
Day 186 - July 5

The Divided Kingdom (930-725 BCE)

Isaiah Tells of 'Last Days'

Readings: *Isaiah 24:1-23; 25:1-12; 26:1-27:1; 32:1-8; 35:1-10*

Reflections:

- It may have been during this exciting period of Hezekiah's restoration of true worship of God that Isaiah was given these prophecies of hope about the future. Isaiah's visions are rich in detail and description of the final days of blessing and judgment.
- The first images make the final days of judgment look like a nuclear holocaust. Everything in it is totally destroyed. It is like a teacher walking in and wiping off everything from the blackboard in preparation to start over. In a sense, this is the return of Noah's flood where the wicked are judged and the righteous are saved. The major difference was that the flood used water to purify where this time it will be fire. Water purifies the externals where fire purifies both internal and external (e.g. removing dross from gold). Water may destroy but nothing like fire. Judgment by fire is final and complete. (Isaiah 24:6)
- All of the aspects of joy and celebration and blessing are destroyed. No one can escape. Everyone must face this final, fateful judgment.
- During this global destruction only one place of refuge remains, only one place that will be like Noah's Ark to the world. This is the Jerusalem, the mountain of the Lord. "On this mountain the Lord Almighty (emphasizing God's power) will prepare a feast of rich food for all people...On this mountain he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces, he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth." This image of the refuge city where God pours out a feast and complete healing and where even death itself is banished is fulfilled in the coming of Jesus. It is not a physical Jerusalem that will provide this community of eternal life but the New Jerusalem that we see described by first Christ-followers. Revelations 21:1-4 says, "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'" The parallels are intentional as the Christ-followers realized that the nations of the world

would never get all the way to a physical location to hear the Good News about Jesus and being restored to intimate relationship with God. This image of a community of truth, grace and hope – a place where the poor find safety and security and where the proud and powerful are brought low - was to reach out across the world and be a spiritual city of refuge. Those that will respond to the message these people would teach and live will then say, “Surely this is our God; we trust in him and he saved us.” (Isaiah 25:12)

- Key verses from Isaiah 26: “You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you.” “He humbles those who dwell on high, he lays the lofty city low.” The path of the righteous is level, O upright One, you make the way of the righteous smooth.” “Lord, you establish peace for us; all that we have accomplished you have done for us.” These verses help us understand the vision God has for his people as they live in daily dependence and trust in him. It is God who wants to work in us (divine peace) and through us (divine power) and he leads us in moment by moment dependence (daily trust).
- In the story of what doesn’t work, it is interesting that in this same section Isaiah prophesies a judgment against Israel : “We were with child, we writhed in pain, but we gave birth to wind. We have not brought salvation to the earth; we have not given birth to a people of the world.” This is a fascinating judgment. Israel was called to be a light to the nations but failed to do this. They had everything external you could want: the law (torah), security (territory and tribe), a way to meet with God (tabernacle and then temple), and leadership (king). But none of these worked. They as a nation gave birth to wind. The reason was that they, like all people, need a heart change. It is only through an inner transformation that people can truly change. It will be through a new people, a people from all tribes of the earth that God would raise up; a New Israel – not based on ethnicity but based on having God as Father and living in a trust relationship with him.
- In his judgment against the wicked we see in Isaiah 27:1 that God will slay the great serpent of the sea (an image of the devil no doubt).
- Isaiah 32 rounds out these passages on the final days with incredible words of hope for those who live in righteousness. “See a king will reign in righteousness...” Creation itself will be liberated. Healing will be released to all those who are broken – the blind, lame, and mute. Those being redeemed will walk in a way of holiness in complete safety, security and joy. Isaiah declares to all his listeners, “Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way; say to those with fearful hearts, ‘Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you.”