



BETHEL
PRESBYTERIAN

MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Volume 11 Issue 34

September 9, 2012

Where Will You Flee in Times of Trouble?

What is it about being human that we are so good at hurting ourselves?

In 1992, a man by the name of Rodney King was severely beaten by four Los Angeles Police officers and it was caught on tape! The policemen were arrested and tried as criminals for their conduct. In the end, all the policemen were exonerated; declared not guilty by a mostly white jury. So many in the black community of L.A. were enraged, they literally burned down their own neighborhoods, looted their own stores, and destroyed their own lives! In all fifty-three people were killed and over 2,000 were injured.

This is but one example of the folly of our sin! In the name of sinful pride, we do all sorts of stupid things which ultimately hurt ourselves. Men forfeit their jobs because their pride won't allow them to submit to a co-worker. We ruin vacations and free time smoldering over the actions of another, ignorant of our own offenses. We remain alienated from those we love because we are too proud to say we are sorry. And perhaps the worst of all, we refuse to submit to God lest we lose control or autonomy over our lives!

It is this sad reality that is in the cross-hairs of Isaiah. Isaiah was written in an era filled with trial, difficulty, and suffering for the people of God (740-689 BC). The glory days of Uzziah were gone. Judah was left to navigate the difficult waters of war, false religion, godless leadership, national compromise, and a whole lot more. Now on account of the ministrations of Ahaz, God's people *en masse* rejected the life of faith/dependence upon God, opting either to trust in another (whether that be a man or a nation) or simply to go it alone! Lest in their pride the nation persist in their rebellion/independency, in our section Isaiah turned to an exposé of the folly and peril of pride. To whom will you flee in times of trial?

Isaiah discounted national dependence and self-dependence and addressed a potential hindrance to God's people trusting God: Pride! Accordingly, Isaiah takes up two things: the question of pride and its impact upon the sworn enemy of God's people, the Moabites!

The Misery of Moab

Isaiah 15:1-3, "The oracle concerning Moab. Surely in a night Ar of Moab is devastated *and* ruined [the word for "ruined" literally means "silenced"- evidently, no one remained in this city!]; surely in a night Kir of Moab is devastated *and* ruined. They have gone up to the temple and to Dibon, *even* to the high places to weep. Moab wails over Nebo and Medeba [the piling up of names creates the impression of national destruction] everyone's head is bald *and* every beard is cut off. In their streets they have girded themselves with sackcloth; on their housetops and in their squares everyone is wailing, dissolved in tears."

This passage details a horrible time in Moabite history, when Assyria under Sargon II reasserted its authority over this nation. In 721 B.C., soon after taking into exile the northern Palestinian nations (including Israel), the Assyrian King, Shalmaneser III, died. As was typical in that day, this plunged Assyria into turmoil as competing generals and royal offspring vied for the throne. The ensuing conflict was a lengthy one such that the Assyrian nation's hold on Palestine was relaxed. As a result, during this time the peoples, tribes, and nations formerly subject to Assyrian rule were enjoying a respite. In fact at this time many of these nations rebelled against Assyria and so were living the life of independency. Yet it was all short-lived as in 715 Sargon II began *another* conquest over the people groups and nations surrounding Assyria; one such nation was Moab!

And yet if you read Isaiah 15-16:14 you will note that none of the information here is dateable. In fact, the Assyrian's aren't even mentioned by name (cf. Isaiah 16:8). The effect of this serves to generalize the crises such that what we have here is a principle concerning all peoples in all place at all times. J. A. Motyer wrote:

Certainly in any invasion by the pitiless Assyrians all that 15:1-9 describes would be true but, as so often, Isaiah's concern is with the principles central to a situation, not with dates, times and personalities... In this way Isaiah lifts a certain tract of history on to a new level: a Gentile people is in dire straits (15:1-9). (Motyer, 1993, p. 142)

And what is God's view of the situation? What ought to be our view?

Isaiah 15:5, "My heart [speaking of God, cf. v. 9] cries out for Moab; his fugitives are as far as Zoar [the following list of cities are all south, indicating the path of those fleeing] *and* Eglath-shelishiyah,

for they go up the ascent of Luhith weeping; surely on the road to Horonaim they raise a cry of distress over *their* ruin.”

Don't ever forget God's words in Ezekiel:

Ezekiel 33:11a, “...I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live...”

Unlike the people of God who at the time would have rejoiced over the downfall of the Moabites, God's compassion and mercy were moved by this nation's struggle! In fact, Isaiah 15:5-9 detail the pitiful struggle of the Moabites as they suffer under the Assyrians! From this we conclude that no matter how bad you may be or have been, there is always the possibility of forgiveness! What a glorious message! There was a kingdom and a God to whom the Moabites could flee for refuge. And it is to this nation that they in fact turned.

An Appeal for Protection and an Invitation to Rely upon God

Isaiah 16:1a, “Send the *tribute* lamb to the ruler of the land, from Sela by way of the wilderness to the mountain of the daughter of Zion.”

With this, the scene changes from the plight of the fugitive to a conversation in the inner cabinet of the King of Moab which now was in session in the far southern city of Sela. According to 2 Kings 3:4, lambs were the preferred tribute that Moab paid Israel in times past for protection. In light of this, we conclude that the Moabites have chosen to send a commission to Judah asking for their protection and help.

Now you must see that Isaiah chose a writing style that comes across in the original as being frantic. He is showing us the panic rather than saying it! The pleas are rattled off in machine gun fashion.

Isaiah 16:3-4a, “Give *us* advice, make a decision; cast your shadow like night at high noon; hide the outcasts, do not betray the fugitive. Let the outcasts of Moab stay with you; be a hiding place to them from the destroyer.”

Feel the urgency! It is hard to miss. Based on the word choice of this request, we conclude Moab was asking for five things:

1. First, the Moabites wanted Judah's counsel and a decision concerning their willingness to protect them.
2. Next they wanted temporal aid. “Cast your shadow like night at high noon” the suffering of Moab at this time was akin to being in the desert at high noon with no shade! They wanted Judah to be their relief!
3. They wanted Judah to accept every Moabite who had been dispossessed from their home on account of the war; notice the phrase, “...hide the outcasts...” (v. 3).
4. They wanted Judah to promise that they would NOT concede to the demands of Assyria for extradition, “...do not betray the fugitive” (v. 3)!
5. Finally, they wanted Judah to accept their Moabite fugitives not as a second class people, but as equals, “Let the outcasts of Moab stay with you; be a hiding place to them from the destroyer” (v.

4a).

Now Isaiah knew that such a request could be met, but only if the Moabites became servants of God/Christians! It is important to note that we do not know if Judah ever responded to this plea. Regardless; Isaiah's response... God's Response essentially was this: *"The protection of God's people can only be found in the protection afforded when a person submits to the Lord!"* In fact, notice the protection/peace found in Christ. Isaiah describes the experience of God's people under Ahaz or another Davidic king, but what life would be like with Christ on the throne, Isaiah continued:

Isaiah 16:4b-5, "For the extortioner² has come to an end, destruction has ceased, oppressors have completely *disappeared* from the land. A throne will even be established in lovingkindness, and a judge will sit on it in faithfulness in the tent of David; moreover, he will seek justice and be prompt in righteousness."

I want to draw your attention to the fact that Isaiah has changed the form of his writing. It has slowed down to a gentle pace *showing* the peace, comfort, and security that only can be found in a love relationship with Christ. Motyer said that the writing reflects a "majestic calmness." (Motyer, 1993, p. 145) With that, notice the majestic calmness that comes when one submits to Christ.

1. The word for "extortioner" means "squeezer." In Christ, all pressure to conform, compete, or put out is muted (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:17).
2. The words in Isaiah 16:4 for "destruction" and "oppression" (literally, "trampling") are broad and therefore can mean any violence to one's person or property. When Christ comes back, He will bring us securely into the New Heavens and Earth where "destruction and oppression" are gone!
3. Reference to "the throne" (Isaiah 16:5) portrays a Kingdom which will not be moved.
4. Lovingkindness (Isaiah 16:5) is THE mark of this Kingdom; which means God's covenant love will rule over all!
5. "The Judge sitting on the throne in faithfulness" (Isaiah 16:5) pictures a just King whose character is able to be trusted no matter what! IOW, never would He let those who follow Him down!
6. Because this King would be of the "tent/house of David" (Isaiah 16:5) we know that He is not a usurper. He belongs on the throne!
7. Finally as a ruler, "He will seek justice and be prompt in righteousness" (Isaiah 16:5).

What a King/Ruler! Yet and again, in order for Moab to enjoy this King and His protection, they must submit to the God of the Jews.

Pride and so the Refusal to Submit

Isaiah 16:6-7a, "We have heard of the pride of Moab, an excessive pride; *even* of his arrogance, pride, and fury; his idle boasts are false. Therefore Moab shall wail; everyone of Moab shall wail..."

This passage represents a huge turning point in Moabite history. For a brief moment, it looked like this nation would enjoy the glorious protection that God gives to His people. But in their pride, Moab refused to submit to the Lord. The statement in Isaiah 16:7, "Moab shall wail!" And this arrogance, this refusal to submit to the Lord would cost them far more than their sovereignty as a nation!

The Immediate Result of Pride

Isaiah 16:7, “Therefore Moab shall wail; everyone of Moab shall wail. You shall moan for the raisin cakes of Kir-hareseth as those who are utterly stricken.”

The text continues on this note for five more verses. It is quite depressing. Yet notice, Moab would suffer enormously NOT because God was punishing them for not submitting, BUT because they’d rather live this way than follow the Lord. This is the point of this text. In our sin we want independency so much, that we are willing to suffer great amount of pain and misery before we ever would give it up. This was the sad story of Moab! And where would it end?

The Temporal End of Pride

Isaiah 16:13-14, “This is the word which the Lord spoke earlier concerning Moab. But now the Lord speaks, saying, ‘Within three years, as a hired man would count them, the glory of Moab will be degraded along with all *his* great population, and *his* remnant will be very small *and* impotent.’”

Because of Moab’s pride, in short order the nation would be decimated, destroyed, and totally ruined! It is important to keep in mind that this prophecy, like most prophecies concerning foreign nations in the Bible, was not delivered to Moab. This was written for the sake of God’s people. Accordingly, this passage was intended as instruction for the people of God in Isaiah’s day and by application, those of us alive today. Essentially Isaiah says this:

Won’t you learn from the Moabites?! If this wicked nation could receive protection, solace, comfort, and peace by trusting Christ, what ought you to expect if as the people of God you humble yourselves and return to the Lord?

Now lest Isaiah’s generation in their relative comfort say: “*We don’t need God; we’ve got our neighbors, our friends, our family who have promised to meet us in our trouble!*” Isaiah addressed this response head-on.

The Insufficiency of Human Aid

Isaiah 21:13a, “The oracle about Arabia¹...”

This occurred around 715 B.C. when Sargon II began flexing his muscles in his quest to reassert Assyrian dominance over the known world. At this time, one of Sargon’s campaigns was against the tribes living between Tema (an oasis city east of the Red Sea) and the Gulf of Aqaba. Isaiah depicts the Arabian tribe of the Dedanites fleeing from the war and Tema is urged to comfort them.

Isaiah 21:13, “The oracle about Arabia. In the thickets of Arabia you must spend the night, O caravans of Dedanites.”

On account of war, this tribe was on the run.

Isaiah 21:15, "For they have fled from the swords, from the drawn sword, and from the bent bow, and from the press of battle."

So we have a conquered people on the run, as fugitives, fleeing for their lives! And yet they are not alone; thankfully they have help: the Tema-ites who are commanded to:

Isaiah 21:14, "Bring water for the thirsty, O inhabitants of the land of Tema, meet the fugitive with bread."

This passage gives us THE link to our first passage in that the word for "fugitive" is the same in both places (Isaiah 16:2-3; 21:14). We read of more fugitives in need of help, just like the Moabites. Yet in this instance, Tema is a godless nation who could not offer the protection of the Lord, but only the best that could come from man. And what was/is that?

Isaiah 21:14, "Bring water for the thirsty... meet the fugitive with bread."

When everything is said and done, all that man can offer another man is bread and water! Ultimately speaking, that's it! We don't want to downplay this, for in times of trial and hardship- in war- I'm sure bread and water are well-appreciated. Yet in the end, how far would this take you if you were a disposed person on account of war?

- Your home is still destroyed.
- Your property and wealth have been taken.
- Your wife and sisters have been brutally raped and taken for domestic service.
- Your sons have died by the sword in battle.

And you alone are left as a disposed individual with no place to go! It is against this backdrop, that we see the insufficiency of "bread and water!" In fact, notice the end that any and all aid, bereft of God produces nothing. Isaiah prophecies concerning the future of these fugitives:

Isaiah 21:16, "For thus the Lord said to me, 'In a year, as a hired man would count it, all the splendor of Kedar will terminate [Kedar here is a general title for this Arabian area with its nomadic tribes- and hence the Dedanites!]; and the remainder of the number of bowmen, the mighty men of the sons of Kedar, will be few; for the Lord God of Israel has spoken.'"

Do you see the insufficiency of worldly comfort, help, and support? Temporally it no doubt is wonderful and needed support; but in the end it will fail! Solomon describes this:

Psalm 127:1, "Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman keeps awake in vain."

Child of God, to what resource do you plan to go when trial/misery descends upon you?

- Bob has his spouse!

- The children their parents!
- Sally has her bosom friends who have sworn that they will never leave or forsake her!

Yet do you see that none of these resources in the end can be of any real help?! Oh Christian, how long will you live in such blindness!

Cindy was a college student who purposely walked away from Christ because she wanted to enjoy the pleasures of the college experience. She gathered around herself an “incredible group of friends” who she knew would always be there for her. She partied with these girls. She studied with these girls. She opened up her heart to them and they in return to her.

One summer she stayed at school to be with her boyfriend who had assured her that he’d stay with her, even to the end of the age! But their relationship went south and she found herself literally at the end of herself one early, early morning. So what did she do? She called on those friends who would always be there for her. The first was Jeannine who didn’t pick up the phone. She then called Carol who was so drunk she couldn’t carry on an intelligent conversation. Last she got a hold of Barb. Barb, wouldn’t let her down.

Hello Barb- she said in her tears.

What do you want? Do know the time? It’s 2:00 in the morning!

I need your help. Carol cried. I just broke up with Randy. I need someone to talk to!

Barb’s response was, and I’m not embellishing the story, “*Call me later; I need to sleep!*” She hung up the phone!

You say, “Nice story; but my friends/support will never let me down!”

Anticipating this response, Isaiah turned, in his final treatment of this theme, to the future and a brutal contrast.

The Bitter/Sweet End

Isaiah 25:1 – 5, “O lord, Thou art my God; I will exalt Thee, I will give thanks to Thy name; for Thou hast worked wonders, plans *formed* long ago, with perfect faithfulness. [What are God’s most wondrous plans?] For Thou hast made a city into a heap, a fortified city into a ruin; a palace of strangers is a city no more, it will never be rebuilt. [Before a person can submit to God, they must first be brought quite low... to the end of themselves! That is what God is said to be doing here on account of His providence. Notice the result...] Therefore a strong people will glorify Thee; cities of ruthless nations will revere Thee. For Thou hast been a defense for the helpless, a defense for the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shade from the heat; for the breath of the ruthless is like a *rain* storm *against* a wall. Like heat in drought, Thou dost subdue the uproar of aliens; *like* heat by the shadow of a cloud, the song of the ruthless is silenced.”

What an incredible statement of the blessing that waits all who trust Christ. Notice the protection.

Isaiah 25:4, "For Thou hast been a defense for the helpless, a defense for the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shade from the heat; for the breath of the ruthless is like a *rain* storm *against* a wall."

Such is the blessing that will be given to all who have fled to God for refuge. And who are these people? Obviously the righteous, the upright, the goody-goodies! Wrong! Notice they are described as the treacherous.

Isaiah 25:3, "Therefore a strong people will glorify Thee; cities of ruthless nations will revere Thee."

Do you understand the implication? It is not the healthy that need a physician, but the sick (Matthew 9:12). Likewise, it is not the righteous that flock to Christ, but the wicked and sinful. Yet in their repentance, God does not despise them! AND THIS TRUTH FLOORED ISAIAH (cf. v. 1) as it should you and me! With that, notice the blessing.

Isaiah 25:6-9, "And the Lord of hosts will prepare a lavish banquet for all peoples on this mountain; a banquet of aged wine, choice pieces with marrow, *and* refined, aged wine. And on this mountain He will swallow up the covering which is over all peoples, even the veil which is stretched over all nations. He will swallow up death for all time, and the Lord God will wipe tears away from all faces, and He will remove the reproach of His people from all the earth; for the Lord has spoken. And it will be said in that day, 'Behold, this is our God for whom we have waited that He might save us. This is the Lord for whom we have waited; let us rejoice and be glad in His salvation.'"

There are many passages in Scripture which repeat and expand upon these promises. At the last day, after God judges the living and the dead, many will enjoy the victory of Christ and so His eternal reign and rule on earth! Yet such will not be the case for all mankind. There are some who will suffer eternity under the wrath of God. And who are they? None other than the Moabites, which are a metaphor of the proud.

Isaiah 25:10-12, "For the hand of the Lord will rest on this mountain, and Moab will be trodden down in his place as straw is trodden down in the water of a manure pile. And he will spread out his hands in the middle of it as a swimmer spreads out *his hands* to swim, but *the Lord* will lay low his pride together with the trickery of his hands. And the unassailable fortifications of your walls He will bring down, lay low, *and* cast to the ground, even to the dust."

Rightly did both James and Peter say, "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5). With this we see the bitter end of pride. On the Last Day, many a sinner will find themselves enjoying glory in eternity; murderers, adulterers, thieves, prostitutes, and more! BUT not so with the proud! They are the special enemies of God!

Isaiah is writing this passage to warn his countrymen against the Perils of Pride! Why would he do such a thing? They are already children of God; they already are the Lord's! Pride is expressed amongst the people of God NOT in their refusal to serve Christ, BUT in their refusal to serve Christ according to Christ's command. Proud Christians...

- Worship the Lord... on their own terms.
- Fellowship... according to their whim.
- Deal with conflict... according to human devices.
- Struggle in this state of sin and misery... in their own strength.
- Go to battle... using their own devices.

All of this and more is pride. And it was this that was rotting out the soul of the nation of Judah in Isaiah's day! Isaiah's third message during the difficulty days in which he lived was this: "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble!" If they weren't saved, that meant condemnation. But if they were saved, that meant the removal of covenant blessing and so, "Leanness of soul" (Psalm 106:15)!

Christian, we must take from this passage a commitment to doing God's work in God's way, regardless of the cost to ourselves! That means I must be more concerned with what God thinks rather than:

- My boss or co-workers- if I stand for truth!
- My peers- if I speak up!
- My friends- if I do what is right!
- My spouse- if I say I'm sorry!

End Notes

¹ There no doubt is a pun here as the Hebrew could easily have read, "concerning evening" rather than "concerning Arabia." The Hebrew is **בַּעֲרָב** (*ba'rab*). Both translations work in that Isaiah is recounting an oracle about a dark time in the history of a nation!

Sources Cited

Motyer, J. A. (1993). *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary*. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press.

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Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10th Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

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About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on September 9, 2012. Greg is the preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church.