

"I will lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth!" (Psalm 1:1-2)

Welcome back, men! Four weeks ago, we began our study of the first of 11 chapters in Isaiah (chapters 11-23) which record "oracles" (prophecies in poetic and picturesque language) concerning the judgment of nations surrounding the southern kingdom of Judah, who opposed the Lord God Almighty, the Holy One of Israel! Beginning with Babylon which, at the time of Isaiah's writing, hadn't yet become the powerful empire it would become, but was already the symbol of a world system in defiance of God! And so, in Isaiah 13, Isaiah sees Babylon in "double-judgment jeopardy"! First, in a "far off" judgment on the "day of the Lord" when the Lord of hosts will "muster" an army for battle which will shake the heavens and the earth and bring about the "final fall" of Babylon--on the day still to come when Christ will return to judge the world and establish His millennial kingdom! But then, a more "near term" day (which J. Vernon McGee calls "a day of man"), when Isaiah prophesies that God would "stir up" the Medes (and Persians) to cause the downfall of the ancient city of Babylon (a prophecy which was actually fulfilled in 539 B.C., a hundred or so years after Isaiah's passing)!

But Isaiah wasn't finished with his "ranting" of Babylon! And so, in Isaiah 14, he writes a poetic song about how the whole earth--even the inanimate cypress trees and cedars of Lebanon--will join together one day in singing when the reign of terror by the king of Babylon is over and the "house of Jacob" will be resettled in their land and given "rest from their pain and turmoil"! The final "movement" of the song looks forward to the end of a "tribulation period" when the people will "gaze and ponder" at the one who would once have made the world tremble, as he is "stripped of his royal robe and throne into the abyss" (prefiguring perhaps the demise of the "antichrist" when Christ returns to establish His earthly kingdom)!

Then Isaiah turns his focus back to the "immediate threat" to Jerusalem of Assyria, which he prophesies will be "trampled in the Lord's own land" (just outside the walls of Jerusalem)! A prophecy which would actually be fulfilled in Isaiah's time when God would strike 185,000 Assyrian soldiers surrounding Jerusalem with a deadly disease, and Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, and his remaining forces would humbly make their way back to Assyria, never to be a threat to God's people again!

And finally (still in Isaiah 14), God's judgment on Philistia, a long-time enemy of Israel (going back to the time of David and Goliath) --"in the year that King Ahaz died"!

And so, as Constable notes, the "oracles of nations" reveal that world history, even in its most threatening and climatic forms, "is so organized that the people of God are cared for"--and that our sovereign God is in total control of what's happening in our world!

Our lesson last night on Isaiah 15-17 continues that line of thought as we considered Isaiah's oracles on two other countries surrounding Judah, beginning with Moab!

The Moabites (along with the Ammonites and Edomites) had a long history of threats and abuses to the children of Israel. As a tribe descending from Moab, the son of Lot (born of an incestuous relationship with his daughter after fleeing from the fall of Sodom), they settled on the high geographical plateau directly east of the Dead Sea, between Edom and Ammon, where they worshiped their pagan god, Chemosh! They were notorious for trying to prevent the children of Israel from passing through their land on their wilderness wandering from Egyptian captivity to enter the land of Canaan, the "promised

land"! Numbers 22 records how Balak, king of Moab, tried to get the false prophet, Balaam, the son of Beor, who practiced magic and divination, to "put a curse on them when he realized they were too mighty to conquer! (Didn't work, of course!) But Numbers 25 records how the children of Israel "began to play the harlot with the daughters of Moab...as they were invited to the sacrifices to their gods and joined themselves to Baal of Peor"!

But there's more! Solomon took wives from the women of Moab, which turned him to worship the gods of Moab and (according to I Kings 11:7) even built a "high place for Chemosh on the mountain east of Jerusalem..." all of which turned his heart away from the Lord and cost him the kingdom! II Chronicles 20 tells the story of how the sons of Moab and the sons of Ammon later gathered together to make war against Jehoshaphat and how, in one of the more positive sides, Jehoshaphat "turned his attention to seek the Lord" and prayed the inspiring prayer of II Chronicles 20:12--"O our God, will you not judge them? For we are powerless before this great multitude who are coming against us; nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are on You!" And God delivered them! And verse 30 says, "So the kingdom of Jehoshaphat was at peace, for His God gave him rest on all sides!" Wow!

Deuteronomy 23:3-6 says that "No Ammonite or Moabite shall enter the assembly of the Lord; none of their descendants, even to the tenth generation...because they did not meet you with food and water on the way when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired Balaam the son of Beor to curse you!"

So, it's no wonder that Isaiah would include Moab among the countries against whom God would pronounce judgment, in Isaiah 15!

Motyer describes it as "the certain ruin of Moab"--and the "grief expressed" by the Moabites, a "cry of distress that has gone around the territory of Moab," and yet how the "heart of God cried out for Moab"! (Constable notes how "the grief of the Judge of all the earth, over the judgment of the nations for rejecting Him, is one of the striking truths of this oracle"! And II Peter 3:9 tells us that the Lord is patient, "not wishing that any should perish but for all to come to repentance"!)

This theme continues through Isaiah 16 where the "outcasts of Moab appeal for a hiding place (in Judah) from the destroyer" (presumably Assyria) and Isaiah seems to offer them hope by writing (in verse 5) that "a throne will 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"!

And yet the pride of Moab--an "excessive pride," according to verse 6, sadly causes Moab to reject the God of Israel, and for God to judge them!

Jeremiah 48:29-31 says, "We have heard of the pride of Moab--he is very proud--of his haughtiness, his pride, his arrogance and his self-exaltation. 'I know his fury,' declares the Lord but it is futile; his idle boasts have accomplished nothing. Therefore, I will wail for Moab, even for all Moab will I cry out; I will mourn for the men of Kirheres!"

Isaiah pronounces the verdict in verse 12: "So it will come about when Moab presents himself, when he wearies himself upon his high place and come to his (pagan) sanctuary to pray, that he will not prevail...and within three weeks, as a hired man would count them, the glory of Moab will be degraded along with all his population ...!"

And yet, according to "the word of the Lord," there will be a "remnant"! A "small one"! But a remnant!

Interesting that one of the most significant Bible characters would come from Moab! Ruth! Although she came from a pagan background in Moab, she met the God of Israel through her mother-in-law, Naomi, and chose to "cling to her" after losing her husband--and go to Bethlehem where she married Boaz, and became the grandmother of Jesse, who became the father of David! Thus, though a Moabite, one of the few women listed in the genealogy of Christ!

Then Isaiah 17--and the "oracle" concerning Damascus (Syria)! And while addressed to Damascus, it quickly focuses on the northern kingdom of Israel as well, which refused to trust God but depended on man--making an alliance with Syria for protection against Assyria! And suffered the consequences!

Verse 1 says that Damascus "will become a fallen ruin"! And verse 4 says that "in that day the glory of Jacob will fade"! Verse 10 continues, "And the land will be a desolation. For you have forgotten the God of your salvation and have not remembered the rock of your refuge"! Verse 14 adds: "Such will be the portion of those who plunder us" (speaking of God's people)!

But Isaiah also prophesies (in verses 7-8) that "in that day (perhaps speaking of the coming millennium, when the "nations rumble like the rumbling of mighty waters"), man (a remnant?) will have regard for his Maker and his eyes will look to the Holy One of Israel. He will not have regard for the (pagan) altars, the work of his hands"!

So, along with the judgments of the nations, there is hope, and the promise throughout Isaiah (and the rest of Scripture) that people from all the nations will one day worship and seek the God of Israel!

Malachi 1:11 says it best: "For from the rising of the sun even to its setting (a way of referring to the whole world), My name will be great among the nations and in every place, incense is going to be offered to My name, and a grain offering that is pure; for My name will be great among the nations!"

This lesson certainly corrects any impression that the hope expressed in God's covenants is "exclusivist"!

And we have to agree with Motyer's bottom line rendering: "But, as Isaiah understood it, the real issue was not one of military muscle nor of political cleverness in creating defensive alliances but whether the Lord could be trusted to do what His Word promised!" Never was and still isn't!

So where should we look for help in our lives? "My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth!"

Happy New Year, men!

Lowell