the military at boot camp where everyone is taken down to the same level and built back up to become a unified force for good, so God judges everyone and places everyone on the same plane so that He can build His kingdom as a unified force for good.

THE LORD JUDGES THOROUGHLY - 24:3-6:

Notice how utter destruction is to come upon the earth - "completely laid waste" (with inf. abs.) and "completely despoiled" (with inf. abs.). God has spoken. That is enough. Verse 5 tells us why God has judged the world to be worthy of destruction: they transgressed laws; they violated statutes; they broke the everlasting covenant. This covenant either refers to a "general" covenant between God and man or perhaps to the covenant God made with all the world following the flood of Noah (Gen. 9). "They rejected divine moral absolutes and invented an innovative morality" (Motyer, 185). All men are answered to God.

Either way, they are guilty of sin and sin demands punishment. Yet, "few men are left." There is always hope. There is always the remnant. There will be no end to the government of King David (Isa. 9:7).

GLOOM AND DESPAIR - 24:7-13:

In this passage, Isaiah pictures all merriment, all laughing and rejoicing come to an end. In verse 10, the world is viewed as one big city, one big city like Sodom, like Gomorrah. But, God will take away their reason for rejoicing - verse 11 - "All joy turns to gloom."

GLORY TO GOD - 24:14-16:

In the midst of this destruction, there are those - the "few who are left" (vs 6), who do glorify the Lord of hosts. When God's judgment is made visible, His faithfulness is also made visible. When a teacher punishes a bully in class, she shows herself to be fair and faithful. If she punishes the "teacher's pet," she shows that there are principles involved in the class that transcend her personal favorites. Here, the remnant shouts concerning the majesty of the Lord. They glorify the Lord in the east, the name of the Lord, the God of Israel. Isaiah writes in verse 16: "We hear songs, 'Glory to the righteous one!' We saw back in 2:1-5 that God's glory would fill the earth. Here, we see people all over the earth praising the Lord of hosts.

"God's majesty, glory, and righteousness will be on full display for all to see. Praise naturally flows from those who know God and observe what he has done" (Smith, 421). If ever the "majesty, glory, and righteousness" of God was on full display, it was at the death, burial, resurrection of Christ and the subsequent establish of His divine kingdom on earth on the day of Pentecost.

UNIVERSAL UPHEAVAL - 24:16b-23:

But the destruction of the world does not bring Isaiah joy as he cries out, "Woe to me! Woe to me! Alas for me!" He sees the coming destruction of those who deal treacherously: terror, pit, and a snare. The foundations of the earth shake, as they did in the flood of Noah (vs 18). "The issue is that no great nation or people is ultimate in creation. Only God is" (Oswalt, 453).

Notice the apocalyptic imagery in verse 19. The reason for this is "transgression" (vs 20). God will punish from the highest to the lowest (vs 21). Again, verse 23 is apocalyptic, using the same imagery Joel used in Joel 2, fulfilled in Acts 2. The "white one" (moon) and the "hot one" (sun) will be ashamed when compared to the glory of the Lord. All this will happen in light of the reign of the Lord of hosts on Mount Zion - the King Messiah, Son of David.

A SONG OF PRAISE FOR GOD'S FAVOR - 25:

This song is a song of praise from both Isaiah and all the faithful remnant who have survived the destruction of the world that has come. Why praise God?

#1 GOD IS FAITHFUL - 25:1-3:

God has a plan and He has worked wonders. This wicked world, viewed as one big “city,” He has made into a heap, a ruin. The result is that some people will glorify God and revere Him. “This latter is a spiritual work, and is accomplished only by spiritual means, namely, the working of God in the human heart as a result of the effective preaching of the Gospel. How wondrous are the counsels of God!” (Young, 189).

#2 - GOD PROTECTS - 25:4-5:

In verse 4, Isaiah pictures God as a defense, a refuge, a shade and those images are elaborated in verse 5.

#3 - GOD WILL ESTABLISH FELLOWSHIP - 25:6-7:

Here we find the banquet of the Messiah pictured; the Lord enjoying fellowship with His people. All people, all nations will be invited to enjoy this banquet of the Lord of hosts. “so also is the banquet to be understood figuratively, as signifying the spiritual blessings that God brings to mankind through His kingdom” (Young, 192). There is no single mountain large enough to hold the multitudes who serve Jesus Christ and enjoy His banquet. If we have understood the reference from 2:1-4 correctly, that the “mountain of the house of the Lord” refers to the holy spiritual temple of Jesus Christ, then that kingdom is large enough, that banquet hall covers the world, wherever disciples of Christ are found.

John, of course, picks up on this imagery and uses it to encourage his own persecuted remnant in the days of the Roman Empire (Rev. 19).

#4 - GOD WILL COMFORT - 25:8-9:

God will eventually take care of death itself and wipe away all tears and remove the reproach of His people. “This is the Lord for whom we have waited; Let us rejoice and be glad in His salvation” (vs 9). “The establishment of God’s kingdom would once and for all demonstrate they had been right all along to follow their God, no matter the cost” (Beyer, 115).

“Only the revealed religion of the Bible can give true comfort to man and can evoke from him tears of loving joy and gratitude, for only the revealed religion of the Bible presents a God of true love and compassion who paid the price necessary to swallow up death and to wipe away tears” (Young, 198).

#5 - GOD WILL REMOVE THE ENEMIES - 25:10-12:

Yes, God will take care of His enemies, epitomized here by Moab. God will bring down their pride and their deceit (vs 11).

Brethren, if nothing could keep God from establishing His kingdom on earth, then there is no power yet on earth that can destroy the kingdom of our Christ and our God.

A SONG OF TRUST IN GOD’S PROTECTION - 26:

In light of *that* song, Isaiah and the remnant offer another song to teach and admonish one another - a song of trust, chapter 26. In 25:9, Isaiah had said, “Behold, this is our God for whom we have waited that He might save us. This is the Lord for whom we have waited; Let us rejoice and be glad in His salvation.” So here in chapter 26, in these 21 verses, Isaiah encourages his people to trust God for His protection, not the nations of men.

THE LORD DELIVERED US - 26:1-2:

Verses 1 & 2 picture the remnant as being a city. God destroyed the wicked city of the nations of men in chapter 24. Now He establishes His own city, the city of the remnant, a city founded on principles of righteousness and faithfulness. “The point is simply that none can live in this city for whom God’s character is not the passion of their lives (Rev. 21:6-8)” (Oswalt, 471).

THE LORD DESERVES OUR TRUST - 26:3-6:

For those who trust God, He will keep their minds in perfect peace. So, trust in the Lord forever. He is our everlasting rock (vs 4). "Humble dependence engenders a peaceful trust in God's abundant strength" (Smith, 442). Again, God brings down the wicked, the evil, those full of pride and arrogance (vss 5-6).

THE RIGHTEOUS VS THE WICKED - 26:7-11:

It is only by the work of God - through Jesus Christ - that anyone can be righteous. The path of those who follow God, the righteous, is smooth and level. These follow the judgments of the Lord. They wait eagerly for Him to lead them. These faithful righteous ones long for God, to be with Him, to follow Him, to be led by Him.

When the world experiences God's discipline, they can learn righteousness (vs 9). Some are stubborn and refuse to learn righteousness. He does not perceive the majesty of the Lord. Yet, the zeal of God will consume His enemies, the enemies of His people.

GOD'S PAST WORKS - 26:12-18:

God has worked for His people and given them peace. But He has punished the wicked and wiped their memory off the face of the earth. Blessings come from God - the increase of the nation (vss 15). Israel could not save herself, as much as she tried as a woman laboring to give birth, salvation comes only from the Lord. "The one positive result is that the people finally realized that 'we' are not the true source of salvation" (Smith, 451).

GOD'S DELIVERANCE AND WRATH - 26:19-21:

God wiped out the wicked dead and even annihilated their memory (26:14). But for the righteous, God can bring them back to life. Just as surely as dew brings freshness in the morning, so God can bring freshness back into the lives of His faithful and righteous followers.

Again, verse 20 encourages the Israelites to hide in their closet, stay faithful to God, and let him deal with the wicked (vs 21).

ISRAEL'S COMING SALVATION - 27:

In verse 1 of this chapter, Isaiah pictures God destroying the wicked of the earth, using the imagery of the Leviathan. We do not know what we would like to know about the Leviathan. I reject the idea that it is a mythological figure because I do not see how the verse would carry any meaning if Isaiah says God is going to punish a "mythological figure." But, what type of animal it was is beyond our current knowledge. It appears four other times: Job 3:8; 41:1; Psa. 74:14; and 104:26. It is portrayed as being enormous, a twisted serpent that dwells in the sea, a dragon.

ISRAEL'S POSITION AS GOD'S VINEYARD - 27:2-6:

We saw back in chapter 5 that God planted His vineyard, Israel, and they produced sour grapes. But here, because the vineyard is now composed of those who are righteous and faithful, then they produce fruit (vs 6). "In the missionary proclamation of the Gospel this truth finds its fulfillment" (Young, 242).

THE PURPOSE BEHIND GOD'S JUDGMENT - 27:7-11:

In verses 7 & 8, we see that God did not punish Judah as He did the wicked nations. Yet, His discipline of Judah was to bring her back into a right relationship with God (vs 9). For those who have refused to turn to God, there will still be disaster, a lack of compassion from their Maker and their Creator (27:11). Motyer (203) sees in verse 9 a prediction of the dismantling of the altar from the Jewish religious system.

THE RETURNING REMNANT - 27:12-13:

These two verses picture God's discipline on His people as separating the wheat from the chaff. Notice how thorough and how individual the gathering is: "one by one" (vs 12). Once again, as we saw in chapter 19, those scattered in Assyria and in Egypt will come and worship the Lord in the holy mountain at Jerusalem.

Next week:
Oracles of Woe Part I
Isaiah 28 - 30