

## NOTES

**ISAIAH'S VISION OF THE COMING MESSIAH**

Isaiah 11:1-10; Jerry Truex; December 4, 2016

**A. Introduction**

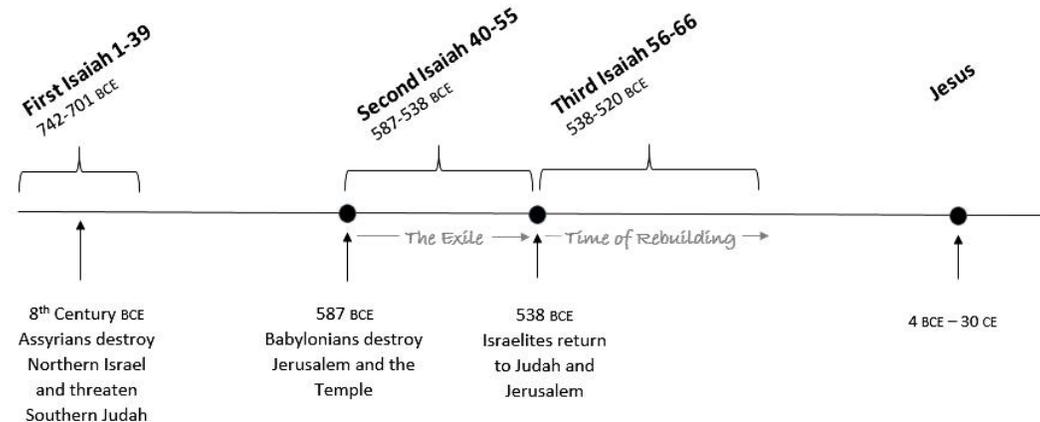
Today marks the Second Advent Sunday. Advent refers to the coming or arrival of the Lord. The Scripture we read this morning, Isaiah 11:1-10, focuses on the *coming of the Messiah* as envisioned by the Prophet Isaiah.

The vision has three elements:<sup>1</sup>

First, the Messiah will establish a just sociopolitical order.

Second, the Messiah will bring peace.

Third, the Messiah will unite all peoples.

**B. Historical and Literary Context**

In the latter half of the 8th century BCE,<sup>2</sup> First Isaiah announces his vision. It is an apocalyptic vision of a new and better world breaking into this world from beyond, swamping this age with the glory of the world beyond.

<sup>1</sup> Bryan E. Beyer, *Encountering the Book of Isaiah. A Historical and Theological Survey* (Kindle Version. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007) Loc. 2783 of 9755.

<sup>2</sup> Although the historical setting might be exile of the 6th century BCE, First Isaiah prophesied to Judah and Jerusalem during the reigns of Uzziah, Jothan, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (Isaiah 1:1), which dates First Isaiah from about 740 to 701 BCE. The last historical event recorded in First Isaiah was the siege of Jerusalem (Isa. 36-37), which occurred in 701 BCE. Christopher R. Seitz, *Isaiah 1-39. Interpretation. A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville: John Knox, 1993) 11; S. H. Widyapranawa, *Isaiah 1-39. The Lord is Savior Faith in National Crisis*. ITC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990) xiv.

Isaiah envisions an ideal, future world. That ideal world functions as a *stern critique of the present world*. Isaiah's vision is a protest and a promise.

- It is a protest against political and military powers that pour evil on others
- It is God's promise to vindicate all who follow God's ways.



Assyria was the superpower of that era. It had destroyed the Northern Kingdom of Israel in 722 BCE and was threatening to destroy the Southern Kingdom of Judah, including Jerusalem.

It was a bad time. Pain and death was on the horizon for every man, woman, and child in Judah. It looked hopeless.

In chapter 9, the prophet Isaiah brings an indictment against the Northern Kingdom of Israel (9:7-10:4). Israel's leaders had led the people astray after other gods, namely, the Ba'al gods. This was very serious. Not only did the worship of Ba'al involve child sacrifice,<sup>3</sup> but Ba'al, the storm god, established his rule through war. Following gods like Ba'al authorized nations to wage war against other nations.

Israel also perverted justice (10:1). They "turned aside the needy," robbed the poor, devoured widows' homes, killed their youth in military campaigns, and preyed on the fatherless (9:16; 10:2). For these reasons, Isaiah said God will punish Israel with devastation (9:11, 17, 20; 10:4). That devastation came from the hands of the Assyrians in 722 BCE.

Then, Isaiah presents an indictment against the Assyrians. The Assyrians had destroyed international boundaries, caused political chaos, assassinated foreign leaders, raped and plundered city after city, and seized what belonged to others (10:13-14). For that, Assyria will be destroyed, which happened about ca. 612 BCE.

### C. A Just Sociopolitical Order (Isa 11:1-5)

Against this backdrop of war and ethnic cleansing, Isaiah announces his vision.

<sup>3</sup> 2 Kgs. 3:26, Amos 2:1, etc. William Foxwell Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan* (Reprint 1951, Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1991), 239; Susan Ackerman, "Child Sacrifice: Returning God's Gift," *Bible Review* IX, No. 3 (June 1993): 27.

## 1. A shoot from the stump of Jesse (v. 1)

11:1 A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots.

The Assyrians had been like an axe, cutting down Israel and Judah like trees. Now only a stump remained, "the stump of Jesse"—Judah.

The name Jesse refers to the father of King David (1000 and 961 BCE), so the "stump of Jesse" refers to what was left of David's dynasty or the people of Judah.

But now something new was going to happen:

- a new *shoot* (חֹטֶר; chōter) out of the *stump* (גֵּזַע; geza`)
- a new *branch/sprout* (נֶצֶר; netser) out of the *roots* (שֵׁרֶשׁ; sheresh).

The new shoot or branch refers to the Messiah, for Christians, Jesus Christ (cf. Matt. 2:23).<sup>4</sup>

## 2. The character of the messiah (vv. 2-3)

In verses 2-5, Isaiah describes the character and activities of the Messiah.

11:2 The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

### a. Spirit of Yahweh

The Messiah will be shaped by the "Spirit" or *ruach* of the LORD. This Spirit or *ruach* is the same force or wind active in creation.<sup>5</sup>

It is this time of despair—*when the forest of Israel has been reduced to a stump* by the Assyrians—Isaiah announces that the Spirit of God is coming with the Messiah.

### b. Three pairs of spiritual gifts (v. 2)

The Spirit gives the Messiah three pairs of gifts necessary for being an ideal ruler.

<sup>4</sup> "The Hebrew term for "branch" (*netser*) is related to the name of the town Nazareth (Heb. *natseret*)." Bryan E. Beyer, *Encountering the Book of Isaiah, A Historical and Theological Survey* (Kindle Edition, Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007) loc. 2793.

<sup>5</sup> "The Spirit of Yahweh is a force that enlivens, gives power, energy, and courage, so that its bearer ... has the capacity to do what the world believes is impossible." Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah 1-39*, WBC (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998) 99.

First, the Messiah will be given the Spirit of

- *wisdom* (חִכְמָה; chokmah)
- *understanding* (בִּינָה; binah)

Second, the Messiah will be given the Spirit of

- *counsel* (עֲצָה; ay-tzah)
- *might* (גְּבוּרָה; geburah)

Third, the Messiah will be given the Spirit of

- *knowledge* (דַּעַת; da'at) *and*
- *fear of the Lord* (יִרְאַת יְהוָה; yir'at YHWH).

### c. Judging the heart and intensions (v. 3)

11:3 His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; 11:4 but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. 11:5 Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist, and faithfulness the belt around his loins. (NRSV)

Because the Messiah has the Spirit, he will not judge things superficially—as Isaiah says, “he will not judge by what his eyes see or by what his ears hear” (11:3).

Rather, the Messiah see and hear below the surface—I take it as he will judge the hearts and intensions of people.

### d. With righteousness (Heb. *tsedeq*)

With righteousness, the Messiah will ensure that the most vulnerable members of society—the poor, disabled, children, elderly— have full protection under the law (11:4; cf. Psa. 72:4, 12-14).

The word righteousness is *tsedeq* (צֶדֶק). It means more than just moral goodness or virtue; it refers to a norm or a standard of what is right or just between people or between God and human beings.<sup>6</sup> It's a relational and covenantal term.

**Psalm 85:10** Steadfast love (חֶסֶד; *hesed*) and faithfulness (אֱמֶת; *'emeth*) will meet; righteousness (צֶדֶק; *tsedeq*) and peace (שָׁלוֹם; *shalom*) will kiss each other.

<sup>6</sup> S. H. Widyapranawa, *Isaiah 1-39. The Lord is Savior Faith in National Crisis*. ITC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990) 69.

**Psalm 89:14.** Righteousness (צֶדֶק; *tsedeq*) and justice (מִשְׁפָּט; *mishpat*) are the foundation of your throne; steadfast love (חֶסֶד; *hesed*) and faithfulness (אֱמֶת; *'emeth*) go before you.

### **e. With equity (Heb. *mishor*)**

With equity, the Messiah will ensure fairness. *Mishor* (מִישׁוֹר) refers to a “level place.” No one will get preferential treatment. There will be no billionaire class. Not wealth and income inequality.

"The importance of which is evident in a society like ours, wherein governmental power is largely in the hands of the wealthy and powerful and is operated almost exclusively to their own advantage and benefit."<sup>7</sup> The arrangement of power in our society contradicts the biblical vision of government.

As such, the Messianic Age repudiates Social Darwinism. Social Darwinism assumes only the fittest should survive, which justifies social policies that show no sympathy for the poor, weak, and vulnerable. Isaiah's Vision of the Messianic Age repudiates Social Darwinism and so-called, *realpolitik*—realistic, practical, pragmatic politics without concern for ideological or moral concerns.

### **3. The Messiah will stop the wicked (v. 4)**

11:4 ... he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.

In verse 4, Isaiah also envisions the Messiah having power and authority, not just for creating social goods, but also for curbing the wicked.

The Messiah will have the power to “strike the earth with the rod of his mouth” and “with his breath kill/stop the wicked” (v. 4). The language is metaphorical.

The rod (שֵׁבֶט; *shebet*) symbolizes discipline. Kill (מוֹת; *muōt*) is a metaphor for:

- stopping the wicked,
- overcoming evil,
- dismantling crooked institutions

We are not told how the Messiah will terminate wickedness, but it is Good News.

<sup>7</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah 1-39*, WBC (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998) 101.

- It is good news the oppressed and poor
- It is good news for those crushed by injustice and abuse

But it is also bad news.

- for people who exploit others for selfish ends
- for political leaders who serve their own ambitions
- for leaders of financial institutions, who cheat people out of their savings and their homes

## **D. An Unthinkable Peace (Isa 11:5-9)**

With verse 6, there is an abrupt shift. Whereas verses 1-5 characterize the rule of just society, verses 6-9 describe a mythological scene of natural harmony.

11:6 The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. 11:7 The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. 11:8 The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.

### **1. Nature transformed (vv. 6-7)**

In verses 6-7, creation is transformed. Natural enemies live in peace.

- The wolf and the lamb will live together (11:6)
- The leopard and the goat, the calf and the lion, will rest side-by-side (11:6)
- The cow, bear, and lion will eat vegetarian ... instead of each other (11:7)

Now, this is important: Isaiah is suggesting that once human society is living in harmony (vv. 1-5), then the rest of creation will follow (vv. 6-7). Conversely, corruption or sin within human relationships—at the personal, social, economic, and political levels—is a root cause of environmental imbalance and corruption.<sup>8</sup>

### **2. Peace Established (v. 8)**

Verse 8 describes human beings living without fear:

- A child will play with formally dangerous animals (11:6)
- An infant will not be bitten by a cobra (asp) (11:8)
- A young child will not fear snakes (adder) (11:8)
- Humans and animal will not hurt or destroy (11:9)

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<sup>8</sup> Congruent with the picture draw by Genesis 3.

### 3. What? Where? Why? (v. 9)

Notice that verse 9 focuses on what, where, and why.

11:9 They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. (NRSV)

What is happening in verse 9?

They (humans and animals) will neither *harm* nor *destroy*... literally, neither "act *wrongly* (רָעָה; ra`a`) nor act *corruptly* (שָׁחַת; sha-chat)."

Where is this happening?

On the holy mountain, Mount Zion. In Isa. 2:2, Zion is called the Lord's Mountain, thought to be the gathering-point for all nations on earth.

Why is this happening?

Because of the rule of justice (11:1-5) and the transformation of nature (11:6-8), "the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord" (11:9).

### E. A Unity of All Peoples (Isa 11:10)

11:10 On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious. (NRSV)

Finally, verse 10 ends on the same note that we began. The passage began by talking about the "stump of Jesse" and now it ends by referring to the "root of Jesse."

The coming Messiah was referred to as the shoot that comes from the "stump of Jesse" and now the coming Messiah is referred to as the "root of Jesse."

Isaiah envisions all nations, tribes, and peoples coming to the peaceable kingdom. Warring factions will be reconciled:

- The wolf and the lamb live together
- Jews and the Gentiles
- Men and women
- Chauvinists and feminists
- Republicans and democrats
- Straights and gays
- Black and white
- Israelis and Palestinians
- Mennonites and other Mennonites

All will come to the Messiah at Zion

## **F. Implications**

1. Isaiah's vision tells us that justice, mercy, and peace work together. You can't have one without the other two.
2. Isaiah's vision tells us justice leads to peace among human beings and that has an impact on the environment and ecosphere.
3. Isaiah tells us that the Messiah will bring righteousness and wickedness will cease.