
July 29 : Scriptures Isaiah 31-33

SUMMARY

Yes, we have another prophetic woe here in chapter 31. It's the Lord's warning to trust in the Lord, not humans. Judah's choice is between the Egyptians vs. God and flesh vs. spirit (31:3). If they choose Egypt, both the helper and the helped will fall. Judah will get that if they rely on Egypt and not their God, Yehovah. As Israel's protector, the Lord portrays Himself as a lion that's not the least bit perturbed with the noise of the shepherds trying to chase it off. So the Lord stands over Jerusalem and His people, unperturbed by the "threats" of enemies attacking Judah. He's also like a flock of birds that hovers over the city. He'll hover over the city to rescue and protect it. So His people will not only return to Him, but they'll throw away the useless idols they've embraced. Isaiah also proclaims Assyria's downfall by God's hand.

Chapter 32 shows us what's to come, the vision of righteous leadership and its effects on Israel, and what is, complacent women who trust in the produce of the land as if taking it for granted. With unrighteous leaders, the ground will fail and grow barren. However, the Lord will intervene, and the land will prosper again (31:15-18). We're unsure whether Isaiah's prophecy here is about a near-future king or the Messiah to come. But it's still a great prod to keep trusting in the Lord and pray that He will give us righteous leaders.

And we have another woe in chapter 33. According to my Study Bible, this is the sixth woe in chapters 28-33. This woe is directed toward a betrayer. Given the context of Assyria's attack upon Judah, this could be about Sennacherib, King of Assyria, or another individual/nation betraying Israel. The upshot is that the Lord will bring the betrayer down. With the threat of the betrayer before them, the people of Israel cry out to their God for help (33:2). When God finally acts, it'll be a rout, and His people will swarm over the spoil like locusts (33:4). Then with the Lord dwelling over them (like a lion and a flock of birds) His people will enjoy peace. In 33:8, Isaiah switches back to the threat – an agreement has been broken (likely Sennacherib's agreement with Hezekiah to not attack) – and he describes the state of war in the land (33:8-9). But the Lord will rise, and all the enemy's plans will come to nothing (33:11-12), declaring Yehovah's strength near and far. Yehovah's strength is also a threat to the unrepentant Israelite (33:13), but the righteous have nothing to fear (33:14-19). Jerusalem will enjoy peace on that day, and the people will know God's forgiveness. As an observation, this could very well be applied to the Lord driving off Sennacherib's army or some future time when the Lord delivers Jerusalem just before the Millennial kingdom begins.

INSIGHT

“For the Lord is our Judge, the Lord is our Lawgiver, the Lord is our King. He will save us” (33:22). Fun fact. Did you know that this verse inspired our Founding Fathers to separate our government into three branches? We have the Judicial branch (Judge), the Legislative branch (Lawgiver), and the Executive branch (King). Pretty cool, huh?

July 30 : Scriptures Isaiah 34-36

SUMMARY

Today's reading brings us God's prophetic judgment on the nations, specifically Edom, His people's return from exile, and part 1 of Sennacherib's attack on Jerusalem in Hezekiah's day. Let's begin with chapter 34, shall we?

What can I say? The Lord is ticked off at the nations, and Isaiah doesn't tell us why, although the context is about Assyria attacking God's people. Therefore, this can be an extension of that. According to other prophecies, nations will continue to attack Israel and Judah until the Lord finally steps in and attacks the attackers (34:1-4). This is a common End Time scenario in prophecy. More specifically, the Lord turns His declaration of judgment toward Edom. The Edomites are descendants of Jacob's brother, Esau, and there has been (and I believe there is) a long-standing rivalry between the two sides. The prophecy is interesting because it sits next to the former prophecy against the nations. Obadiah contains judgment against Edom and the nations for what they've done to the Jewish people. God's judgment against Edom seems to promise a total wipe-out of Edom, "For the Lord has a day of vengeance, a time of paying back Edom for its hostility against Zion" (34:8). Apparently, the only things left alive in the land for a time is wildlife.

What follows on the heels of God's judgment on the nations of the world and Edom? A prophecy about bringing His people home to their God-given land! Chapter 35 is a glorious song about Jewish exiles returning and the land bursting into bloom. *This piece of prophecy has been slowly unfolding over the last ~125 years!* The Jews started emigrating to their land in waves of *aliyah*, "going up," since the Zionist movement began in the late 1800s. What did the returning Jews find when they returned? Barren ground, few trees (because the Ottomon Turks taxed fruit and the way to cut taxes was to eliminate the trees), malaria from mosquito-infested swamp land, and very few people scattered across the countryside in villages and clustered in a few main rundown cities. *But* the Jews got to work, and the Lord blessed them. Israel today is rich in agriculture, industry, and tech, which have blessed the world in remarkable ways. From A.D. 70 until the late 1800s, God's land lay dormant and barren. When His people returned, the land erupted in production. Yeah, I think Isaiah nailed this one from 2,800 years away!

Furthermore, I don't believe the Lord is finished with restoring His people to their land. This prophecy, among others, says the Lord will call *all* His Israelite people home and make way for them to return (35:8). Since almost half of the world's Jewish population lives outside the land of Israel, this is a prophecy that's happening, but not fulfilled.

Along comes King Sennacherib of Assyrian in chapter 36. This account restates 2 Kings 18 and 2 Chronicles 32, and the chapter speaks for itself. We leave the chapter with the Assyrian royal spokesman threatening and cajoling the Judahites behind the city walls to surrender, but they remain silent. Either the Lord steps in, or the Assyrians' wrath will fall.

INSIGHT

I enjoy the prophecy in chapter 35 because it lets me know God is still in control and acting on behalf of His people. When I read prophecies, I often read them as "that happened then and this will happen in the future." But the prophecy in chapter 35 is in operation right now, and I believe we're seeing it unfold before our eyes! I like how the ministry, Bridges For Peace (bridgesforpeace.com), says, "Why read about Bible prophecy when you can be a part of it?" That's why they invite us to not only give but experience Israel through tours and volunteer work. Do it, and you'll see how magnificently the Lord is honoring His word and fulfilling His prophetic promises in our day.

July 31 : Scriptures Isaiah 37-39

SUMMARY

We pick up the account of the Assyrians' attack on Jerusalem in chapter 37. Again, it's the same account we find in 1 Kings 18 and 2 Chronicle 32. As I read this, what jumped out at me was the names of the two men Isaiah prophesied about in Isaiah 22 – Eliakim, who was in charge of the palace, and Shebna, the court secretary. They're right there in the middle of the action. These guys and the other palace messengers go to Isaiah to fill him in on the national security threat. The messengers know that their only hope is God, and Isaiah reassures them that the Lord has everything under control. Yehovah's heard how the Assyrian representative has trashed-talked Him and will cause the Assyrian army to withdraw via a rumor, and this happens! But on his way out, the Assyrian royal spokesman sends a letter to King Hezekiah along the lines of Arnold Schwarzenegger's "I'll be back!"

Hezekiah takes the letter to the Lord at the Temple and spreads it out before Him. The king begs for Yehovah's mercy and help to which the Lord responds through Isaiah, "Jerusalem mocks you Assyria! Who do you think you're mocking when you brag about how successful you've been in battle? Do you mean Me? The one who *let you* triumph over your opponents? I know where you live. I know all your moves, and I'm going to make you move... back to your own borders." Then Isaiah turns to Hezekiah and reassures him that the Assyrians will be defeated and never enter Jerusalem (37:33-34). Because of the siege, the people couldn't plant or harvest, but they will because the threat would be gone, never to return (37:30-32).

King Sennacherib does return and lays siege to Jerusalem again. In one night, the Lord strikes down 185,000 men in Assyria's army. "Bad dates" (hat tip to *Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark*). The Assyrians return home, and two of Sennacherib's sons kill him and escape. Then a remaining son, Esar-haddon, becomes the new Assyrian king. And there you have a prophecy given and executed shortly after that.

Chapter 38 has another King Hezekiah account. This time good king Hezekiah falls sick, and unless something changes, the Lord says Hezekiah will shuffle off the ol' mortal coil. Knowing full well what's coming, Hezekiah makes his peace with God. He had dedicated his life to serving the Lord, and now his life is over. But then there's a turn of events. The Lord tells Isaiah that he's pleased with Hezekiah and will add 15 years to his life. That will be in conjunction with the Lord saving Jerusalem from the king of Assyria's grasp. So you can see why these two accounts (ch. 37-38) go side by side. As a sign to confirm

the prophecy, the Lord causes the sun's shadow to retreat ten steps on the staircase. Pretty cool, huh?

Out of gratitude, Hezekiah composes a poem to the Lord, speaking of his great suffering and how the Lord mercifully healed him. Hezekiah even finds a purpose in his sickness, "Indeed, it was for my own well-being that I had such intense bitterness; but your love has delivered me from the Pit of destruction" (38:17). I find it interesting that not only does Hezekiah get a prophecy, but Isaiah provides the medical treatment (38:21).

Chapter 39 is the third and final account of King Hezekiah's life. Whereas the previous two events show Hezekiah's wisdom in working with the Lord, this third one shows his foolishness. Emissaries come from Babylon, a small, slowly building empire east of Israel on the other side of the Fertile Crescent. The men are on a goodwill mission to rejoice with Hezekiah over his recent recovery. There have already been some struggles between the mighty Assyrian empire and this young upstart nation called Babylon. Hezekiah is pleased to receive the envoys and shows them the treasures of his kingdom. Bad move, Hezzie! When Isaiah finds out about the incident, the Lord tells him that this has undoubtedly impressed the envoys, but it will result in serious trouble for the Judahites in the future. Hezekiah's foolishness will become part of the Lord's process of bringing the Babylonians to Jerusalem to punish Judah for their idolatry. Sadly, we leave Hezekiah shrugging his shoulders and saying, "Oh well. At least it won't happen in my lifetime."

INSIGHT

Going back to Hezekiah's purpose in 38:7, it reminds me that I shouldn't get inwardly focused when I hit difficult times. How do I know if it's by accident or the Lord's doing? I look back now and see Hezekiah's keen perspective when he writes, "it was for my own well-being that I had such intense bitterness; but your love has delivered me." So true. The Lord does things that are bitter in the short term, but in the long run, we see that it's for our overall well-being. And since it came from the Lord's hand, His presence and deliverance are with us. We just have to walk through the situation with our minds set on Him. And that reminds me of a previous verse from Isaiah, "You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You" (Isaiah 26:3 NKJV).

The Amplified Bible, Classic Version says it well, "You will guard him and keep him in perfect and constant peace whose mind [both its inclination and its character] is stayed on You, because he commits himself to You, leans on You, and hopes confidently in You."

AMEN!