

Handout Isaiah Lesson 12

Yahweh thwarts the plans of nations, frustrates the counsels of peoples; but Yahweh's own plan stands firm forever, his heart's counsel from age to age. How blessed the nation whose God is Yahweh, the people he has chosen as his heritage. Psalm 33:10-12

The major theme in chapters 7-33 has been the sovereignty of God over Judah and other nations. The question for Judah has been whether the covenant people will trust God and allow Him to be their king or whether they will deny His sovereignty over them in trusting to their own plans and in accepting the help of foreign nations. In chapters 28-33, Isaiah delivered oracles in six “woe” judgments: four against God’s own people and two against foreign nations. Chapter 33 is the final woe judgment. Although Assyria is not named, it is clear from the historical context that it is Assyria that is the intended focus of God’s wrath in 33:1-9.

In 33:2-6 the people petitioned God to rescue them, and in verses 7-9 Isaiah gives the condition of the people and the land:

1. The people are lamenting in the streets.
2. The peace ambassadors are weeping over their failure to secure the aid of allies.
3. People are afraid to travel.
4. The justice system has completely broken down.
5. The land suffers the devastation of the foreign army’s invasion, from the north to the Holy Land’s most fertile regions in the east and west.

Yahweh replies to the people’s lament in 33:10-14 saying He is ready to act:

1. They have been ineffective in defending themselves (verse 11).
2. He will demonstrate great works on their behalf (verse 12) to afflict the enemy (verse 13).
3. Sinners and the godless of Jerusalem/Zion will be fearful and panic-stricken by the realization that divine judgment is upon them (verse 14).

In 33:14 the sinners and godless ask the question: “*Which of us can survive the devouring fire, which of us survive everlasting burning?*” In verse 15 God answers that question and promises salvation to the righteous. God defines those righteous individuals and what will be their future. Those who lives’ reflect their good inner character, who reject evil, and who fill their lives with qualities that honor God are:

- Those who are upright and honest
- Those who refuse to take advantage of others to get rich through extortion or bribes
- Those who do not cooperate in causing bloodshed or crime

Those people will receive God’s blessings and protection.

Isaiah’s description of God’s wrath against the nations is revealed in three sections in chapter 34:

1. Isaiah calls the nations to experience God’s wrath (verses 1-4).
2. Isaiah announces that Edom is singled out as representative of hostile foreign nations to receive God’s wrath (verses 5-15).
3. Isaiah gives God’s assurance that He will accomplish all that He has spoken through His prophet (16-17).

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The Hebrew words *tohu* and *bohu* only occur together three times in Scripture. They are found in Isaiah 34:11 and occur in the same order in Genesis 1:2 ~ *In beginning God created heaven and earth and the earth was a formless void [tohu wa bohu]* (IBHE, vol. I page 1; Beyer, *Encountering the Book of Isaiah*, page 136). And the same phrase from Genesis 1:2 is repeated in Jeremiah 4:23 (IBHE, vol. III, page). These words in Genesis and Jeremiah describe the condition of the earth prior to God bringing about His order out of chaos in the Creation event.

Isaiah 34:14 is the only time the word “Lilith” appears in Scripture and the connection with satyrs identifies Lilith as a demon spirit. Jewish myths were written that named Lilith as Adam’s first wife prior to Eve, but this myth is to be rejected as simple folklore that is an affront to the truth of the divine word to mislead people into error.

Isaiah 35 is a hymn celebrating God’s promised restoration of Jerusalem in the era of the Messiah. The Church uses Isaiah 35:1-10 in the Advent liturgy of the 3rd Sunday, Cycle A to encourage the faithful in the joyous hope that God will come again to complete His mission in bringing salvation to His people. The focus of Isaiah’s message shifts abruptly from judgment that awaits everyone who opposes God’s divine plan for the nations in chapter 34 to the announcement of the joy of the redeemed as they witness and experience the salvation God will bring to His people in chapter 35. God’s redemption features three elements:

1. God will show His salvation in nature (35:1-2).
2. God will encourage the weary and downtrodden (35:3-6a).
3. God will renovate the land (35:6b-10).

The promises that are made concerning “the Sacred Way” in verses 8-9:

- The spiritually unclean (sinners) and the foolish will not use it.
- The way is only for the redeemed.
- God will protect all who travel this way.

The significance of the “Sacred Way” as it is expressed by Jesus and members of the New Covenant Kingdom of the Christ: Jesus announced that He is “the Way” and the “Narrow Path” to salvation. There was no other way for men and women to receive the gift of eternal salvation except through Him. Before members of Jesus’ Kingdom of the Church called themselves “Christians,” they identified themselves as members of “the Way” (see Mt 7:14; Jn 14:6; Acts 9:2; 22:4; 24:14 and 22).

In 35:10, the ransom for the people to return to “Zion” (a symbolic name for the Church of the redeemed) was paid by the Messiah in Isaiah 53:11. In Matthew 20:28 (also Mk 10:45) and 1 Timothy 2:5-6, both Jesus and St. Paul spoke about the “ransom” God paid for our salvation: Jesus said: “... *the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many*” (Mt 20:28) St. Paul wrote, *For there is only one God, and there is only one mediator between God and humanity, himself a human being. Christ Jesus, who offered himself as a ransom for all ...* (1 Tim 2:5-6).

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