

Isaiah Bible Study

Chp 13-23 God is in control of the nations outside Israel, as well as inside Israel

1. These chapters show God is the sovereign governor of every nation state. There is the same type of judgment for immoral action vested upon them as we saw earlier enacted against Israel (Judah) by them. The idea is that God can and will use anyone and anything God wishes to do his will. There is a whole list of evil acting nation states. We must look hard to find the precise definition of the failings of these nation states

2. This is a way of showing international political relationships from a theological basis. God has always been and always will be involved in the affairs of nations - great and small.

3. A sub theme is that Israel (Judah) is restored as a byproduct of some of the judgment actions against others nations. Another is that the oracles themselves move through history, and inevitably move toward an apocalyptic interpretation.

4. We still see the overall theological theme to the book as a whole of bringing "inescapable punishment" and "buoyant assurance" in dramatic tension with each other, not only for the people (nation) of Israel, but also for the nations. This can happen even in such events as those discussed in 22:15-25 concerning the two stewards.

Some examples:

1. Babylon 13:1-14:23, 21:1-10, pride, insolence 13:11; hebrew words in 13:13 indicate an apocalyptic settings (ie not just the 6th century Babylon, but rather a more universally present prideful, arrogant & insolent nation.

Assyria 14:24-27

Philistia 14:28-32

Moab 15:1-16:14

Damascus 17:1-3

Ethiopia 18:1-7

Egypt 19:1-25 Note the movement from destruction to blessing and back for Egypt - similar to the salvation story of when Israel was in Egypt and was saved; so also Egypt is 'saved' from itself

Dumah 21:11-12

The desert places 21:13-15

Kedar 21:16-17

Tyre 23:1-18

Isaiah Bible Study - Chapter 22

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Two sections: Both concern Israel (Judah), even though they are in the section which is predominately judgment against the nations. This is a surprise. The judgment is as harsh as any against the nations. Is it possible that Israel (church) becomes just one of the nations (secular) when it is disobedient?

22:1-14 focus against Jerusalem can link to a specific in history (Assyrian assault in 701BC by Sennacherib. Laid siege to Jerusalem, extracted a large booty, did not capture the town, left. Therefore can read in history as both an "**actual loss**" and as a "**perceived victory**".

:1-4 A prophet looking at actual historic (or present) events to himself and Jerusalem.

:5-8 The same prophet looking beyond the current circumstance to events that are visionary - a result of the prophet's intimate knowledge of both the residents of Jerusalem and of Yahweh, to be able to see the complete and utter destruction which will follow.

9:11 The people respond to their crisis with no regard for Yahweh - and as a result become like the nations. We are expected to "look to Yahweh" as well as to "look to civil defense", instead we (Judah) are breaking the covenant.

:12-14 God's call is to repentance, the people respond to the call with a self-reliant 'good news' spin that is a denial of everything in front of them.

22:15-25 "**Bad steward, Good Steward**"

Shebna and Eliakim are historic figures (2 Kings 18:18, Isaiah 36:3 & 37:2). Face understanding of the text is about the wise vs irresponsible uses of power.

:15-19 Household is reference to Judah - Shebna is 2nd in command of the nation. The charge is 1st that he is a foreigner then that he is guilty of self-aggrandizement at the expense of the nation. Whether an actual non-Israelite or foreign to Yahweh is not clear. He is to be dismissed, although the rhetoric of how is somewhat unclear in reference. It may be that the ignominious end is a contrast to the nature of the crime. It seems to be talking about a power struggle within the administration. It has been interpreted by persons since in terms of contemporary power struggles. For example, John Calvin sees Thomas More as exemplar is shebna.

:20-25 There is a possibility of understanding these verses as either another historic perspective - in which case Eliakim held the 2nd spot, lost it to Shebna, then was reinstated; or as a visionary perspective on the coming Good Shepherd. "On that day" is a formula starting point to a visionary statement particularly in Isaiah. Therefore, although based on a real character, this Eliakim becomes a prototype of the "Good Shepherd". This then can certainly be seen as messianic prophecy, and indeed many of the statements used in these verses (:21-23) use metaphors that are used in other places about Messianic servants (Matt. 16:19, .

Overall, this becomes a prophetic warning to contemporary (at any time) stewards of the kingdom (the church today and those who lead it and those within it)

Isaiah Bible Study - Chapter 24-27

Chp 24-27 A universal (apocalyptic) view with total destruction of everything - but with a faithful remnant. Not identified to a time or place. "As a consequence, this poetry tends to lack historic location or reference, but it can be endlessly resituated and reused in any situation of extremity where it is possible (and necessary) to entertain the termination of all present reality and the abrupt gift of newness given by God." (page 188)

Destruction (universal) - restoration (remnant) cycles

24:1-12	Destruction
24:13-16a	Exiled remnant
24:16b-23a	Destruction as judgment
24:23b-25:10a	Judgment as redemption
25:10b-12	Destruction of nations (Moab - symbol for Babylon - symbol for all the 'evil empires')
26:1-15	Restoration beginning to grow
26:16-27:1	Righteous will live (& live again), unjust will die (& be known as dead)
27:2-6	Righteous community will be protected and flourish
27:7-11	Righteous community does not understand and is judged
27:12-13	Redemption one-by-one (remnant)

Many symbols of the universality of damnation and redemption similar to other apocalyptic literature (Revelation, in particular). What are the connections to our time and place? What do they say about our future mission and ministry? What do they say about our nation?

Isaiah 28-35

Continues the dual themes of judgment and restoration. Chapters 28-31 reflect 8th century understanding and language, 32-33 appear to reflect thoughts from a later time.

In 28-31 the main theme is the judgment (of the north - possibly already a reality, of Judah or Jerusalem, of the enemies of Israel). Taken together, quite widespread. It not only includes the many various ways of referring to the people of God, but also to Egypt and to Assyria (who conquered Egypt for a time).

In 32-33 the main theme is restoration - either in the reality of a good king (Hezekiah?) or Messiah. Both views have their proponents, and indeed possibly both were intended to those who had eyes and ears. Hezekiah, even as an imperfect example of the goodness of God's reign, and Messiah as the perfection of that reign.

Some themes worth exploring:

eyes and ears (with reference back to 6:9-10) - 'see' 28:2, 28:16, 28:9-13, 29:9-12, 29:18, 29:20, 29:23, 30:27, 32:1, 32:3, 33:17

Role of Egypt as political ally as a contrast to Yahweh as political ally- won't work - primarily chapter 30:1-6 Similar to material in Jeremiah. Role of Assyria as hand of Yahweh in judgment and being judged. Both as examples of theological socio-political analysis. Note change in attitude in chapters 32-33, where now those political forces are overcome by Yahweh. God is a player in the world stage even when the human players do not recognize God.

Cornerstone and plumb line metaphors 28:16-17

potter and clay metaphor 29:16, 30:14 and agricultural metaphors 28:23-29-

Look, for example, at 30:27-28 where the nation(s) are not named and the time is not specified. The prophetic voice is timeless and as a result timely for any and all times.

Isaiah 36-39

This is an historical interlude in the prophetic poetic text. It divides the prophetic work into two major sections - the first grounded in the late 8th century BC life of the southern kingdom (Israel or Judah), and the second grounded in the early 6th century BC life of Israel (Judah).

These chapters are closely paralleled in II Kings 18-20 which leads to the conclusion of a tie to a specific historical reality. Additionally, by their placement in the book of Isaiah, the historical reality seems to be used as an of or metaphor for faithful service by a king. It is in this context that they are placed in the book and become the focal point.

Why are they the focal point? I think because they allow for the use of a real example. It is saying among other things that it is possible to be a good shepherd. It is possible for a human to not fall to the temptation of abusing power or disregarding God because of one's power. Hezekiah rules in stark contrast to Ahab (one of the most evil and ungodly kings) and follows directly after him. Hezekiah relies on God in times of real pragmatic difficulty in the kingdom and God responds. Hezekiah relies on God when in personal difficulty and God responds.

Hezekiah is also used to bridge the time between the Assyrian and Babylonian empires and their respective relationship with the Israelites. Chapter 39 which is the bridge chapter is the only place where the inherent goodness of Hezekiah can be questioned. It may be that his actions in the first few verses are ill advised rather than evil. They do result in a prophetic vision of destruction by the Babylonians. What was the problem? Possibly pride in all the accomplishments and possessions of Israel? Possibly the resulting temptation of the Babylonians to want those possessions?

36:1-3 Threat from Assyria

:4-10 speech by Assyrian commander note parallels with speech of prophets
"this is what the great kings" "Thus says the Lord"
judgment for past and present actions
promise of reward (hope) if they will follow
judgment if agreement not reached (they will not follow)

:11-21 2nd speech by Assyrian

disregards request of Israelites
disparages Hezekiah for faithfulness to God
triangulates leaders and people
people respond in faith

37:1-7 Hezekiah hears report and responds with prayer and worship in the temple

sought prophet Isaiah
Isaiah's response is that God will take care of threat

:8-13 Letter from Sennacherib (official diplomatic communication)

disparages God, urges Hezekiah not to rely on God

:14-20 Hezekiah again responds by going to the temple and prays to God

:21-29 Isaiah responds with judgment against Assyria

:30-35 Isaiah gives hopeful message to Hezekiah

:36-38 God fulfills prophecy of prior verses

38:1-8 Hezekiah becomes ill, Isaiah says will die, H prays, God gives reprieve

:9-20 Hezekiah for recovery

:21-22 Strange verses, better placed before vs 9. Why here? Possibly to show :8-20 as faithfulness prior to healing.

39:1-4 Hezekiah acts foolishly?

:5-8 Response of God through Isaiah

Servant identity is an enigmatic mystery. In many respects a broad understanding of 'Israel' might fit the original intent the best. That would be the nation Israel or better the people Israel, possibly in some places represented by a person of the people (prophet). Certainly, the Christian community has seen Jesus as the servant. It is not evident that there was any prophet intent in the original; but it is also not evident that it is improper to read back into the text with that understanding. God's work is enacted by human agency.

42:1-9 Servant brings justice. Justice is reinforced here as the 'reordering of social life and social power so that the weak may live a life of dignity, security and well-being' - Brueggeman, while Bailey and others see this same identity of justice as being revealed in a new way here.

Also in question is what the 'nations' represent. The coastlands may represent the coastal areas of Israel (with or without Phillistia (Gaza)) or may speak to the entire Mediterranean shore area (Europe and Africa). And within that may refer to Jews, dispersed Jews and/or gentiles.

'Covenant to the people' & 'light to the nations' - Is Israel live so as to bring others to a defining relationship with Jahweh or to transform their own social relationships to make them more neighborly. Covenant also implies Word which then also brings to mind two of the images we have of Christ (again the church reading back into the text) 'Word' and 'Light'.

49:1-7(8-12) Bringing of justice through a mechanism of vulnerability and perceived defeat. The described justice is only possible when the sweep and influence of power and violence are broken, those chains can only be broken with the vulnerability that can only come from being completely linked to Yahweh. This is a kind of reference to crucifixion and resurrection and complexity and mystery of their relationship to each other and the whole. It is being expressed here in ways which perhaps we can get our hands and heads around. It is reminiscent of the tactic of Ghandi, of the early US civil rights movement, of the peace and reconciliation trials in South Africa among others

50:4-9 A major emphasis here on the degree to which the work of the Servant is indeed the work of Yahweh. "The Lord God has ..." 4 times is a focal point.

52:13-53:12 Difficulties of understanding begins with ambiguity and question within the text. There are unusual words and grammatical constructs which allow for many variant understandings in Hebrew let alone in translation to English (or any other language). Christians so identify the image of the Messiah (Jesus) in the text with a clarity that was very likely not intended or understood by either the writer or early listener-reader. Understanding in the early hearing would have seen the people Israel as embodying these characteristics (through exile and restoration). This poem may well help us with a feel and emotion which allows us a deeper identification with crucifixion and resurrection in our own lives.

These passages taken together then, may give us encouragement to stand against the societal pressures which are not justice and act for the radical changes in society which reflect justice.

There is some concern about whether one should connect these passages out of their immediate context in Isaiah - i.e. are they more connected to each other or to the text immediately before or after their placement. I think we can safely see in them as a common response to the situation in which Israel finds itself. The consistent response of Jahweh to the environ of Israel is the call to be His servant in any and all circumstance.

How we understand particularly the part of Isaiah from 40-55 is dependent on how we understand the three major characters in the mind and writing of the poet/author. The three major characters in the writing are 1)Yahweh, 2)Judah (sometimes Israel or Jerusalem or Servant), and 3)Babylon.

It is not hard to recognize in the cycles of judgment/redemption enacted by Yahweh, the same cycles at work in the life/death/resurrection of Jesus also enacted by Yahweh and through that to those same cycles in the life of the Judeo-Christian communities today in which Yahweh continues to be active.

As hinted above it is also not hard to draw connections to the character of Judah in all the representations to the Judeo-Christian communities today and to their relationship with Yahweh. In the case of the Christian communities that connection can be drawn to and through the servant (Messiah).

It is with the character of Babylon that we have some difficulty drawing identity (particularly in the US and western Europe). Can (or should) we connect Babylon to a specific nation/state or its leaders as Revelation does to Rome and the emperors? In an ever shrinking world community do we generalize to 'all that is secular' ie. to all that does not directly identify and connect itself to Christianity? Or are there 'movements' (communism, capitalism, militarism, industrialization...) which are the Babylon of today?

Brueggeman presents the case that we American Christians are indeed living in a non-geographic exile of faith. Increasingly all around us are people and institutions which hostile or indifferent toward us and our God, and who at best treat us and God as unimportant or irrelevant.

If that is a reasonable assessment, then what does the text say to us about our situation and what should we be doing according to the text?

We have the 'new' definition of justice **42:1-5**. How do we live in that definition?

We see redemption (deserved or not) in **43:1-7**. What does that look like today?

One answer is to be a witness **43:8-13**. The call to be a witness is here. The description of how to do it is not. Is one answer in **43:18-19**, that as Yahweh continues to 'do a new thing' that we should anticipate, expect and jump into the new things Yahweh is doing?

The promise of 'my Spirit' **44:1-5** brings us to a connection with God that we can identify with in our faith journey.

If we are drawing these types of identities, how do we properly identify with **44:24-28** the promise of restoration to the land and restoration of the land? Since we are not 'off the land' we need to find what restoration means. Perhaps we can see restoration as the return of a time where the loving reconciling relationship between God and the people of God does indeed become a beacon to the world. If so, then we need to find those ways to demonstrate that restorative relationship which would cause others to desire to be a part of it.

We need to also develop a realistic interpretation of how in this days and time God works in the world **44:28-45:1-4** corresponding to the identity of Cyrus and how God actually worked through Cyrus.

In the sense of the timeless quality of the poetic prophecy, how do we understand and respond to the promises in chapter **48**, particularly **48:14-22**.

This portion of Isaiah seems to reflect the theological reflections a generation after the beginning of the return from exile. It deals more with issues of reconstruction - not so much physical - as reconstruction of the people of God. This is the dramatic shift which has been hinted at thus far. The kingdom becomes less important than the community, and that community becomes much more expansive. Those who had been excluded previously (eunuchs and foreigners) are now included and even with special promises

56:1-2 Justice/right & salvation/deliverance are pairs. Hebrew for right & deliverance is the same word. Then note the universal (mortal) in verse 2. Blessing (happy) come to those who do verse 1 (justice/right) - defined by hold on to the justice/right exemplified by keeping sabbath & refraining from evil.

:3-5 Special attention for eunuchs (one of the excluded groups) - Deut. 23:1-2 and foreigners. The special attention is that they will be remembered even more than those with children (the early Hebrew understanding of immortality). This is a definite expansion not only of whose can be saved, but also of the very nature of salvation.

:6-8 Same kind of attention paid to foreigners. Yahweh is the active agent of these changes (I will bring, I will give, I will gather).

:9-12 One of the ways of understanding these rather perplexing verses is that the grand new vision (former things have passed away, there are new things) is that not everyone is happy with the 'new things'. Apparently not everyone was happy with eunuchs and foreigners, kind of like today not everyone is happy with gays & illegal aliens. Not everyone today will be happy with every *or even any) new thing. But the emphasis in the chapter is that Yahweh is the active agent here.

Chp 57

:1-13 This chapter continues the debate between the 'new things' and 'old things' persons and understandings. vs :1-2 & :13b (new things) and Yahweh's pejorative against the 'old things' :3-13a. It also reemphasizes some of the 'new' in understanding salvation - that sometimes and ultimately salvation is lived in its completeness after this life.

:14 note highway metaphor again which here speaks of path of Torah (particularly new Torah) which leads to salvation.

:15 Looks back to 6:1-8 (the vision of Yahweh on the high mountain) and to Exodus 3:7-8 (the promise to 'come down' to deliver the oppressed). As such is also a precursor of the Christological concept of fully God (high) and fully human (low-crushed) and in all that to give life.

:16-19 An expansion of vs :15. There is a movement from anger (justified)!7, to healing :18, to wholeness (Shalom) :19

:20-21 Contrast for those who reject (wicked).

Isaiah 60-66

61:1-11

:1-7 Prophet - human agent authorized by God's Spirit (Breath) - Gen. 1:2, Ex. 14:21, Isaiah 42:1 (Creation, liberation, Justice)

:1-3 This agent will effect the changes talked about in the prior chapters

preach good news to poor:

bind up brokenhearted

proclaim freedom to captives

release from darkness to prisoners

Year of Lord's favor

Day of Vengeance

Comfort those who mourn

provide for those who grieve

:4-6 Renewal will take place - foreigners will be workers instead of tyrants

:7 Double portion of justice - this time favorable - see chp 40

:8-9 Yahweh - "I love justice" I will be faithful to them - everlasting covenant (even longer than the 1000 generations of the covenant of Sinai - Ex. 20:6) - All others will see the people as blessed of Yahweh

:10-11 Prophet - there will be true worship, praise, & thankfulness

65:1-24

:1-16 Warning to those who rebel - also promise to remnant - problem is raised indirectly here about how to appropriately handle the blessings from Yahweh without perverting those blessings. HOW do we live in God's justice when we are in charge. What are the communal (congregational, denominational) mandates of justice? How does this political language affect the politics of today? If the church sees itself somehow as the inheritors of the new covenant, then what mandates do we have and how are we living them out.

:17-24 New heaven and new earth appear here to be a renewed heaven and earth - renewed to the original intention of creation. God in the middle of a worshipping and just people who are taking care of each other and the creation. Renewal of peace and harmony among creation. renewal of faithful use of gifts.

66:1-24

:1-6 Hypocrisy seems to be one of the serious ways that we disrespect God and disregard the covenant mandates. We pay lip service without meaning, we talk but do not act.

:7-9 There is a remnant which does live appropriately in the covenant. They receive the promised blessings, and they see if they wish to remains of those who don't - as a reminder.

:10-16 Repeats 1-9 showing the active agency of Yahweh in both aspects of justice

:17-24 Repeats again in prose form instead of poetry