

Isaiah Intro #3 Chapters 9-20

Isaiah 9-20 continues the basic themes of judgment and hope that form the heart of this whole book. But in these chapters, we get even greater clarity about the details: the specific reasons for God's anger, and the amazingly inclusive vision of hope for the world.

God's anger against the people has been stirred up because they have lived selfishly – consuming all kinds of resources in their search for personal satisfaction and fulfillment. “They gorged on the right, but still were hungry; they devoured on the left, but were not satisfied; they devoured the flesh of their own kindred.” And this isn't just a private and personal matter, either... because our individual attitudes and passions are always eventually reflected in the way we organize society as a whole. “You who write oppressive statutes, and turn aside the needy from justice, and rob the poor of their rights!” The corruption of the heart unfolds at every level, from the privacy of individual relationships to the policies of the nation.

Isaiah does a startling thing in these chapters, beyond even the shocking nature of the judgments he describes. He begins to break down the walls between Israel and the surrounding nations. Whereas the people would have naturally tended to view themselves as unique and exclusive in the plans of God, Isaiah begins to include other nations in both the judgments and the blessing to come.

In chapters 14-19, Isaiah expands the words of judgment. No longer is his message only for the people of Israel and Judah, but now we find devastating critiques also for Babylon, Assyria, Moab, Damascus, Ethiopia, and Egypt. He includes everyone – all of the major powers in the region. Just like he accused the leaders of Judah for sending God's people down the wrong paths, we now find (quirky and awesome) statements like: “The wise counselors of Pharaoh give stupid counsel.” And the promise that the mighty land of Babylon will be “swept with the broom of destruction...I will make it a possession of hedgehogs.” And as it turns out, the reason that these mighty powers of the earth are being judged is pretty much the same reason that God's people are being judged: they “ruled the nations in anger and with unrelenting persecution.” The powers have become unjust. They have crushed their people instead of bringing them life. And this simply cannot continue, because God's plan for righteousness on earth and the blessing of humanity includes *all nations* (this is some shocking stuff):

“The LORD will strike Egypt, both striking and healing. They will return to the LORD, and he will listen to their supplications and will heal them. On that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian will come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians. On that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom the LORD of hosts blessed, saying: ‘Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my heritage.’” (!)

Isaiah proclaims a painful message for God's people and for all people. He says that the people have rejected the commands of God about how life is supposed to be done, and therefore they will certainly endure humiliation. But there is hope for them on the horizon. And in Isaiah's vision, that hope begins to take on the form of a person, a deliverer – a just and righteous leader who will rise up to restore the systems of the world. In other words, a **messiah**.

In Hebrew, the word messiah means “anointed one,” and is a classic name given to the righteous and godly leaders of the people. There were many messiahs in Israel’s history, but here Isaiah begins to describe a kind of super-messiah... an ultimate leader who will set all things right in the land, bringing the people back to their original mission. In chapter 9, Isaiah calls this person “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” A super-messiah indeed. (By the way, the word *christ* [Greek] is exactly the same as the word *messiah* [Hebrew]. These words were used as titles for any number of Israel’s leaders in ancient times.) As Isaiah’s hopes for the people begin to revolve around a new super-leader-to-come, we find these statements of immense confidence and promise in chapters 9, 11, and 12:

“His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness, from this time onward and forevermore.”

“A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. The spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.”

“He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear, but rather with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth... Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist, and faithfulness the belt around his loins.”

And as a result of the righteous and just rule of this messiah, the earth itself shall be transformed:

“The wolf shall lie down with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, the calf and the lion together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze together, and their young shall lie down together... And you will say in that day: ‘I give thanks to you, O LORD, for though you were angry with me, your anger turned away and you comforted me!’”