

## group Bible Study – January 24, 2007

### Read Isaiah chapters 15-23

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In Isaiah 15-23 we are confronted with a whole list of prophecies against different groups of people – against Moab, Damascus, Ethiopia, Egypt, Babylon, Jerusalem and Tyre. One after another, Isaiah delivers his prophecy – which means his message from the LORD – concerning these people. He speaks about their doom and the reasons why. These chapters of Isaiah can be disturbing and confusing for modern readers, but the key is to listen for the main point. Why does Isaiah speak words of destruction to these people – both to Israel and to the other nations? And is destruction the final word?

The beauty of these poetic condemnations is that each one contains a word of hope as well. Isaiah pulls no punches when he calls for repentance. He calls the people fools and whores, and he tells them straight up that they will be slaughtered like cows. But that is not the end. The end is good. When the 'day of the LORD' comes to the people, they will suffer. But the purpose is not suffering itself – it is righteousness. The 'day of the LORD' is a terror for the evil of the world – it is judgment. But that judgment happens so that God's perfect kingdom of peace and love may finally be made real on earth. God's judgment is against the sin of the world, not ultimately against the people he has created. That is why we see in this passage of scripture that the sins of Egypt, Israel and Assyria will be judged – but in the end all these nations will be gathered to God in love.

Consider the prophecy about Moab in chapter 15. Why does the word of God come against these people? We read this in verses 6-8:

We have heard of the pride of Moab – how proud he is! – of his arrogance, his pride, and his insolence; his boasts are false. Therefore let Moab wail, let everyone wail for Moab.

The people of Moab are proud; they believe themselves to be the gods of their own world and the makers of their own destiny. They must learn that greatest lesson: there is no God but YHWH (the LORD). "Therefore let Moab wail, let everyone wail for Moab."

But the wailing is not the final word! The purpose of the discipline is always to make room for the justice of God on earth. We read these words in verses 4-5:

When the oppressor is no more, and destruction has ceased, and marauders have vanished from the land, then a throne shall be established in steadfast love in the tent of David, and on it shall sit in faithfulness a ruler who seeks justice and is swift to do what is right.

And that is the whole point. As Isaiah says elsewhere, "Every mountain be laid low, and every valley lifted up, to prepare a highway in the desert for our God!"

### Study Questions (for individuals or groups):

- The pattern of judgment leading to a vision of salvation occurs over and over in this section. Read chapter 17, the vision concerning Damascus. Answer these three questions: why are they being judged, what will happen to them, and finally, what is the end of the story? (Hint: it's not presented in that order in the chapter! Remember, you're dealing with poetry.)
- These chapters contain judgments against both Israel and other nations. And likewise, the vision of Isaiah is for the salvation of both Israel and the other nations. Read Is. 19:19-25. Who is 'in' and who is 'out'?