

The Road to Jesus: The Gospel According to Isaiah
Oracles of Woe Part 2 - Isaiah 31-33
November 18, 2015

INTRODUCTION:

We have seen in Isaiah for the past several chapters that the major theme is: Do not trust in man! In Isaiah's day, the Assyrians are ransacking cities and villages around Israel left and right. Isaiah and his people in the south of Israel, known as Judah now, have seen the northern nation of Israel with its capital, Samaria, captured by the Assyrian army. And, Assyria is knocking on the door of Jerusalem. The very strong temptation - as it was for King Ahaz who made an alliance with Assyria against Israel and Syria - is to now form an alliance with Egypt against Assyria. But God is screaming, "No! No! No! A thousand times, No!"

Do not trust man. Do we have issues with this today? Do we not seek the approval and accolades of man today instead of seeking to honor Jesus Christ by trusting His word and being simply obedient slaves to His word? Just like today, the issue is not a weak economy. It is not a weak military. It is not irreligious people. The issue today as it was in Isaiah's day is commitment to the *wrong religion*. It is commitment to something else or someone else besides Jesus Christ and His word. Man has not changed.

HELP NOT IN EGYPT BUT IN GOD - 31:1-3:

The warning here is not to go to Egypt for security. Do not put your trust in man! Woe to those who do not look to the Holy One of Israel nor seek the Lord! "Trust in Egypt is one of these, in part because it was a denial of the efficacy of the Exodus" (Oswalt, 570).

Observe in verse 2 that we have an affirmation that God does not go back on His word. God is faithful, for blessing and for judgment. He will strike the evildoers and the workers of iniquity (vs 2).

These Egyptians are human beings, not God. Their horses are not supernatural. They are only flesh and blood. The one who trusts in man and the man who accepts that trust will both fall together.

THE LORD'S DELIVERANCE SHOULD LEAD TO REPENTANCE - 31:4-9:

Just as a shepherd does not run from the roar of the lion, so God is not going to run from the defending His faithful on Mount Zion, Jerusalem, the remnant.

Like a bird of prey, the Lord of Hosts will hover over Jerusalem and protect His people.

So, what should the Jews do? They should "return" to God (vs 6). This returning will involve them destroying their idols.

The Assyrian will fall by a sword, but not by man's sword. It will be by a sword of an angel (36:37-38). The "rock" on whom the Assyrian rests/trusts will pass away. The standard that is flown by the God of heaven will cause Assyria's princes to flee in panic. Because God is a fire in Zion and a furnace in Jerusalem.

THE GLORIOUS FUTURE - 32:1-8:

UPRIGHT LEADERSHIP - 32:1-2:

This first few verses picture that king that Isaiah saw would come, back in passages like 9:6-7. This king will reign righteously and His people will rule justly. Back in 9:7, righteousness characterized the King's throne. In 11:5, righteousness characterized the King's character. Here, it will characterize the King's administration. They will be a place of refuge for the needy, a shelter from the storm, like water in a dry country and a shade in the heat of day. We need elders and preachers, to the extent they lead in their preaching and teaching, to follow the King

in being leaders who are righteous and just. But if man fails, our ultimate allegiance needs to be to God and His word.

SOCIETAL REJUVENATION - 32:3-8:

Because of this great king, the blind will see and the deaf will hear (vs 3). Man can discern truth and will speak that truth clearly (vs 4). "Spiritual clarity and perception always follow from submission God's ways" (Oswalt, 581). In verses 5-8, Isaiah draws a contrast between the man who follows the King in His righteous kingdom and the man who does not. And those who want, will be able to distinguish between the fool and the noble.

JUDGMENT AND MOURNING - 32:9-20:

BEFORE THE KINGDOM - 32:9-14:

As Isaiah has done before, here he directs his attention again to the women of Judah and calls on them to "hear" and "give ear." He warns them that judgment is coming.

In verse 11-1, he warns these women to repent of their lack of trust in God and the subsequent disobedience that flows from that. Judgment is coming from God.

The palace will be abandoned, the populated city will be forsaken (vs 14). "...the ultimate mark of God's blessing is not good crops or secure states but righteous lives and just dealings" (Oswalt, 587).

THE OUTPOURING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT - 32:15-20:

They will have no guidance until the Spirit is poured out from above (vs 15). *Then* the wilderness will become a fertile field. *Then* justice will dwell in the wilderness and righteousness will be found in the fertile field (vs 16). We are probably most familiar with Joel's prophecy of the coming of the Holy Spirit in the kingdom, since it was his prophecy that Peter quotes in Acts 2. But Ezekiel (36:26-27), Jeremiah (31:33), and others, as Isaiah does here, also predicted the coming of the Spirit of God. "God cannot fill where he does not rule" (Oswalt, 587). That's why one must obey the Gospel first before he receives the Holy Spirit. One does not receive the Holy Spirit in order to obey the Gospel - Acts 5:32; Galatians 3:2; 4:6.

Isaiah elaborates again on these spiritual virtues in verse 17: the work of righteousness will result in peace and the service of righteousness will result in quietness and confidence forever. What a stark contrast with what the Jews were experiencing at that very moment! Can you have peace in the midst of chaos? Yes, the peace only God can give.

At that point, in the Messiah's kingdom, His people will live in peace, secure, undisturbed, and restful (vs 18). When the forest comes down and the city is laid low (vs 19), these individuals will be blessed (vs 20). "These claims demonstrate that people cannot produce peace and security on their own through human efforts or political alliance" (Smith, 547). Paul's list of "fruit of the Spirit" in Galatians 5:22-23 might be a reflection on this text from Isaiah.

THE JUDGMENT OF GOD - 33:1-9:

We are not sure exactly who this chapter has in mind as the "destroyer." It is a "woe," a lament because God's judgment is coming. It likely refers to the Assyria nation but it would be equally applicable to the nations that would eventually persecute the Israelite nation - Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome. The message of Isaiah would have long-term usefulness and applicability for the Israelites, to keep them faithful until the King comes. Whoever is in Isaiah's immediate sight, the destroyer will be destroyed.

In verse 2, Isaiah's thoughts go back to himself and his own people, calling on God to be gracious. "We have waited for You. Be their strength every morning." "Wait" is found 14 times in Isaiah. Be patient while God works.

Beginning in verse 3, Isaiah views the nations as they react to the judgment of God. Peoples flee. Nations disperse. Through it all, the Lord is exalted and dwells on high, ruling in His new, spiritual kingdom, with justice and righteousness (vs 5).

God will be Israel's stability - verse 6: a wealth of salvation, wisdom, knowledge. The fear of the Lord is the treasure given to the faithful remnant.

But those who are not faithful to God are viewed in verses 7-9. Brave men cry in the streets. Ambassadors wear. Highways are desolate. The traveler has ceased traveling. He has broken the covenant (which might refer to the treaty Assyria had signed with King Hezekiah) so he cannot expect help and blessings from the God of heaven. He has no regard for man. The land mourns at God's lack of involvement: Lebanon, Sharon, Bashan, Carmel. They all suffer because of the sins of man.

THE LORD'S PROMISE OF RESTORATION - 33:10-24:

God, in contrast (vs 10), must be exalted. He will be lifted up either with your consent or against your consent. God will be glorified through obedience of man or through judgment of man. The one will glorify God's grace and mercy; the other will glorify God's holiness and justice. Man conceives of chaff and gives birth to stubble - that's what man's plans are worth when set against the plans of God, which are like fire (vs 11). His judgment consumes like fire (vs 12).

One again (vs 13), Isaiah calls on Israel to hear and acknowledge God. Sinners are terrified and the godless tremble. How can they survive such a consuming fire as the wrath of God (vs 14)? The one who will live is the one who responds - Who walks righteously, speaks sincerely, rejects bribes (unjust gain). Rather than shutting his eyes and ears to the message of God (as we have seen Israel do in the past), they shut their eyes from looking at evil and close their ears from hearing about the violence being committed. "It is not a change of essence [a human being must undergo to live with God, p.h.] but a change of character. That is, what finally separates us from God is not our essence (finite to infinite, etc.) but our character (unholy to holy). ...If we are to dwell with God as his guests, we must share his character" (Oswalt, 600).

The one who walks righteously and speaks sincerely, verse 16, is the one who will dwell on the heights, that is in a safe place. His refuge will be an impregnable rock, the Lord of Hosts Himself. He will have bread and water for sure, in contrast with the "bread of privation" and the "water of oppression" mentioned in 30:20, given to those who will not listen and obey.

In this paragraph, Isaiah returns to the picture of the king last mentioned in chapter 32. These who walk righteously and speak sincerely will see the beauty of the King - just like Isaiah did in chapter 6. They will see a far distant land; it seems to me, this is the land ruled by the King and blessed by the King.

While they are persecuted by other nations, they will meditate on who is in control (vs 18) but they will no longer see a fierce people, a people of unintelligible speech which no one comprehends (cf. 28:11-12).

Instead, Isaiah calls on his people, to look upon Zion, the city of the appointed feasts. Their eyes will see Jerusalem, an undisturbed habitation. This will be the spiritual Zion from which the law of the Lord will go forth (2:1-4). This city is compared to a tent that will not have to be taken down and reset. Its stakes will never be pulled up.

In this spiritual Zion, the Lord of hosts, the Majestic One, will be a place of rivers and wide canals - providing everything one needs. This Majestic One is also their “judge,” their “lawgiver,” their “king.” “He will save us.” Incidentally, keep in mind that when the New Testament writers use these terms to refer to Jesus: Judge, lawgiver, King, they are putting Jesus in the same category and on the same level as the God of heaven. In this context, these are divine designations.

Pictured in verse 23 in nautical terms, Isaiah shows that man is too weak to solve his own problems. Observe at the end of verse 22: “He will save us.” We cannot save ourselves, verse 23. In verse 24, no resident will say, “I am sick.” The people who dwell in this spiritual Zion will be forgiven of their iniquity. This salvation is not salvation from Assyria; it is salvation from sin. Again, the word “iniquity” is used 30 times in the book of Isaiah. It is a major issue for him. “Judah’s need is deeper than the need for deliverance from oppression. Ultimately, says Isaiah, our problem is a broken relation with God because of sin” (Oswalt, 605).

Next week, in chapter 35, we will get another picture of Zion’s happy future.

Next week:
A Summation - Isaiah 34 & 35