group Bible Study – February 7, 2007

Read Isaiah chapters 31-38

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A world about to be turned upside-down. This is the vision of Isaiah the prophet. He calls out in a loud voice:

“Draw near, O nations, to hear;
O peoples, give heed!
Let the earth hear, and all that fills it;
the world, and all that comes from it.” (Is. 34:1)

What is it that the nations hear? They hear these words of terror: everything that is strong in the world is about to be shattered. The rich will be made poor. The famous will be forgotten. The greed of the powerful will rot them from the inside out. And when all this happens to the mighty, self-confident nations of the world...

“They shall name that place ‘No Kingdom There!’
and all its princes shall be nothing.” (Is. 34:12)

This message from Isaiah is all about where you place your trust in this world. Is Hollywood your god? Then you will kill yourself for beauty and popularity. Is Wall Street your god? Then you will ‘succeed’ at any price. Is your own restless ego your god? Then you will spend your days finding ways to make yourself feel and appear superior to everyone else around you.

And if any of this is true, then the word of God will be to you:

“Ah, you destroyer, who yourself have not been destroyed;
you treacherous one, with whom no one has dealt treacherously!
When you have ceased to destroy, you will be destroyed;
and when you have stopped dealing treacherously,
you will be dealt with treacherously.” (Is. 33:1)

The other alternative that Isaiah presents is immensely simple and difficult: sell your soul to no-one and no-thing but the LORD your God:

“But there the LORD in majesty will be for us
a place of broad rivers and streams,
where no galley with oar can go,
nor stately ship can pass.
For the LORD is our judge, the LORD is our ruler,
the LORD is our king; he will save us.” (Is. 33:21-22)

To choose this second path means to swim against the river of world and culture, and it might mean significant changes in our habits and our plans. But our faith is this: all the systems of this world that demand our worship... will fail. And in the end, God alone will rule on the earth. Can we live that reality even now?

Study Questions (for individuals or groups):

- Read the story of Assyria and Judah in chapters 36-38. Why does Isaiah include this unusual story, and what response does he expect from us?