

"Where there is no prophetic vision, the people cast off restraint, but blessed is he who keeps the law!"
(Proverbs 29:18)

Remember last week's lesson on Isaiah 20, when the Assyrians captured Ashdod, one of the Philistine cities on the coastal plain east of Judah, which had depended on Egypt and Cush for its security, and how God called Isaiah to "go naked and barefoot, for three years," as a sign against Egypt and Cush, so that all would see the king of Assyria "leading away captives from Egypt and exiles from Cush, young and old, naked and barefoot, with buttocks uncovered"--just as Isaiah had pictured would happen! Showing the folly of putting ones hope and trust in a world power, rather than in the Lord of hosts!

Then, in Isaiah 21, an oracle concerning the wilderness of the sea," a wilderness area north of the Persian Sea, where the windswept and terrifying nation of Babylon was rising! When a vision from the Lord caused Isaiah's "mind to reel and horrors to possess him" as he saw "a table set," and people gathered around, believed to be a gathering between king Hezekiah of Judah and Merodach-Baladan, king of Babylon, with Baladan trying to strike up an alliance with Judah to fight against the Assyrians! And Hezekiah seemingly ready to accept! Then, to Isaiah's great horror, seeing Hezekiah displaying for Baladan, all the treasures of his house! Causing Isaiah to condemn Hezekiah's actions and to prophesy that "the days were coming when all that was in his house, and all that his father had laid up in store to that day would be carried off into Babylon"!

Then, Isaiah saw in a vision, a watchman on a tower, stationed at the command of the Lord, calling out the news of a "fallen Babylon, with images of her gods shattered on the ground"! (Baladan and the Babylonians would actually fall to the Assyrians in 689 B.C. and then again in 539 B.C., to the Medes and Persians, after having been rebuilt! But, in between that time, in 587 B.C., Babylon, under king Nebuchadnezzar, would seize Jerusalem and carry away the children of Israel into Babylonian captivity, as recorded in Daniel, just as Isaiah had prophesied!)

Isaiah then goes on to record oracles against Edom and Arabia--with an Edomite asking the watchman on duty about the "length of the night," and told that "morning was coming but also more night"! Interpreted as "a short-term deliverance from Assyria but with the Babylonian domination to follow"!

Then the plight of Arabian merchants and refugees who had "fled from the press of battle," as well as of the nomadic "sons of Kedar," who were descendants of Ishmael--all destined for a similar fate!

Motyer would note that, as our study of Isaiah was continuing, "the days seemed to be getting darker and darker"! And that brought us to our lesson last night on Isaiah 22--which is addressed as "an oracle concerning the valley of vision" (referring to Judah)!

Why would the kingdom of Judah be included in the list of nations that God would judge, you might wonder!

Wiersbe says that "the people of Judah were behaving like their pagan neighbors, so it was only right that God should include them--in this line-up--along with the other nations! And so, while God would deliver them from the Assyrians, He would ultimately cause them to be conquered and taken into captivity by Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians!

Why would Isaiah refer to Judah as a "valley of vision"? Motyer sees it as a metaphorical term for "darker experience" and notes how Isaiah "spoke of dark foreboding times and endured a dark night of

the soul as he contemplated the inevitable judgment that would come upon his city"! MacArthur notes how God often revealed Himself to His people in the Old Testament through visions but that the unrepentant inhabitants of Jerusalem actually "displayed a marked lack of vision in their oblivion to the destruction that was awaiting them"!

Our memory verse states that "where there is no vision, the people cast off all restraint" and MacArthur adds that "failure to listen for, and hear, the word of God leads to lawless rebellion"!

"What's the matter now, Judah?" asks Isaiah (sounding like a disappointed father admonishing his wayward children)! "Why are you celebrating on the housetops, when you should be mourning?"

Isaiah notes how there's death and desertion, and captivity, and a "breaking down of the walls" as described in verses 2-7--which seemingly describes the "longer term" future with the siege of the Babylonians, as further recorded in II Kings 25, where it says that "in the ninth year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar," when there was "severe famine in the city," and "the city was broken into, and all the men of war fled by night by way of the gate between the two walls beside the king's garden...but were overtaken in the plain of Jericho...and the king (Zedekiah) was captured"! (Sound like what we read in Isaiah 22?) Then there's the "near term" description of Judah's "dependence of weapons of the house of the forest, as well as the repairing of the "breaches" in the walls, and the creating of an adequate water supply, in verses 8-11, all of which took place during the days when Hezekiah was king and God defended Jerusalem from the threat of Sennacherib and the Assyrians (as recorded also in II Chronicles 32)!

And so, part of Isaiah's prophecy concerning Judah in this chapter clearly applies to the threat from the Assyrians under Sennacherib, during the time of Hezekiah, while other parts appear to apply to the destruction and fall of Jerusalem under king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, more than 100 years later, when Zedekiah was king of Judah (in both cases future events so certain to happen that it's written in past, or perfect-past tense, as if it had already happened, which is characteristic of Isaiah's prophecy)!

And, in both cases--despite the lapse of time--the people showed that they were "out of touch" with the Lord's doing, and "did not depend on, or take into consideration the One who planned it all"! And so, instead of fasting and weeping and seeking Him with "sackcloth," they "went to their housetops...and ate and drank," even celebrated, as if there were no tomorrow! Which was their actual mind-set! As a result, the Lord revealed to Isaiah that "their iniquity would not be forgiven"! And they would be judged severely!

(Interesting, in retrospect, that Hezekiah's legacy (in II Kings 20:20) is tied to the great "engineering feat" he led in bringing water into the city of Jerusalem! And yet how Motyer sees that as "contradicting the way of faith"! He notes that when God chose Jerusalem as the city of God He knew all about its vulnerable water supply! And that it was no accident or oversight! God didn't leave it short of water, and Hezekiah didn't increase the supply! He just "redirected" it! But God had arranged the supply in such a way that living in Jerusalem was a continuing exercise of faith, a perpetual challenge to find security in the Lord! And, according to Motyer, Hezekiah's actions contradicted the way of faith--although, in the final analysis, it didn't prevent the fall of Jerusalem! Which turned out to be the result of its "unbelief," and lack of reliance on the Lord of hosts! And not having to do with weapons, or walls, or water! Interesting thought!)

Isaiah's oracle goes on, in verses 15-25, to describe two stewards who were put in charge of the royal household, who (according to Constable) demonstrated by their "self-reliance," individually, what the nation showed collectively! First there was Shebna (possibly of Egyptian extraction, according to MacArthur--thus in juxtaposition to Joseph's place in Egypt with Pharaoh, though not "measuring up"!) who stood nearest to the king (Hezekiah) but who, it turned out, was more concerned about "honing out a tomb as a memorial to himself," and riding around ostentatiously in his "splendid" chariot, to be "seen of men" (according to Grogan), rather than attending to the spiritual needs and affairs of Judah and its people! Seeking the praise of men, rather than the "smile of approval" from God! ("What's the matter with you, Shebna?" Isaiah must have wondered!) Verse 17 says that the Lord would "grasp him firmly and roll him tightly like a ball, to be cast into a vast country," where he would die"! Wow!

Then Shebna's replacement, Eliahim, who would become like a "father-figure" to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah and be given "the key" to the house of David to control who would see the king, and have good motives, and be like a "tent peg" to hold the house (tent) of Jerusalem stable against the winds of adversity! Verses 24-25 say that the people "will hang on him all glory of his father's house...but that in that day, declares the Lord of hosts, the peg driven in a firm place would give way...even break off and fall, and the load hanging on it will be cut off, for the Lord has spoken!" Noting again the fallacy of putting ones total trust in "man" (even "the best" of mankind)--rather than in God!

MacArthur notes that this oracle "again reproved the people of Jerusalem for trusting in the arm of the flesh to protect them from their enemies when they needed to put their trust in the sovereign, almighty Lord"!

Oswalt wrote: "If it's true that God is the Sovereign of the universe, then our first task in a moment of crisis is to be sure that all is clear between Him and ourselves! The other preparations, if necessary, can follow!"

Psalm 20:7 says: "Some trust in chariots and some in horses but we will trust in the name of the Lord, our God!"

Bottom line? We need to ask ourselves too: "What's the matter with me? Where's my vision? What am I doing with what God has given men? And in what, and in whom, am I placing my trust?"

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