

Behold the Mountain of the Lord

2 *The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.*

*² Now it shall come to pass in the latter days
That the mountain of Yahweh's house
Shall be established on the top of the mountains,
And shall be exalted above the hills;
And all nations shall flow to it.*

*³ Many people shall come and say,
"Come, and let us go up to the mountain of Yahweh,*

*To the house of the God of Jacob;
He will teach us His ways,
And we shall walk in His paths."
For out of Zion shall go forth the law,
And the word of Yahweh from Jerusalem.*

*⁴ He shall judge between the nations,
And rebuke many people;
They shall beat their swords into plowshares,
And their spears into pruning hooks;
Nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
Neither shall they learn war anymore.*

*⁵ O house of Jacob, come and let us walk
In the light of the LORD.*

As we have discussed earlier today is the First Sunday of the Advent season. This year's Old Testament Scripture Readings for the Season of Advent are all taken from the Book of Isaiah. The Scripture readings that we go through are on a three year cycle, this year, I have decided to kick off our Advent season with an introduction to what Advent is and what is about from Isaiah the second Chapter.

All of the way back in Genesis God is calling Abram out of Ur of the Chaldees and leading him to the Promised Land. Abram, who God would later call Abraham, would be the one through whom God would bring to the world the blessing of knowing him. Hear these words from Genesis 12:1-3:

12 *Now the LORD had said to Abram:*

*"Get out of your country,
From your family*

*And from your father's house,
To a land that I will show you.
2 I will make you a great nation;
I will bless you
And make your name great;
And you shall be a blessing.
3 I will bless those who bless you,
And I will curse him who curses you;
And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."*

One of the things we have often observed as we have read through our Bibles is that Israel throughout their history, as a people chosen by God to be a light to the nations, tragically has been characterized by failure and by unfaithfulness. Rather than being a light to all the people of the world they have instead become a byword and a mockery. But part of what we read in our text from Isaiah 2 is that God's purpose always succeeds, and in order that all people in the world (including Gentiles) might receive his blessing, God would send one of Abraham's descendants, from the house of David, who would be Immanuel as Isaiah 7:14 says God with us. *14 Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.* Immanuel means literally God with us.

Throughout the Book of Isaiah, he is denouncing hypocrisy, greed, and idolatry as offenses against God. But we also observe him foreseeing the salvation of sinners. He tells us of the child destined to rule forever. Isaiah 9:6-7 is my favorite Christmas card verse in the Bible, and yet we often forget the significance of what it is about. Isaiah 9:6-7:

*6 For unto us a Child is born,
Unto us a Son is given;
And the government will be upon His shoulder.
And His name will be called
Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
7 Of the increase of His government and peace
There will be no end,
Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom,
To order it and establish it with judgment and justice
From that time forward, even forever.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.*

We learn in Isaiah 11:1 that this promised ruler is the hope of the Davidic throne:

*There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse,
And a Branch shall grow out of his roots.*

And we learn in Isaiah 61:1-3 that he is the anointed preacher of the gospel

*61 "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me,
Because the LORD has anointed Me*

*To preach good tidings to the poor;
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to the captives,
And the opening of the prison to those who are bound;
² To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD,
And the day of vengeance of our God;
To comfort all who mourn,
³ To console those who mourn in Zion,
To give them beauty for ashes,
The oil of joy for mourning,
The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness;
That they may be called trees of righteousness,
The planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified.”*

Of course there is much more, but in our passage today Isaiah is picturing the mountain of the Lord which is a reference to the presence of God. But the question we must ask is in what way is God present with us? Many people misunderstand the relevance of this mountain of the Lord, which according to today's text, will achieve its prominence in the latter days.

If we want to understand the times of the text today it will perhaps do us well to notice a similarity between us today and Israel at the time of Isaiah's prophecy. Some of you may be familiar with the book "Democracy in America" which was published in 1835 by Alexis De Toqueville who was a Frenchman who travelled to the United States in the early part of the 19th century and wrote about what he found there. It is an early study of the behavior of American society. The Book is both encouraging and informative and it has warnings as well, showing what may happen to this country if it forgets its way.

Now Let's imagine that someone from another country visited us today and also wrote about he or she had observed. And let's imagine that he had not been exposed to any media or information about America. What would that person say about America today?

Well, he would say that America has many admirable qualities. And yet, there are also areas of concern. For example, he would note that true, biblical faith is declining as a growing number of people embrace non-biblical views about God and his world. Worship of the living God is becoming increasingly self-serving and of course idolatry is on the rise even in the churches, and many people have simply rebelled against God. People also care less and less about true justice. And, of course always lurking in the background is the ever-growing threat of terrorism and war. I am sure there are other things that could be said as well, but I think that would be a pretty good start.

Well if we read through Isaiah the description of our country is in fact quite similar to the description of Judah in the days of the prophet Isaiah. By the time of Isaiah, the nation of Israel had already divided into Israel (in the north) and Judah (in the south). That division took place in 931 B.C., and Israel was eventually conquered and taken into captivity by Assyria in 722 B.C., never to return again. Isaiah began his prophetic ministry "in the year that King Uzziah died"

which was in 740 B.C. approximately 18 years before the Northern Kingdom was defeated carried off, and he ministered until the death of Sennacherib in 681 B.C.

The spiritual state of the people in Isaiah's day could be summed up by stating that they no longer trusted in the promises of God. The descendants of Abraham increasingly aligned themselves with the false promises of their world. Biblical faith was declining as a growing number of people embraced non-biblical views about God and his world. Worship of the living God had become increasingly mixed with the pagan ideologies of the day as the people embraced pagan gods and yet in name still claimed allegiance to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Idolatry was on the rise, and many people had rebelled against God. People also cared less and less about justice. And, lurking in the background was the ever-growing threat of an Assyrian invasion.

In summary, God had promised that he was going to judge Israel for their sin, but behind that judgment, He had also given them hope of a glorious future. Looking at the concept of hope as set forth in our text we get a picture of this glorious future. Now remember this glorious future that is being written about, 8 centuries before the coming of Christ and it is said to be in the latter days. I would hope that I do not need to remind us, but the latter days in Scripture is not primarily focused on our time.

Verse 1 of our text begins: *"The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem."* We know very little about the prophet Isaiah apart from what we read in his book. Isaiah 6 records his call to the ministry, and some of his innermost thoughts on that occasion. Isaiah gives a few glimpses into his public ministry in chapters 7-8, 20, and 37-39. We know he was a married man, we know he was a father, and it seems he resided in Jerusalem. In the New Testament, Jesus recognizes his role as a prophet in John 12:37-41:

³⁷ But although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him, ³⁸ that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spoke:

*"Lord, who has believed our report?
And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?"*

³⁹ Therefore they could not believe, because Isaiah said again:

*⁴⁰ "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts,
Lest they should see with their eyes,
Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn,
So that I should heal them."*

⁴¹ These things Isaiah said when he saw His glory and spoke of Him.

The Apostle Paul speaks about his boldness in Romans 10:20 when he writes:

²⁰ But Isaiah is very bold and says:

*“I was found by those who did not seek Me;
I was made manifest to those who did not ask for Me.”*

Tradition even tells us that Isaiah was sawn in two under the reign of the wicked King of Judah Manasseh. In Hebrews the 11th chapter which I have referred to as the Faith Hall of Fame does not list Isaiah by name, but in verse 37 it is thought he is mentioned when we read: *37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, ^[a]were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented—*

Biographically this is about all we know of the Prophet Isaiah. His primary interest seems to have been the message he received from God, which is summed up in the meaning of his name: “Yahweh is salvation.”

Isaiah was the son of Amoz. Jewish tradition claims that Amoz was a brother of Amaziah, king of Judah from 796-767 B.C., putting Isaiah into the royal family, this would have made Amaziah his uncle.

The wording of the first verse in this passage is somewhat odd. Isaiah said, “The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw. . .”. Ezekiel is typical of many of the prophets that when he writes he says the word of the Lord came to me. Isaiah though is different. Isaiah saw. In what is arguably the most famous passage in Isaiah, the 6th chapter Isaiah writes: *“In the Year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord.”*

The vision of Isaiah in chapter 2 is centered on Judah and on Jerusalem in particular. In chapter 1 Isaiah wrote about Judah’s present sinful condition. After today’s text the rest of Chapter 2 is spent talking about God’s impending judgment against Judah. But before he writes about the judgment, Isaiah gave a vision of a glorious future in verses 2-4.

The vision of Isaiah in verses 2 through 4 is very similar to the vision of Micah in Micah chapter 4. Compare our text to these words from Micah 4:1-3:

*Now it shall come to pass in the latter days
That the mountain of the LORD’s house
Shall be established on the top of the mountains,
And shall be exalted above the hills;
And peoples shall flow to it.
2 Many nations shall come and say,
“Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
To the house of the God of Jacob;
He will teach us His ways,
And we shall walk in His paths.”
For out of Zion the law shall go forth,
And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.
3 He shall judge between many peoples,
And rebuke strong nations afar off;*

*They shall beat their swords into plowshares,
And their spears into pruning hooks;
Nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
Neither shall they learn war anymore.*

There are many commentators who think Isaiah copied Micah or that Micah copied Isaiah in this passage. Another possibility is that they were both quoting the words of an existing song or Psalm, which would explain some of the minor word changes. Another possibility is that the Lord revealed the same vision to two of His prophets.

In breaking down the vision we are shown three very clear pictures. First is the rule of God, Second is the salvation of God, and Third, the reconciliation of God.

The first part of the picture is the rule of God or the reign of God.

Isaiah began by saying in verse 2, “It shall come to pass in the latter days. ...” The phrase latter days or last days appears very often in the Bible, and invariably when people read it they think it must be speaking of our future. But Isaiah was writing this passage in the 7th or 8th century B.C.. The latter days to Isaiah do not necessarily mean the same thing as when you and I hear the expression the latter days.

In Genesis 49:1 Jacob called his sons and said, “*Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you what shall happen to you in days to come.*” The Hebrew words used in are the same Hebrew words as used in Isaiah 2:2. Jacob was not speaking to his sons about what was going to happen at the Second Coming of Christ. Still less was he telling them about what was going to happen in the twenty-first century. In fact, he was telling his son Judah what was going to happen regarding when Messiah came the first time. In Genesis 49:10 Jacob says of Judah:

*¹⁰ The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor a lawgiver from between his feet,
Until Shiloh comes; And to Him shall be the obedience of the people.*

What I am going to say next is something that far too many people who read the Bible today do not understand and that is the authors of the New Testament believed that they were living in “the last days.” This statement is very plain in the Scripture. To the point that it can be disputed. Some will even say, “yes that is true”, but then they will tell us that the authors of the New Testament were simply mistaken. All this to hold on to their view that these passages are speaking about the future as it pertains to us. Why do they do this? In large part they do this because if Christ reigns now then it will of necessity affect the way Christ is preached. And if Christ is reigning now, proclaiming Christ means also proclaiming His present reign.

It is one thing for me to say the Disciples believed this, but let me give you a couple examples. Many of these you have heard, but repetition is not a bad thing. The apostle Peter believed they were living in the last days. On the Day of Pentecost, he quoted a prophecy from the prophet Joel in Acts 2:17, ‘*And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh;*

Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your young men shall see visions, Your old men shall dream dreams. In the previous verses he told his hearers that what they were seeing, the

speaking in tongues of Acts 2 was the fulfillment of that latter days prophecy. This is that spoken of by the prophet Joel.

The writer to the Hebrews believed that they were living in the last days. He wrote in Hebrews 1:2 *“But in these last days He [God] has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.”* Note how he indicated that the last days included Christ’s teaching ministry.

The apostle John believed they were living in the last days. In fact, he called it “the last hour” in 1 John 2:18, where he wrote, *“Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour.”*

So, what was it that Isaiah saw coming in the latter days? What he had seen and what he wrote about was God’s rule beginning with the first advent of Christ. This is how he expressed in the rest of verse 2, *“It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it.”*

In ancient times, people worshiped their gods on the highest mountains they could find. They believed that the higher they got, the closer they would get to their false god. But, the true God rules supremely and sovereignly over all the gods of this earth. That is why Isaiah said *“that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills.”* Commentator Derek Thomas said, “A time will come when the God who has revealed himself in Jerusalem will be shown to be far greater than any other ‘god’ currently worshipped elsewhere. The God of Israel is not just some local deity. He is the God of the whole earth.”

Also, note the interesting expression at the end of verse 2, where Isaiah said, “And all the nations shall flow to it [the mountain of the Lord].” What is interesting is the picture of a river flowing uphill. Alex Motyer said, “The incongruity of a stream flowing upwards to earth’s highest point is intentional; a supernatural magnetism is at work.”

The mountain of the Lord is the place from where God rules and reigns and His rule is administered through His church.

So, first, the prophet saw that God rules.

Second, the prophet saw that God saves.

One of the great mistaken notions that people have is the idea that the Old Testament is about the salvation of the Jews, and the New Testament is about the salvation of the Gentiles.

Remember though, As far back as Genesis God told Abram, “. . . and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” God’s intention has always been international. He has always wanted “a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, to stand before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, as it says in Revelation 7:9-10 ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’”

So, Isaiah saw a day when “many peoples shall come, and say: ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.’ For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem” (2:3).

The number of people who came to genuine saving faith in the Old Testament was small. God’s people had not been zealous in sharing the good news of God’s saving grace with the nations. So, it is fascinating to note that on the Day of Pentecost, fifty days after the resurrection of Jesus, Luke recorded that there were people from all nations who came to the mountain of the Lord and received the message of salvation. Luke said in Acts 2:9-11 that “*Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians – [who heard] them telling in [their] own tongues the mighty works of God.*”

So, Isaiah told about the result of the first advent of Christ. The good news of the gospel is that Jesus Christ was born, lived, died was raised and that He ascended to the right hand of God the Father almighty so God could save people from every nation under heaven.

In this prophecy of the mountain of the Lord, God is ruling the whole world, and saving peoples from every nation but the third thing is that God is reconciling people to Himself.

Isaiah said in verse 4, “*He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide disputes for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.*”

These words from Isaiah are often misunderstood. Part of this verse is actually engraved in large letters on the wall opposite the United Nations headquarters in New York City. These words are actually engraved in large letters on the wall opposite the United Nations headquarters in New York City. *they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.* The part about judging the nations and deciding disputes is left out. To do this is to misunderstand the spiritual nature of Isaiah’s statement. There is a deep desire within every human heart for peace. But one of the chief problems of unbelieving man is that they think that people are basically good, and if somehow people can just express that goodness, we will be able to have peace in this world. However, there can never be world peace apart from God. Jesus said in John 14:27 *Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.*

God is concerned for peace too. But peace will only come to this world when people are first reconciled to God. To reconcile means to restore friendly or peaceful relations. From the time of the fall in Genesis 3 man has had a relationship of enmity with God. There was nothing that man could do to restore or bring about reconciliation in that broken relationship. But what Isaiah is telling us is that God is so concerned about peace that he sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to bring about peace. And this was accomplished during his first advent. This is one of the reasons in Isaiah 9:6 Jesus is called the Prince of Peace.

Reconciliation has been God's purpose since the Fall in the Garden of Eden. Restoring sinful men and women into a relationship of peace with God is what the good news of the gospel is all about. Paul said in Romans 5:1: "*Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*" Having been reconciled to God, we are then, and only then, in a position to be reconciled with one another. This is what Isaiah saw.

After Isaiah tells the people of this good news he then closes by exhorting them. Notice the exhortation of the prophet.

In view of the truth that God rules, saves, and reconciles, Isaiah said in verse 5, "*O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord.*" This statement may seem encouraging because he is encouraging them to do the right thing, but in actuality this really was a rebuke to the people in Isaiah's day. They had the presence of the Temple, with all of its beauty and splendor. But the people had no delight in God's word. And they were not telling others the good news about God's saving grace.

Today we live in the reality of the fact that the Messiah's Kingdom has been established. True there are still areas of darkness and we often find ourselves in despair, but In 2 Peter 1:19 we are told that *we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts;* having analyzed the concept of hope as set forth in these verses in Isaiah we are also strongly encouraged to walk in the light of the Lord.

We must share the truth that it is He who rules, it is he who saves and it is he who reconciles. Let us behold the mountain of the Lord and walk in His light. Amen.