

Isaiah 15-23

God's judgment on the nations

It is difficult to track the history of many of these prophecies. Many of the locations are uncertain. And unless revealed in the text, the timing is difficult to know.

We are going to take a very unusual approach for us this morning. We are going to look at the judgments from chapters 15-23 as a whole. And we will try to glean information from them that will help us in our day to day decisions.

Please read these chapters for your selves this week. There is more to learn. But we will focus on what are to me the most obvious applications.

Here is the outline of the text. But this is not the outline of the sermon.

The judgment of Moab- 15: to 16:14 within 3 years

Syria and Israel 17

Ethiopia 18

Egypt 19:1-17

Egypt Assyria and Israel blessed 19:18-25

Judgment on Egypt and Ethiopia clarified 20

Babylon 21:1-10

Edom 21:11,12

Arabia 21:13-17 Within a year

Jerusalem 22:1-14

Shebna The steward of the king's palace, replaced by Eliakim 22:15-25

Tyre 23

What we are going to look at this morning are

1. The sins that were being punished
2. The results those punishments would have
3. Interesting and profound points in the text

First I would like to bring our focus to the sins that are mentioned in these passages.

What we read in our text this morning is pure human misery. What God has in mind for these human beings is awful.

Our world wants to continually measure God based on **His record** of providing humans **with happiness**. They say if God was truly good.... and then they tell us how he should be promoting our purposes. They point to the Old Testament and tell us that they do not want to serve a God who would have His people wipe out villages including women and children. You and I don't need to skirt around this issue. Nor do we need to expect that many will respond to our proclamation of God's goodness with open acceptance.

Human life is never more important to God than His own Glory is to him. Just as our creations are never more important to us than our own welfare. God does

with His creation whatever he purposes. When God sent the Israelites into Canaan, he wanted many of these cultures annihilated. Why? There are plenty of references to the prohibition of the Israelites picking up the practices and idols of those who lived in Canaan. This leads us to believe that the problem was sin. God did not want his people to pick up their sin. And also, every individual that was missed in the slaughter was a potential enemy to the people of God. So as long as this kingdom of His was to be represented by an **earthly kingdom**, those people who represented sin needed removed. And God makes no apology for this. None. Ever.

Our God, in the New Testament, has not changed. He is still the same. But one of the difference now is that His Kingdom is now purely a spiritual kingdom. There are no longer any geographical boundaries to His kingdom. There are no longer any genetic bloodlines for His kingdom. Our enemies are no longer ultimately human but spiritual. So we no longer have any commands to kill our human enemies. We are to love them in hopes of winning them into our kingdom. Our world refuses to see this and understand it. So be it. It is true none the less. Now, what are we to learn about God's ruthless punishment of these peoples? One of the themes from the beginning of the Bible to the end of it is the danger of coexisting with sin. For the Israelites it meant exterminating the human beings who carried the sinful temptations. For us it is removing its influence from our hearts. For us it is fighting the fiery darts of the devil with all the spiritual resources available to us.

These nations in our text are being wiped out. They are being displaced. The men are being killed. The women are being ravished. The children are being stolen or killed. This is awful stuff. But that is the cost of sin. No human being is more important to God than His own glory. And sin is a blatant attack by humans on God's glory. Sin is essentially spitting on one's own Creator. It deserves what it gets when God finally brings it into judgment. And when God places unrepentant sinners into the hands of other unrepentant sinners, crying "fowl" is not going to have an effect on God.

Now for us who claim to be believers in Christ, followers of Christ, do we see the obvious application here? How can we, who claim to live for God's glory, who claim to cherish His Son, who claim to be God's children, how can we blithely accept sinful habits, sinful attitudes, sinful alliances in our lives? How can we invite anything into our homes that will cultivate those habits? How can we coexist with that which God hates? We cannot control that out in the world. But we can inside our walls.

The point in all of this is- sin is a big deal. And God will not put up with deliberate rebellion forever. That is what we see in our text.

Now let's look at some of the sins listed in our text. Keep in mind these are reasons for God **destroying** these people **if they were not going to learn**, or **disciplining His people if they would learn**. We ought to pay attention here.

Isaiah 16: 6,7 Moab's sin

⁶ We have heard of the pride of Moab-- *He is very proud-- Of his haughtiness and his pride and his wrath; But his lies shall not be so.*

Moab was so proud that, when threatened, would not approach Jerusalem for help, even though Jerusalem may have been able to save them. That is pride at its worst. It will not seek to humble itself even when facing certain doom. This is the circumstance of all unbelievers who have heard the gospel but simply will not respond. They won't approach King Jesus for a rescue. They would rather protect themselves with their own resources. If this describes your life now, give up. Surrender to the Lordship of Christ while you have time. Gain his help with your sin by receiving His blood to cover your sin. That is the only way to avoid God's certain wrath on your life.

Look at the picture painted in this passage. Pride, haughtiness, wrath and lies. These are often the attributes of the enemies of God. And evidently this whole people were infested with this sin. They were referred to as a group to be this kind of people.

The reverse is what **we** should be. We have spoken about this many times, but it is such a dangerous sin we should speak of it again. Do you resist hearing advice? Do you resist looking closely at your life to see what really is driving or has driven your decisions? Do you start any conflict with the assumption that the fault is not yours? That you would never have the motives that others seem to think you have? You could **not be** the one who is in the wrong?

More churches and relationships have been destroyed by this single attitude than probably anything else. Pride. The assumption that we are in the right because we must be. The trusting of our own intuition as the final authority in all things personal. Again, pride's goal is not to know and adjust to the truth. Pride's goal is to win.

Moab had a chance. But they did not respond to their opportunity. They would not admit that their way of handling things was not working. Isaiah had a heart for the Moabites. We don't know why. But he was distraught about their judgement. He wanted them to repent. But they would not. And it broke Isaiah's heart. That seems to be a very New Testament attitude. He wanted better for this enemy than the enemy wanted for himself. But ultimately God would wipe them out because of their pride and its offshoots of violence and deception.

17:10 Syria and Israel's sin

Isaiah 17:9-10

there will be desolation. ¹⁰ Because you have forgotten the God of your salvation, And have not been mindful of the Rock of your stronghold,

Forgotten- It indicates that something has been lost to memory, or a period of time has softened the memory of it

Complete Word Study Dictionary, The - The Complete Word Study Dictionary – Old Testament.

Not been mindful- A verb meaning to remember, to mention, to recall, to think about, to think on, to be remembered, to recall, to acknowledge, to mention, to make known. The basic meaning indicates a process of mentioning or recalling either silently, verbally, or by means of a memorial sign or symbol. The verb often means to mention, to think about.

Complete Word Study Dictionary, The - The Complete Word Study Dictionary – Old Testament.

All of our minds gravitate back to those things we most love. We remember the things that are most important to us. We think about those things that are most pleasing to us. Or we fearfully consider losing those things most precious to us. The word “remember” in scripture is not an incidental word. It is not something treated as if it will happen if we do nothing to make it happen. We are exhorted over and over to remember God and God’s word. We cannot rely upon it just happening. God does not say, **allow yourselves** to remember. God does not say that the responsibility is on Him to make us remember. He **commands us to** remember.

Let’s take a look at a classic piece of remembering.

Psalm 77:6-15

⁶ I call to remembrance my song in the night; I meditate within my heart, And my spirit makes diligent search. ⁷ Will the Lord cast off forever? And will He be favorable no more? ⁸ Has His mercy ceased forever? Has *His* promise failed forevermore? ⁹ Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has He in anger shut up His tender mercies? Selah ¹⁰ And I said, "This *is* my anguish; **But I will remember** the years of the right hand of the Most High." ¹¹ I will remember the works of the LORD; Surely I will remember Your wonders of old. ¹² I will also meditate on all Your work, And talk of Your deeds. ¹³ Your way, O God, *is* in the sanctuary; Who *is* so great a God as *our* God? ¹⁴ You *are* the God who does wonders; You have declared Your strength among the peoples. ¹⁵ You have with *Your* arm redeemed Your people, The sons of Jacob and Joseph. Selah

David was facing a troublesome time. It seemed like God had rejected him, like he was no longer in God’s favor. He was bummed and had some truth, some reason to be feeling the way he was. So what did he do? What was his therapy? It was **remembering therapy**. It is the therapy we continually need to change our moods and habits of thought.

But I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High." ¹¹ **I will remember the works of the LORD; Surely I will remember Your wonders of old.** ¹² **I will also meditate on all Your work, And talk of Your deeds.**

David probably suffered with some of the same anxieties that we do. But he did not accept their verdict. He used them as a motivation to remember. And when he remembered, he was lifted above the **fog of the truths he could see**. He saw the **higher truths**, the more prominent truths, the more permanent truths. The truths that would deliver him from his malaise.

To forget our God is not a small deal. It isn't a minor infraction. It is a great danger to our souls.

What will you do this week to ensure you will include remembering God in the midst of your daily routine? How will you incorporate remembering God in your busy schedule? It won't happen by itself. If we only apply this one single point, this sermon will have served a valuable purpose.

19:3 Egypt's sin

Isaiah 19:3

³ **The spirit of Egypt will fail in its midst; I will destroy their counsel, And they will consult the idols and the charmers, The mediums and the sorcerers.**

We see where Egypt put its trust. Idols. They trusted a god that was not a god and would not trust the one true God. We don't need to say much about this. If we have not considered our idol worship up to this point in Isaiah, we probably never will.

Idols are bad because they offend God. But they are also bad because they will always let us down. They will leave us in a state of desperation. And they will never help to carry the burden they create.

Is 22:11-14 Jerusalem's sin

Isaiah 22:11-14

¹¹ **You also made a reservoir between the two walls For the water of the old pool. But you did not look to its Maker, Nor did you have respect for Him who fashioned it long ago.** ¹² **And in that day the Lord GOD of hosts Called for weeping and for mourning, For baldness and for girding with sackcloth.** ¹³ **But instead, joy and gladness, Slaying oxen and killing sheep, Eating meat and drinking wine: "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!"** ¹⁴ **Then it was revealed in my hearing by the LORD of hosts, "Surely for this iniquity there will be no atonement for you, Even to your death," says the Lord GOD of hosts.**

There is an 70's song about a man discontent at home so he takes the long way home to, I think, sing Karaoke. There is a line in it where his wife seems to think he is part of the furniture. This text in Isaiah is talking about **treating God** like he is part of the furniture.

Here is God supplying for every need. He is taking care of His people. He has given them a city with water. And they take the water as a resource and use it as they see fit. They substitute the provision for the provider. They trust in the provision instead of the provider. They no longer need God. They just use what He has given them to take care of themselves. They express no gratitude or appreciation for His contribution to their welfare. They would not submit to their provider.

Look what they did when God attempted to call them to Himself? He wanted a sign of relationship. He wanted them to act according to the relationship He was offering them. He was inviting them to share in the perspective he had toward their condition. He wanted them to reflect who He is and what He cares about. But instead what did they do? They partied with the stuff God gave them. Instead for mourning how they had been treating God, instead of being ashamed about how they had been living, they throw a party, looking at their condition in absolute frivolity.

So as always we must ask, what about me? Do I love what God has given me more than I love Him? Do I care more about my relationship with Him than the provisions he gives me? Do I care more about Him than my spouse or my children or my friends and family? We can often tell what we care about most when God chooses to deprive us of those provisions, or when those provisions are threatened. How quick are we to turn on God when God withholds those things we want from Him?

Will we mourn our distance from God even when we are enjoying his provisions? Do we treat God like He is part of the furniture as long as there are no problems? What do we do when we are called to use our resources for His kingdom and we know that is going to cost us things that we care about? What will we do? How do we respond when our resources are threatened? We need to consider this because this was one of the sins that Jerusalem was being destroyed for. It is not a flippant thing to show no appreciation or respect to our Savior and to **allow His provisions** to become more important to us than **His relationship**.

23:8,9 Tyre's sin

Isaiah 23:8-9

⁸ Who has taken this counsel against Tyre, the crowning city, Whose merchants are princes, Whose traders are the honorable of the earth? ⁹ The LORD of hosts has purposed it, To bring to dishonor the pride of all glory, To bring into contempt all the honorable of the earth.

I read something in my study that I would not want to take credit for. Here is a quote:

Finally, Isaiah records "the oracle concerning Tyre" ([23:1](#)). His last prophecy in [chapters 21-23](#) matches his first in [chapters 13-20](#). Isaiah started out with Babylon

([13:1](#)); now he concludes with Tyre ([23:1](#)). Babylon and Tyre are like bookends around Isaiah's vision of the nations. Why? The New Testament explains. The Revelation of John sees the whole world as one vast Babylon ([Revelation 14:8](#); [16:19](#); [17:1-19:2](#)). "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!" ([Revelation 18:2](#)). That's the way John perceives the end of the world culture we live in. It's the fall of *Babylon*. So on the one hand **he calls the world Babylon**. But on the other hand John also describes our world as an **Isaianic Tyre**—a prostitute out hustling the nations: "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute who is seated on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality, and with the wine of whose sexual immorality the dwellers on earth have become drunk" ([Revelation 17:1, 2](#); cf. [Isaiah 23:3, 15-17](#)). The prophetic eye merges Babylon and Tyre together into one understanding of our world.

Babylon and Tyre together typify all human societies. Babylon symbolizes ruthless political power, and Tyre symbolizes dishonest commercial success. Babylon was a land power, Tyre a sea power. Babylon used force; Tyre used seduction. The strategies differ from one culture to the next, but what matters in the one kingdom of man is money and power and ego and visceral pleasure—all the things that belong to time rather than eternity. This is our brilliant, heroic, costly, empty world.

The prophets understood the power of the Babylon-Tyre of this world. They saw that this world is not only the **opponent** of faith, it's also the **seductress** of faith. The world not only **punishes** all who follow Christ; it also **panders, tempting believers away from Christ**. The devil doesn't much care either way. He'll use harsh intimidation, and he'll use soft seduction—whatever works, as long as we lose sight of Christ, so that our faith no longer overcomes. That is the spiritual battle being fought deep in our hearts every day.

Preaching the Word - Preaching the Word – Isaiah: God Saves Sinners.

Isn't that a good insight? Pride is the predominant issue with Tyre as some of the other cities and peoples.

Is Tyre seducing us? What would happen to us if we were suddenly transplanted into Syria, facing brutal hardships and maybe starvation? How would we respond? Would the seed of Tyre undo us?

It is interesting that Tyre is only going to be down and out for 70 years. It is probably gone from 700bc to 630 bc during Assyria's reign. Assyria did not allow Tyre to do any business so they had to turn to agriculture to sustain itself.

Probably the restoration that came 70 years later happened because Tyre was a source of trade for Israel. And God wanted to use Tyre as a tool to supply for His people.

It is interesting how like a harlot Tyre was. She was all decked out in clothing to advertise its wares in order to do business without regard for anything God had said. Money is the god, not God.

Now, what is this judgment going to accomplish?

Israel and Syria 17:7,8

Isaiah 17:7-8

⁷ In that day a man will look to his Maker, And his eyes will have respect for the Holy One of Israel. ⁸ He will not look to the altars, The work of his hands; He will not respect what his fingers have made, Nor the wooden images nor the incense altars.

Hard times are not hard for no reason. We don't always know what the reasons are. But we know what this hard time in our text was hard for. This is the goal that God had in mind.

Idols are hard to wean ourselves of.

There are usually two options. There is the difficult way that leaves no regrets.

Or there is the painful way that leaves deep regrets.

We can work in conjunction with the Holy Spirit's efforts to wean ourselves of our idols. This requires humility. It requires honesty. It requires choosing to believe what God says each step of the way. And it isn't going to come easy. It is very hard to say no to those things we feel deep in our guts we must have.

Or we can wait until God does business with us by changing our circumstances.

This is usually a very painful way to get free of the idols. But God will do whatever it takes if we are His children.

For Israel and Syria it took an immense burden of pain for them to turn that corner. But God's discipline was finally going to be effective.

How do we want to be weaned of our idols? It is up to us? Will we listen? Or will we be made to listen? Watch those with small children? Which way makes more sense? To listen, or to be made to listen?

Egypt 19:18-25

Isaiah 19:18-22

¹⁸ In that day five cities in the land of Egypt will speak the language of Canaan and swear by the LORD of hosts; one will be called the City of Destruction. ¹⁹ In that day there will be an altar to the LORD in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar to the LORD at its border. ²⁰ And it will be for a sign and for a witness to the LORD of hosts in the land of Egypt; for they will cry to the LORD because of the oppressors, and He will send them a Savior and a Mighty One, and He will deliver them. ²¹ Then the LORD will be known to Egypt, and the Egyptians will know the LORD in that day, and will make sacrifice and offering; yes, they will make a vow to the LORD and perform it. ²² And the LORD will strike Egypt, He

will strike and heal it; they will return to the LORD, and He will be entreated by them and heal them.

God always has an end game. And in it He will be glorified. God is allowing Egypt to suffer so that eventually even they will worship Him, at least to some degree. God will display His glory in a heathen land. Instead of crying to all their idols, they will cry out to the one True God. And He will respond to them by providing a deliverer. I can't tell if this is Christ or a human power. But the hard times for Egypt are going to have the exact effect God intended.

God is always in control, even during the times of the worst suffering. We don't know what **His plans** are. But we can always know what **His intentions** are toward His people. So if you are in the midst of a trial, keep that in mind.

Now, before we close out, I would like to point out some abnormalities.

First- Shebna is singled out in Is 22:15-25

Shebna was the Steward of the King's palace. He was preparing for himself a wonderful crypt to be buried in, so he would have an honor even in death. But God was going to have none of it. Shebna had exalted himself. He was full of himself. And God was going to put a wrench in his plans. He would never be placed in his crypt. And he was going to replace Shebna with someone who was going to be much more honorable.

Shebna is the only person singled out for judgment. God must have really hated what he was doing.

Another interesting thing is that Babylon is referred to in 21:1 as the **Wilderness or Dessert of the sea**. The interesting thing about both the dessert and the sea is that neither is capable of sustaining human life. In essence, neither one has anything to offer us. And that is the point. Babylon has nothing to offer us, nothing to sustain us, nothing that will grant our hearts satisfaction. So there is no sense in looking to the world's system to get what our hearts need. We won't find it there. We are barking up the wrong tree.

Another interesting thing is found in 21:11,12

There is a play on words here. Edom and Dumah are similar in the language this was written in. Dumah means silence. I have a colorful associate who talks about situations when there is no response from the other party. He refers to it as hearing crickets. That is what Dumah is. Hearing crickets.

Here is another good quote

In [verse 11](#) a plaintive Edomite voice is asking, "Watchman, what time of the night?" In other words, "Mr. Watchman, Mr. Prophet, what time of the night is it? How much more darkness and gloom do we still have to endure? How long until the dawn of a new era?" The prophet responds in [verse 12](#), but his answer is

vague. And that's the point. God is not giving Edom a clear word. Everything hangs in suspense, but God puts them off: "Come back again."

There is another nation, the people of God, and they have a bright future in his many explicit promises. He is not silent to us. Paul writes in the New Testament that "whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" ([Romans 15:4](#)).

Preaching the Word - Preaching the Word - Isaiah: God Saves Sinners.

So Edom hears crickets. The people of God hear God's voice.

(reword this)

Fourthly, in [22:1](#) we encounter "the oracle concerning the valley of vision."

The oracle of concerning the valley of vision. When you want to go somewhere with a great view, where do you go? You go to a mountain peak. You don't go into the valley. There are lots of reasons to go in the valley, but vision is not one of them.

[Verse 11](#) says, "**You did not look to him who did it, or see him who planned it long ago.**"

So the people of God were not looking to the right place. They were not looking to their God to order and provide. Their vision has become blindness. And look what it results in. [v. 13](#). "**Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die**"

This is God's people looking just like the world. They have lost their vision of God and as a result they have lost their purpose in life. They are living just as the rest of the world. Their existence has been centered on planet earth with all of its limitations.

It is a tragic thing when the church has no more purpose in their lives. It is a travesty when our lives can be described as getting up and going to bed, enjoying life as best we can, and then dying. This is not the life Christ died to give us. This is what He said.

Matthew 5:13-16

¹³ "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. ¹⁴ You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all *who are* in the house. ¹⁶ Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

We were put here and chosen by God for a higher purpose. We are to glorify our Father in heaven. And our lives are intended to be lights, little places where a person is living by a whole different set of rules. Will we be that person who voluntarily and habitually remember our God? Will we be that person who will

not allow our focus to fall on what God gives us, but on God Himself? Will we remember our purpose in such a way we live to glorify God? And will we be the people that God has no need to even discipline, because we don't need to be made to listen? We listen because we love our Lord.