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Where Will You Flee in Times of Trouble?

Judges is a transitional book intended to bring the child of God from the era of the conquest of Canaan to the era of the Kings. It does much by way of preparation for the redeeming work of God. The majority of Judges (chapters 1-16) describes the ministrations of twelve different spiritual/military leaders called Judges, each of which get progressively worse in terms of their character as the book unfolds. The final five chapters revolve around two events which leave the reader in shock on account of the wretchedness of the time. The theme of Judges is summarized in Judges 21.

Judges 21:25, "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes."

Think about this expression for a moment. At this time in Israel, if IT furthered the cause of the individual or simply pleased him, they'd have no qualms in proceeding. Thus we read of these things:

- Thievery.
- Drunkenness.
- Coveting.
- Rape.
- Murder.
- Idolatry.
- Slavery.
- False worship.
- And much more!

Now don't be mistaken. You don't need to be "kingless" in order for lawlessness to prevail. These horrible sins arose even in the days of the monarchy, however it should be noted that when lawlessness reigned at this time either the king's authority was rejected (think of Absalom) or the king himself was not respected (think of Saul). We need to hear this, for whether you realize it or not, as Christians we have a King! In order for us to "do our own thing," either we have to reject His authority or simply take Him lightly either of which will have detrimental effects in our lives!

It was in light of this background that Isaiah penned the heart of this prophecy! The era in which he served the Lord and His people was a dark time indeed! Uzziah was dead and his son, Ahaz, was as wicked as you can get. It would have been tempting to take matters into your own hands and so do your own thing to get by; which many did!

Yet Isaiah was written to remind the nation that they ought not to revert in their living to the era of the Judges. Their King remained on the throne, for He was and is none other than the Holy one of Israel! To Him they owed allegiance. From Him they must never depart! To convey this message, Isaiah arranged our current section (Isaiah 13-27) around five themes. Notice the chart...

| <i>Isaiah 13-20</i> | <i>Isaiah 21-23</i> | <i>Isaiah 24-27</i> |
|--|------------------------|------------------------|
| <i>Isaiah 13:1-14:27</i> | <i>Isaiah 21:1-10</i> | <i>Isaiah 24:1-20</i> |
| The Futility of National Dependence | | |
| <i>Isaiah 14:28-32</i> | <i>Isaiah 21:11-12</i> | <i>Isaiah 24:21-23</i> |
| The Reign and Rule of God | | |
| <i>Isaiah 15:1-16:14</i> | <i>Isaiah 21:13-17</i> | <i>Isaiah 25:1-12</i> |
| The Peril of Pride | | |
| <i>Isaiah 17:1-18:7</i> | <i>Isaiah 22:1-25</i> | <i>Isaiah 26:1-21</i> |
| The Folly of Man-Trust | | |
| <i>Isaiah 19:1-20:6</i> | <i>Isaiah 23:1-18</i> | <i>Isaiah 27:1-13</i> |
| God's Unthwartable, Mind-Blowing Plan | | |

One theme in Isaiah is this: "Where ought you to flee in times of trouble?"

As we consider Isaiah's second response which is an exposé on "The Reign and Rule of God" as it is worked out in this state of sin and misery! We pick it up with Isaiah's first of three treatments of the

theme.

The Unthwartable Will of God to Bless His People

Isaiah 14:28, “In the year that King Ahaz died this oracle came.”

This is a rather significant statement for a number of reasons. First we know that Isaiah wrote this passage in 715 BC (which is when Ahaz died) a good twenty-five years into his ministry. That tells us that things were not at all good in Judah. Whatever plenty that came as the result of the Golden Era from Uzziah’s reign was used up and so gone! As a result, the people of Judah were living in harsh times economically, politically, and religiously. Furthermore, the Northern Kingdom was gone, wiped off the face of the earth in 722 B.C. and Judah now was a vassal state of Assyria which would have meant high taxes, foreign laws, and more devastatingly, the cessation of the worship of God. 2 Kings records what Ahaz did with the articles of Israel’s worship when once Judah became a vassal state of Assyria.

2 Kings 16:17-18, “Then King Ahaz cut off the borders of the stands, and removed the laver from them [this is in reference to the altar of burnt offering]; he also took down the sea from the bronze oxen which were under it [the “sea” was the large basin which was situated behind the altar of burnt offering and which the priests used in order to cleanse themselves prior to entering the holy place], and put it on a pavement of stone. And the covered way for the sabbath which they had built in the house, and the outer entry of the king [these most likely were construction modifications which enabled both the priests and the king to worship God more easily], he removed from the house of the Lord because of the king of Assyria.”

And if this weren’t bad enough, bear in mind that Ahaz was one of the most morally bankrupt kings to sit on the throne of Judah.¹ During his regency the land of Judah resembled the land of Canaan prior to the conquest with pagan temples scattered throughout the land. *It was as though the Lord had not driven out the Canaanites!*

Now you’d think that the death of this monarch would have been a good thing, but it wasn’t. For as bad as Ahaz was nevertheless his death would have brought a level of insecurity and instability to the Kingdom which would have been hard to bear. In fact, it was this instability which the Philistines at this time endeavored to exploit. Isaiah speaks of a Philistine communiqué which Judah received upon the death of Ahaz.

Isaiah 14:32a, “How then will one answer the messengers of the nation?”

While we do not possess the contents of this communiqué, yet based on the passage before us it is obvious that the Philistines offered to ally themselves with Judah and so be their “savior” during their time of woe! What a slap in the face! You know you have bottomed out when the worst sort of rabble are offering to be your protectors!

Yet this is where our passage found God’s people! Truly they were at the end of themselves. Their wicked king was dead and their mortal enemy was cuddling up to them with a smile, offering to be their help! And the question that would have been asked is this one: Where would they flee! Should they take up the Philistine’s offer?

Isaiah 14:29, “Do not rejoice, O Philistia, all of you, because the rod [which refers to the rule of a nation] that struck you is broken.”

There is some debate as to what is meant by “the rod” here. In light of the reference to Ahaz in Isaiah 14:28, is this the Davidic line which seemed to be a thorn in the side of the Philistines throughout their existence? Some have suggested this, yet as you’ll see, this does not fit the rest of the prophecy given here (specifically v. 31). So what is this “broken rod/rule”?

In 721 B.C., the Assyrian King, Shalmaneser III, died. With his death, Assyria was plunged into chaos which took a decade from which to recover. Accordingly, at this time the Assyrian hold over Palestine was indeed waning. The “rod”/rule that Assyria exercised over Philistia was broken such that we know historically that at this time in 715 B.C. the Philistines rebelled against Assyria! No doubt this is why the Philistines felt the freedom to offer to be the “Savior” of Judah this was their “rejoicing!” But truly, this would be short lived.

Isaiah 14:29b, “...for from the serpent’s root [the word for “root” could be used figuratively as “the source of something” which is the nuance here] ...from the serpent’s root [referencing Assyria] a viper [a poisonous snake] will come out, and its fruit will be a flying serpent.”

Though it took a decade for the Assyrian King, Sargon II, to solidify his power following the death of Shalmaneser, nevertheless Assyrian domination in Palestine would come back with a vengeance. This truly is the “viper” that would come out of the loins of the serpent called, Assyria! And so at the time, though Judah looked in shambles and the health/power/sovereignty of the Philistines couldn’t have been better, nevertheless God in His sovereignty would take care of His own! Notice the contrast!

Isaiah 14:30, “And those [in Judah] who are most helpless will eat, and the needy will lie down in security; [then turning to the Philistines, God said...] I will destroy your root with famine, and it will kill off your survivors.”

What a shocking contrast! The ones who would be protected and secure in the future would NOT be the Philistines BUT the people of God! In fact, it wouldn’t be but a few years before the Philistines once again would be devastated by the Assyrians.

Isaiah 14:31, “Wail, O gate [this is referencing the front gate of the city which typically was the first thing assaulted in a siege]; cry, O city; melt away [referring to the hearts of their stout men], O Philistia, all of you; for smoke comes from the north [referencing the dust that would rise as a result of a marching army], and there is no straggler in his ranks.”

Truly in a short time following this prophecy, the Assyrians would attack the Philistines from the north, destroy their cities, and devastate their people. In light of this, notice the question Isaiah asked Judah.

Isaiah 14:32, “How then will one answer the messengers of the nation?: in light of the revealed will of God for the future, how do you suppose Judah ought to respond to the Philistine offer for help? The answer is obvious- for notice: the glory, honor, protection and security of God’s people has and will

continue to be the Lord!

Isaiah 14:32b, "...the Lord has founded Zion, and the afflicted of His people will seek refuge in it."

What an important message for the people of God both in Isaiah's day as well as our own! As dark and bleak as all outward appearances looked, at this time Judah's safety and security was never in question! God was on the throne. HE FOUNDED ZION/JERUSALEM! As such, the afflicted/oppresed/beaten down/hurting/poor/bereft will always find refuge in it!

You must see that Isaiah here is showing it rather than saying it: Where ought we to flee in times of trouble? Obviously to the Lord! Yet, the question must be asked: For us to trust the Lord, must God give a prediction of specific blessing for the future every time we are in trouble? Or has He demonstrated His benign sovereignty enough times for us to trust Him today for our unknown tomorrow?

Psalm 46:1, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."

Truly we don't need more prophecy. If you are a child of God you have all that you need for you to trust the character of God and so take refuge in it in times of trouble.

Proverbs 18:10, "The name [character] of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runs into it and is safe."

Now to solidify the faith of God's people, Isaiah elaborated on the expectations they ought to hold when it came to their present experience in this state of sin and misery. Notice the next, parallel prophecy addressing the reign and rule of God...

The Eschatological Time

Isaiah 21:11, "The oracle concerning Edom. One keeps calling to me from Seir, 'Watchman, how far gone is the night? Watchman, how far gone is the night?'"

It was not unheard of for a Gentile to seek the words/ministry of a prophet of God. In fact, do you recall in the days of Elisha how Naaman, a Syrian general, sought out the prophet for a word from the Lord (2 Kings 5:1)? Ben-hadad, King of Aram, sent a trusted soldier to seek a word from the Lord as it related to his own sickness (cf. 2 Kings 8:7)?

Again, this was not unheard of and is most certainly what is behind the passage before us this morning. The Edomites during the era we are discussing sent a delegation to seek out Isaiah and inquire how much longer would the suffering and hardship which had descended upon Palestine prevail? Now before we address Isaiah's response, it is important for you to see that the theme of God's reign and rule saturates this passage.

- The primary word for "prophet" in the Old Testament is not what is used in this passage (נָבִיא [nabi]).

- The word used here (שַׁעִיר [sair]) pertains to a seer who stands on the wall of a city and beholds things on the horizon which cannot be seen on the ground.

This was Isaiah. This was every prophet of God! The force of this verse is that one can live out their days in blindness worshipping false gods. But in order truly to see the future you cannot rely upon a false god. Rather, you have to go to the ONE in charge of the future: God! He rules over all! So standing before a prophet of God and hence a seer into the future, the Edomites ask the question which at times plagues mankind: How long will the darkness of pain, misery, and suffering persist in our life? How long will the suffering and humiliation of Isaiah. 14 last? How long will God’s people be in grief? How long must they live in weakness?

Isaiah 21:12, “The watchman says, ‘Morning comes but also night. If you would inquire, inquire; come back again.’”

The idea behind this response is basically this: there will be good days in the immediate future for Edom, Palestine, AND the people of God. But this will be short-lived. Darkness again is going to descend and it will be a thick darkness! Truly life in this world is a veil of tears which is made livable on account of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ which upholds all things. So when you enter into ease of days, pleasant pastures, extreme blessing enjoy them! But be careful. Do not expect them to be that which ought to characterize your life. We are living in a state of sin and misery such that darkness will yet again prevail!

Family of God, this is an important message in light of the reign and rule of God. It is so easy to fall into the trap of thinking that because God saved you and has promised to bless you that these blessings must begin today!

The primary error of the “Health and Wealth Gospel” is that it takes the promises of God, which ultimately will be filled in the final state, and applies them today! In the future state:

- Will we be healthy?
- Will we be wealthy?
- Will we be wise?

Ought we to expect the fulfillment of these promises in the state in which we live today? Isaiah’s answer is NO! Christian, “watch over your heart with all diligence” (Proverbs 4:23)! That clearly is the message here. God is on the throne, surely! But it is NOT His will for you to live in a redeemed and renewed world today!

As such, on account of His goodness, blessings will come and be enjoyed. But don’t fall into the trap of expecting these temporal blessings to be that which characterizes your life. For once again, there will be darkness! You say, “Lovely! Then where ought our hope to lie? What ought we to live for?” Isaiah answers this question in his final treatment of this theme.

The “Glorious” End

Isaiah 24:21, “So it will happen in that day....”

The Bible doesn't place a break or an indent at this point, nevertheless in the Hebrew Isaiah 24:21 constitutes a new section. Notice the little phrase, "...in that day." This sets apart what Isaiah is about to say in vv. 21-23 from what he just said in vv. 1-20². Furthermore, notice the recurring theme of God's sovereignty.

Isaiah 24:23b, "...for the Lord of hosts will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem."

Clearly, this section is the climax of Isaiah's second main theme in this section revolving around the reign and rule of God!

Isaiah 24:21, "So it will happen in that day, that the Lord will punish the host of heaven, on high, and the kings of the earth, on earth."

This is where all history is moving: a climatic day in which "the host of heaven" (a reference to fallen angels) and "the kings of the earth" (a reference to earthly kings and so kingdoms and their citizens) will receive the just recompense for their rebellion. How is God going to meet out this punishment?

Isaiah 24:22, "And they will be gathered together *like* prisoners in the dungeon, and will be confined in prison; and after many days they will be punished."

This speaks of the fate of fallen angels and the citizens of the kingdoms of the world who have died without Christ. They currently have been "confined in prison" - which is another way of saying, "Hell!" Peter, by way of analogy in reference to the condemnation awaiting mankind wrote this:

2 Peter 2:4, "...God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment."

Christian, based on this passage, where are the majority of angels who joined Satan in his rebellion? They have been "cast into hell..." - committed "to pits of darkness!" And so it is with all who have died outside of Christ. Peter further describes the state of the rebellious dead as, "imprisoned spirits." (1 Peter 3:19). Both fallen man and angels are here.

Jude 6-7, "And angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day. Just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, since they in the same way as these indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh, are exhibited as an example, in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire."

In other words, if a person dies outside of Christ, they are immediately judged and imprisoned in hell along with the fallen angelic host (cf. Hebrews 9:26-27)! And what, according to Isaiah, is the end of this imprisonment? Notice Isaiah 24:22b again, "...and after many days they will be punished!" This has reference to the Last Judgment and so the Lake of Fire where God will cast Satan, his fallen angels, and everyone who have died without Christ!

Revelation 20:10-15, "And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night

forever and ever. And I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is *the book of life*; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one *of them* according to their deeds. And death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."

Such is the horrifying end of Satan, his angels, and all who have died outside of Christ! Now, when this time comes, what then will happen? What will become of God's regency? What will become of His people?

Isaiah 24:23a, "Then the moon will be abashed and the sun ashamed..."

This is an incredible statement; let's discuss it. The word for "abashed" (חָפַר [chaphar]) means to hang ones head in shame! The word for "ashamed" (בוֹשׁ [bôš]) means to fall into disgrace! Both indicate a severe humiliation on account of inherent personal failure. In what way will the moon and the sun fail in the last day? Isaiah shows the answer which the English obscures.

- moon: the word for this in the Hebrew is לְבוֹנָה (lebonah) literally meaning, "the white one."
- sun: the word for this in the Hebrew is חָם (cham) literally meaning, "the hot one."

Both words emphasize the fact that these solar bodies are "bright!" And so they were: by the light of a full moon, the Israelite was able to travel without torch. And gaze too long at the sun and you will go blind! And yet as bright and therefore impressive as these two luminaries may be, on the last day the Lord will manifest His glory such that the sun and moon will hang their head in utter shame, so great will be the glory of God! In fact listen to the description of John.

Revelation 21:23, "And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb."

Do you understand the implication here? At this time in Redemptive History God will have taken up residence on the earth. Yet His glory will be so great that it will penetrate everything in the New Heavens and Earth such that no matter where you go, you will not need another light source!

Zechariah 14:7, "For it will be a unique day which is known to the Lord, neither day nor night, but it will come about that at evening time there will be light."

So the final state will involve the full manifestation of the glory of God! And what about God's people?

Isaiah 24:23b, "Then the moon will be abashed and the sun ashamed, for the Lord of hosts will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and *His* glory will be before His elders."

When God takes up residence on the earth, Mount Zion will be His throne and He will reign over a New Heavens and Earth. At this time there will not be a stray or independent atom: everything from great to the small will be in submission to His will!

Isaiah 24:23b, "...and His glory will be before His elders!"

What does this mean? The word for "before" (נָגַד [nagad]) refers to the placing of or the unveiling of something before another. Theologically it denotes an act of revealing or "revelation."³ Now think of it!

- In Exodus 33:23, when in the presence of God, Moses could only look upon God's back lest the prophet die!
- In Exodus 24:9-11, when in the presence of God, the elders could only look upon His feet.

Yet not so in the New Heavens and Earth! At that time, the Lord is going to manifest His glory such that it will be fully seen.

Isaiah 24:23b, "...for the Lord of hosts will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and *His* glory will be before [fully revealed to] His elders!"

We see this in John:

1 John 3:2, "Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is."

Family of God, do you understand what lies before you... in the future? Do you understand what alone must be your hope, your glory, your reason for going on in life?

Christ is coming back to this earth to judge the living and the dead. At that time, not only will we be vindicated, but He will specially equip you and me with the ability to gaze fully upon His glory! Then upon judging the world and casting the wicked into the lake of fire, God will refashion the earth into a paradise and we shall enter into it with the Lord!

At this time there will be NO.

- Need.
- Want.
- Suffering.
- Sorrow.
- Sickness.
- Disease.
- Partings.
- Sin.
- Death!

Now you accept this and build your life on it, and you will be radically transformed!

- Your expectations!
- Your desires!
- Your burdens!
- Your labor!
- Your focus and so goals!

All of this and more will be placed in submission to a benign King who is working out His purpose in and through all things! In light of the reality of the reign and rule of God, Isaiah would ask you this morning: Where will you flee in times of trouble? On what or whom will you depend? Can there be any other answer than the Lord Jesus Christ!

End Notes

¹ His grandson, Manasseh would far out do him in terms of treachery. Yet with Ahaz his rebellion before the Lord would set new standards of treachery in Judah.

² As it does in 25:9; 26:1; 27:1; 27:12-12.

³ Gen 49:1; Deut. 4:13; Gen. 41:25; cf. Deut. 13:1; 18:16; Acts 2:17.

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About the Preacher

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