

Lesson 9

Hope During the Divided Kingdom

Introduction

As we move past the highpoint of Israel's world power and influence during the time of David and Solomon, the nation divides in two during the reign of Rehoboam. The northern ten tribes moved immediately into apostasy, with the new king, Jeroboam, instituting two new places of worship, one in Dan and the other in Bethel. In the north, the downward spiral away from God developed rapidly, and within 150 years the people and territory were conquered by the Assyrians. The southern kingdom's history during this time is marked by a slower progression away from God, but within 150 years after the demise of the north, it also was destroyed.

As things began to deteriorate spiritually, the role of God's prophets began to take center stage. Warnings about the judgment to come, urgings to repent, and promises about a glorious future are all seen throughout the writings of Jonah, Joel, Isaiah, Micah, Amos, Hosea and Jeremiah. This lesson focuses on four areas of messianic prophecies related to us from Isaiah.

The Servant Songs

Isaiah 40-55 is one of the most quoted sections of Messianic prophecy inside the New Testament. The main poetic sections are commonly referred to as *the servant songs* and are found in: Isaiah 42.1-4; 49.1-6; 50.4-9; and 52.13-53.12. The following are selected highlights from these passages:

Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; **I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.**

– Isaiah 42.1

And now the LORD says, he who formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him; and that Israel might be gathered to him— for I am honored in the eyes of the LORD, and my God has become my strength— he says: “It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; **I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.**”

– Isaiah 49.5-6

The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him who is weary. **Morning by morning he awakens; he awakens my ear to hear as those who are taught. The Lord GOD has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious; I turned not backward.**

– Isaiah 50.4-5

Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted. As many were astonished at you— his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind— so shall he sprinkle many nations. Kings shall shut their mouths because of him, for that which has not been told them they see, and that which they have not heard they understand.

– Isaiah 52.13-15

As a whole, the nation of Israel failed to be a blessing to the nations of the earth. Instead of shining the light of God, they joined the pagans in idolatry and brought reproach on Yahweh. Now, they were in as much need of salvation as the Gentiles, so God would raise up a true servant who would do His will perfectly, including both the restoration of Israel and the salvation of the Gentiles, 42.6; 49.5-6.²⁸ Looking back from a New Testament perspective, the inspired writers clearly revealed that Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of the Servant of the Lord from Isaiah.

Think of how Jesus perfectly defined and fulfilled the role of a servant. Mark 10.42-45 is a good place to start.

And Jesus called them to him and said to them, “You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Other points to consider are:

His life was to do the work God wanted done, John 4.34. He perfectly fulfilled the Father’s will, John 14.31; 17.4.

Jesus perfectly fulfilled the greatest commandment and the expression of that love is service. See Matthew 22.35-40 and Galatians 5.13-15. *The life of Jesus was nothing but service.* This is best demonstrated in the selfless, sacrificial, and suffering service that was carried out through His crucifixion and death.

The Child of Promise

In Isaiah 7–12 we find the southern kingdom of Judah facing the serious political and military crisis of the Syro-Ephraimitic War. An alliance between the northern kingdom of Israel and the Arameans (Syria) insisted that King Ahab of Judah join their alliance, so they could defeat the Assyrians with their combined forces. In fear of reprisals from Assyria, Ahab refused and now finds himself threatened by this Syro-Ephraimitic alliance, which wants to depose him, install a puppet king, and continue with their original plan to defeat Assyria.

In an effort to build trust in the Lord, even in “impossible” situations, Isaiah prophesies by means of four special children who are given symbolic names that embody his message. Although the English versions does not consistently translate or transliterate all four names, they are:

- “A remnant will return” (Isaiah 7.3)
- Immanuel, “God with us” (Isaiah 7.14)
- “The spoil speeds, the prey hastens” (Isaiah 8.1, 3)
- “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9.5).

²⁸ Hamilton, T. (2006). Portraits of the Messiah. In D. W. Petty (Ed.), Portraits in Isaiah. Temple Terrace, FL: Florida College Bookstore.

Just how did these children serve as signs, pointing to the true Messiah? What spiritual truths are revealed to us through this emphasis on a child of promise?

Jesus' Human Vulnerability

Children are vulnerable, fragile, and can be easily overwhelmed by almost any force they encounter. Rather than dropping into the middle of His creation from out of nowhere, God the Creator Himself entered into this world as an infant, as one of us, with all the weaknesses and frailties of human existence. The ultimate frailty, death, was the very purpose for which He came, bearing it all for us (Hebrews 2.14–18; Philippians 2.5–8).

Jesus' Trust in God

Because children are so vulnerable, they must trust in some greater power to protect them. The Messiah had to wait on the Lord or put his trust in God, just as we do (Hebrews 2.13). As a Son, He had to learn obedience to His Father's will and authority, through tears of suffering and disappointment (Hebrews 5.7–9). The Messiah sympathizes with His fellow brothers and sisters, because He knows what it is like (Hebrews 2.11–18). If anything is going to be done about the real problem of mankind, sin, then it will be done by God, as we patiently wait on Him. We simply go on doing what our Father commanded us—that is, what is right—while trusting Him to take care of everything else.

Jesus: The Hope of What Will be

Children are about the future, which always rests in God's hands. They are the hope of what will be and the down payment of any purpose that the promise of a future life might have. Whenever the Bible presented a child of promise, it was the harbinger of a new beginning within God's purpose, holding out the bright hope of the future fulfillment of God's promises. All of us are still children compared to our heavenly Father, fraught with weakness, needing to have child-like trust in Him and respect for His authority, and growing toward the promise of better things to come.

God with Us

God Himself became a child with us—*Immanuel, God With Us*—to show that He cares, He understands, He suffers, He hopes right alongside of us.

The King of Israel

For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this,

– Isaiah 9.6-7

There can be no doubt that Isaiah ultimately spoke of Jesus as the fulfillment of both this passage and the promise to David in 2 Samuel 7. Even though these specific verses may not be explicitly quoted in the

New Testament, the earlier part of the prophecy (9.1–2) is quoted (Matthew 4.15–16; Luke 1.78–79) and there can be little question what the meaning of the entire prophecy is intended.

In addition, Isaiah develops the role of King by means of his prophecy about the Branch of Jesse (Isaiah 11.1–10). The idea is that just as a tree is cut down, the kingdom of Judah would be cut down in judgment, carried away into Babylonian captivity, and the literal Davidic dynasty ended. However, just as a tree can sprout new life, the throne of David would be restored to a spiritual kingdom with a spiritual King, Jesus, who rules over the *kingdom that is not of this world* (John 18.36–37).²⁹ The basic message is simple: the Messiah rules as King over God's people, but in a drastically different and new way.

As king, Jesus is the embodiment of the nation and personally representative of it. He leads Israel in returning to her primary work of being a blessing to all the nations of the earth. But instead of being a tyrant who barks orders from a safe distance, Jesus leads by example, by going first to blaze the trail for us to follow (Hebrews 2.10; 12.2). In the true style of David, He is the Shepherd-King (Matthew 2.5–6), who first accomplishes the Lord's work perfectly in His own person and then exhorts us lovingly, tenderly, and compassionately to follow in His footsteps (1 Peter 2.21–25).

The Rock of Ages

Therefore thus says the Lord GOD, Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a tested stone, a costly cornerstone for the foundation, firmly placed. He who trusts in it will not be disturbed,

– Isaiah 28.16

This theme of a rock runs throughout Isaiah (8.14; 17.10; 26.4; 28.16; 30.29; 32.2; 33.16; 44.8; 51.1), emphasizing the rock's role as a source of life and security (Psalm 118.22–23; Matthew 7.24–27; Romans 9.32–33; 1 Peter 2.4–10).

Jesus still stands as a rock, regardless of what you think of Him. However, in the case of those who are blinded by the deceit of this world and its philosophy, this Rock becomes a rock over which people stumble (Isaiah 8.13–15), a rock that will pulverize them to dust (Matthew 21.42–44). For those who see through the lies of this world and recognize the self-defeating nature of a self-centered life, Jesus is the only foundation suitable to build one's life upon (Acts 4.10–12; 1 Corinthians 3.11; Ephesians 2.19–22). It is precisely because the Messiah is such a slave, such a child, such a king, and such a rock that we can build our lives upon Him with absolute confidence. When the torrential floods of sin and death assail, we will rest securely upon the only foundation that can endure, Jesus the Messiah.

Conclusion

In reality, what we observe of the coming Messiah in Isaiah and the remainder of the Old Testament are not different portraits, but variations upon a single portrait. Like two-dimensional holographic pictures,

²⁹ This branch or root theme is worthy of its own study in the Old Testament (Isaiah 4.2; 11.1–10; 27.6; 37.31; 53.2; 60.21; Jeremiah 23.5; 33.15; Ezekiel 19.10–14; Hosea 14.5; Zechariah 3.8; 6.12) and its application in the New Testament (Romans 15.12; Revelation 1.4; 3.1; 4.5; 5.5–6; 22.16).

such as special edition baseball cards that appear to move as you change the viewing angle, the image of Christ changes as we look at Him from a new perspective. Throughout the Old Testament, all of the portraits of the Messiah are masterfully interwoven into a beautiful tapestry of Jesus the Christ. For Jesus to be the King is for Him to be the Nation, which is to be the Promised Child, which is to be the Seed of Abraham, which is to be the Servant of the Lord, and all of which is to be the foundation Rock upon which we build, so that we may become “anointed ones” as well (1 John 2.20, 27).

For Thought and Reflection

1. What are some points regarding Jesus that stood out to you as you read *the servant songs*? Why?
2. How did Jesus perfectly fulfill His role as a servant?
3. What is the significance of Jesus’ being a child of promise?
4. What was the Jewish view of how the Messiah would reign as king? How did that contrast to Jesus’ true mission?
5. How does Jesus differ from earthly kings?
6. How is Jesus a rock of stumbling to some and a rock of foundation to others? Explain.