

A BRANCH SHALL GROW

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When King David, in the tenth century before Christ, took a census of Israel, there were about one-million, six-hundred thousand men of fighting age. The total population of the kingdom, then, may have been about five million people. In the ninth century before Christ, God told Elijah the prophet that there were seven-thousand men who had remained faithful to God, who had not devoted themselves to the false god, Baal. (1 Kings 19:18) God may have used the phrase 'seven thousand' for an indefinite number, but, in any case, the number in Israel devoted to God was very small, a minority of the people. So, there were at that time in Israel thousands of people devoted to God, but millions who were not. If the estimate of the world population in the eighth century is correct, there were around one-hundred million people. This means that the divided kingdoms of Israel and Judah accounted for about five percent of the world population at that time, and that they who were devoted to God may have accounted for about one percent. Although some of the pagan nations had come under the influence of the law of God, they remained pagan and wicked. Pagan cities were so wicked that God sometimes destroyed them. For example, God sent Jonah the prophet to the wicked Assyrian city of Nineveh to pronounce God's judgment upon it. (Jonah 1:1, 2) Nineveh was so wicked that God said of it through Nahum the prophet:

Woe to the bloody city! it is all full of lies and robbery; the prey departeth not; The noise of a whip, and the noise of the rattling of the wheels, and of the prancing horses, and of the jumping chariots. The horseman lifteth up both the bright sword and the glittering spear: and there is a multitude of slain, and a great number of carcasses; and there is none end of their corpses; they stumble upon their corpses: Because of the multitude of the whoredoms of the wellfavoured harlot, the mistress of witchcrafts, that selleth nations through her whoredoms, and families through her witchcrafts. Behold, I am against thee, saith the LORD of hosts; and I will discover thy skirts upon thy face, and I will shew the nations thy nakedness, and the kingdoms thy shame. (Nahum 3:1-5)

The covenant people of God were no better, however, and God through the prophet Isaiah denounced them. The book of Isaiah opens with the description of a vision Isaiah the prophet saw concerning the judgment to come upon Judah and Jerusalem for their sins. It reads:

Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the LORD hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider. Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward. Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but

wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment. (Isaiah 1:2-6)

Later in the book of Isaiah, God says to the people:

But draw near hither, ye sons of the sorceress, the seed of the adulterer and the whore. Against whom do ye sport yourselves? against whom make ye a wide mouth, and draw out the tongue? are ye not children of transgression, a seed of falsehood, Enflaming yourselves with idols under every green tree, slaying the children in the valleys under the cliffs of the rocks? (Isaiah 57:3-5)

God's people Israel were to be a light to the pagan nations. However, because of the wickedness of God's people, the nations did not worship God, but rather blasphemed Him. (Isaiah 49:6; 52:5; Romans 2:17-24) God by His prophets warned His people that He would punish them for their rebellion. To Isaiah He compared Israel to a tree that would have its leaves stripped and its branches cut off, and that would be hewed down with nothing left but a stump which would be burned with fire. He said, "But yet in it shall be a tenth, and it shall return, and shall be eaten: as a teil tree, and as an oak, whose substance is in them, when they cast their leaves." (Isaiah 6:13) Through Isaiah the prophet He told the people that the nation of Assyria would ravage them:

Now therefore, behold, the Lord bringeth up upon them the waters of the river, strong and many, even the king of Assyria, and all his glory: and he shall come up over all his channels, and go over all his banks: And he shall pass through Judah; he shall overflow and go over, he shall reach even to the neck; and the stretching out of his wings shall fill the breadth of thy land, O Immanuel. Associate yourselves, O ye people, and ye shall be broken in pieces; and give ear, all ye of far countries: gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces; gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces. (Isaiah 8:7-9)

In the eighth century before Christ, the Assyrian army did invade the northern kingdom of Israel, and, over the course of time, conquered it and carried away many of the people. According to an Assyrian cuneiform, Sargon II, one of Assyria's monarchs, carried away twenty-seven thousand, two-hundred and ninety people.

Assyria was a wicked nation, however, and would not escape the judgment of God. They, too, would be like a tree that would be cut down to nothing, and it would never grow again. Isaiah said, "Behold, the Lord, the LORD of hosts, shall lop the bough with terror: and the high ones of stature shall be hewn down, and the haughty shall be humbled. And he shall cut down the thickets of the forest with iron, and Lebanon shall fall by a mighty one." (Isaiah 10:33, 34)

When Hezekiah, King of Judah, tried to ally his kingdom with the kingdom of Babylon, Isaiah warned him that Babylon would betray him, conquer his kingdom and carry the people away. He said:

Behold, the days come, that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store until this day, shall be carried to Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the LORD. And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon. (Isaiah 39:6, 7)

It happened just as the prophet said. In the sixth century before Christ, the Babylonians invaded the southern kingdom of Judah, destroyed the great city of Jerusalem, and carried many of the people away into exile.

Babylon, like Assyria, was a wicked nation, and God would not let their wickedness go unpunished. He would cause the nation of Media to overthrow them. He said:

Behold, I will stir up the Medes against them, which shall not regard silver; and as for gold, they shall not delight in it. Their bows also shall dash the young men to pieces; and they shall have no pity on the fruit of the womb; their eye shall not spare children. And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees' excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. (Isaiah 13:17-19)

And it happened just as the prophet said.

There was in the ancient world terrible cycle of sin and judgment, of violence and retribution. One nation conquered another, and then a third conquered it. People greatly sinned, and they greatly suffered for their sins. It all must have appeared to God's people to be hopeless. Habakkuk the prophet asked the Lord how He could allow a wicked nation to be destroyed by a nation more wicked than themselves. He said, "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?" (Habakkuk 1:13) The world is inhabited by sinful men. How could the terrible cycle of sin and judgment be broken?

When God told Isaiah that He would destroy Israel, He also gave a hint of hope. He said that He would cut down Israel to a stump, but there would remain a seed. He said, "But yet in it shall be a tenth, and it shall return, and shall be eaten: as a teil tree, and as an oak, whose substance is in them, when they cast their leaves: so the holy seed shall be the substance thereof." (Isaiah 6:13) But what is this seed? Later in the book of Isaiah the prophet writes, "And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots." (Isaiah 11:1) When David was king over Israel, God made a covenant with him in which He promised. "And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son." (2 Samuel 7:12-14) God promised David that he would have an heir, and that the reign of that heir would be eternal. Moreover, that heir, although the son of David, would be also the Son of God. In the time of Isaiah, David's kingdom was coming to an end because of the wickedness of the people. Yet, God had promised David an heir who would reign forever. Isaiah alluded to this covenant God made with David. Although the kingdom of David would fall like a tree cut down, a shoot, the beginning of a branch, would grow from the stump, and would be of the house of Jesse, as was King David. About two-hundred years later, God said the same through Jeremiah the prophet. He said, "Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth." (Jeremiah 23:5; 33:14, 15) This heir, this king, this Christ, would restore the fallen kingdom of David. Through Amos the prophet, God said, "In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old." (Amos 9:11; Acts 15:16) This heir is, of course, Jesus of Nazareth. He is, not only the son of David, but the Son of God. This means that He is no

mere man, but incarnate deity, and He “was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.” (Hebrews 4:15)

Isaiah said, “And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD. And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked.” (Isaiah 11:2-4) The Spirit of the Lord is with Christ as He was with the judges of Israel. (Judges 11:29; 13:25) Unlike their wisdom, however, the wisdom and understanding of Christ are perfect. He has a proper fear of the Lord, a due reverence to God His Father and appreciation of His wisdom, and this is the beginning of wisdom. (Proverbs 1:7) He alone has the virtue and wisdom to rule the world. He does not judge independently of God, but in dependence upon Him. He does not judge according to appearances, but according to truth and righteousness, and He judges men’s hearts. (John 7:24) As the Lord said to Samuel when He was choosing a man to replace King Saul, “Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.” (1 Samuel 16:7) Saint John writes that, when people believed in Jesus because of His miracles, “Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, And needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man.” (John 2:24; 25; compare Matthew 9:4) Christ judges impartially and rightly. He does not favor the rich, and He does not take a bribe. He does not beat men’s backs with a rod, nor slay them with a sword. He subdues them with His Word, “for the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” (Hebrews 4:12)

Just because Jesus subdues men with His Word, so He changes their hearts, and by changing their hearts He changes the world. Isaiah said:

The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea. And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious. (Isaiah 11:6-10)

These words are not meant to be taken literally, but metaphorically. Natural enemies will be made brothers, and will have brotherly love one for another. As all men are brought under the rule of the world’s one true king, wars will cease, and there will be peace on earth. Isaiah wrote, “And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.” (Isaiah 2:4) They that now hold to the Jewish religion say that Jesus cannot be the Christ because He did not unite all the people of the earth under God, and did not bring universal peace on earth. They mistake, however. Jesus is doing these very things now by degrees. Presbyterian minister Albert Barnes wrote:

The gospel does not at once, and by a mere exertion of power, open prison doors, and restore captives to liberty. But it accomplishes an effect analogous to this: it releases the mind captive under sin; and it will finally open all prison doors, and by preventing crime will prevent the necessity of prisons, and will remove all the sufferings which are now endured in confinement as the consequence of crime. (Albert Barnes, note on Isaiah 61:1)

The world population is now estimated to be about eight billion people. Of those, about two billion five-hundred million profess the Christian religion. So, about one out of three people in the world confess Jesus as Lord and this is having a profound effect on the world. In future, everyone will confess Him.

Let us thank God that He sent His Son into the world, not to condemn it, but to save it. Let us rejoice that we are privileged to be counted among His people. Let us not be cynical, but full of joy and hope because of the great work that Christ is doing in the world. And let us do our part.

Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen