

Isaiah Chapters 21-23 - John Karmelich

Title: What should we do when our world is falling apart?

One of the things I ponder at times is why does God bother? If He's perfect by definition, why does He put up with sin and why doesn't God put His "foot down" in a visible way? When it seems like all that we comprehend is falling apart, why keep going? In these three chapters, it seems like everything that was happening in Israel (when Isaiah wrote this) seemed like God is pronouncing harsh judgement and no one is spared! We get that God made unconditional promises not only of our salvation but God will rule the world one day from Israel, so the hope for a better tomorrow is always there despite what we're dealing with at this moment! So why does Isaiah go all "doom and gloom" at this point in the book? It is for us to realize there's a limit to the amount of sin God will tolerate, before He puts his foot down so to speak! Yes, He'll keep His unconditional promises to us, but at the same time He won't tolerate if the people who are called to be His witness ignore Him!

An underlying point at Isaiah's time of writing this is the Israelites were looking to anyone to help them as they were in fear of being wiped out by a rising empire! God is saying to both Israel and the nations in the area, you're all going down for the count as I am God and know all things! Despite all that, there will still be life in the Middle East after all this has come and gone so I will keep my eternal promise of The Messiah ruling from Jerusalem one day! Why do you think Israel is the only nation in history to be conquered, scattered and come together to be a nation again? Despite the struggles we deal with, God's still in charge and the world will continue according to His plan! Times will come when it feels like all is falling apart. As far as our lives, all we can do and should do is pray for guidance and wisdom for us to make the best decisions we can given our circumstances. God will do what God's going to do as He wants us to use our lives as a witness for Him. When we (a church, a nation etc.) turn from Him, He is going to allow horrible things to occur to keep our focus on Him. Even if we can't think of any sin for us to confess, remember God allows us to go through stuff ultimately to glorify Him. Therefore, we're to make the best decisions we can despite whatever is going to happen.

Speaking of things going to happen, let me discuss what Isaiah is predicting before it occurred! (More proof God is God and lives outside of time!) These chapters end Isaiah's comments about nations near Israel and now he's focused on the Israelites themselves. The underlying message is, "Don't mess with God or there will be consequences!" I realize, non-believers get away with stuff, but they're not called to be a witness for Him. Not saying we must be perfect but turning to things other than God for our life has bad consequences as most of us know all too well!

OK time for specifics: Isaiah continues his "tour of the neighborhood", with an emphasis on how all of those places are doomed to destruction. All of these places had knowledge of God's existence, and He holds us accountable for what we know about Him. It starts with picking on Babylon again. Yes, there were already two chapters on Babylon (13-14). When Isaiah wrote, they weren't a power yet. We're in Chapter 21 and it describes the two nations (they are part of Iran today) that conquer Babylon (again in Iraq today). While Chapters 13-14 focused on the rise and fall of Babylon as an empire, Chapter 21 is a focus on the city's fall as their empire headquarters. When Persia conquered Babylon it became Persia's headquarters. When Alexander the Great conquered Persia centuries later, he lived and died there. All I'm saying is, despite the fact Babylon wasn't a power when Isaiah wrote, to trust them as an entity was a mistake as they are going down for the count one day as well. Speaking of "down for the count":

We then get two lines on a place called Seir. (Short version part of Jordan today). Then there's 4 lines on the fall of what we'd call Saudi Arabia today. Remember the key is not to learn ancient history. It's about looking to God for our hope and not to powers in the "neighborhood"! The reason Isaiah's going place by place is to emphasize all the bad options out there!

Next Isaiah turns his attention to Jerusalem itself. Remember when he wrote this, the Northern Israelite Kingdom has (or is about to fall) to the Assyrian Empire. Yes, God spared Jerusalem and the Southern Israel Kingdom from that fall! When the Assyrians conquered the region, the Southern Israel Kingdom was spared for roughly 100 more years till the Babylonian Empire was on the rise. The Israelites in the South feared Assyrians would destroy them when Isaiah wrote this. He states in effect that it's a time to humble ourselves before God and look to Him for guidance and not a neighbor. Isaiah states in the text how those in Jerusalem partied as if none of this mattered. Isaiah used a phrase Paul quotes, "Eat drink and be merry for tomorrow we die!" (1st Corinthians 15:32). If we live as if God is irrelevant and try to enjoy this life as if nothing matters, it will be our downfall!

From there Isaiah gives a bad and good example within Jerusalem. He lists a man who is probably the treasurer for that kingdom. That guy was building a big monument for himself and ignoring God. That became his downfall and let's just say he suffered. Then Isaiah lists the man who replaces him, and he's complimented for seeking God. The text appears to "jump" to discuss THE Messiah (Jesus). The idea is to say there will be hope despite all this horrible destruction. In fact, Chapter 22, Verse 22 is quoted in Revelation: "And I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David; He shall open and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open." Very similar to Revelation 3:8. To those who state the God of the "Old" is NOT the God of the "New" the Old is quoted hundreds of times in the "New"!

We're almost done with our "Israel's neighborhood tour". Chapter 23, Isaiah writes on Tyre and Sidon both powerful cities at the time of Isaiah. They grew rich from sea trade (based in Lebanon). Babylon tried to destroy it and "sort of won". Tyre is on the Mediterranean and took most of its valuables to an island off the coast. The text mentions a 70-year reprieve. In short, the Assyrian and Babylon Empires failed to conquer Tyre. It wasn't conquered until Alexander the Great took rubble from the city Tyre to make a bridge to the island and destroyed them that way. Bottom line Chapter 23 focuses on Tyre and its sister city Sidon. The text discusses the places they traded with and the fact they'll be wiped out!

I am aware this all ancient history, and Isaiah describing the destruction of these places well over 2,000 years ago isn't very relevant for us. The lesson for us is about the danger of trusting in things other than God as that's why He created us in the first place, to use our lives as a witness for Him. These chapters are basically, "These guys are going down for the count, don't put your faith in them!" All this is a big reminder why we've been created in the first place. Isaiah is the biggest book in the Bible and it covers everything from life when he lived to a lot about life after the Second Coming in later chapters!

I realize I could give a lot more details about the specifics here, but that's why I wrote a detailed lesson a good decade ago. The main thing to get is God wants us to use our lives for His glory. Through all of the prophets God gives history in advance to remind us He knows all things. God gives us the free will to choose whether to obey Him or not. Unfortunately, the Israelites in Jerusalem then chose to (for the part) "eat drink and be merry" and ignored God. Obviously, He wants us to enjoy life, but also to make Him the center of it! That is why we were created in the first place!

With that said, hope you like this study. Again, I wrote a more detailed study some years back. If you want to read that, click on one of the links below. It's still a joy to study the bible and again grateful to

all of you reading this. The rest of this email are links to questions you may have. If you are new here, you're always welcome to e-mail me. Thanks again for reading this!

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That's it. Hope you enjoy it. Don't forget to fire up a prayer prior to your reading.