LESSON 9

A Shoot from the Stump

Indeed, God is my salvation; I will trust him and not be afraid, for the Lord, the Lord himself, is my strength and my song. He has become my salvation.

— Isaiah 12:2

When the house of David has been cut to the ground, God raises a King from the stump, fills Him with His Spirit, gathers the nations to Him, and teaches His forgiven people to sing.

WHERE WE ARE
No date is given. The oracle most likely belongs to the reign of Ahaz, during or soon after the crisis of 734–732 BC. Ahaz has bought Assyria's protection and called himself Tiglath-pileser's "servant and son." By 732 Damascus has fallen and Galilee has been stripped from Israel. Chapter 10 ended with God felling the Assyrian forest. The question this passage answers: what becomes of God's promise to David once David's tree is a stump?

Introduction

As Isaiah 10 ends, Assyria has marched to within sight of Jerusalem, and the Lord brings an ax down: *the tall trees will be cut down, the high trees felled*, 10:33. Chapter 11 opens on another tree. This one was cut down too, and nobody expected anything more from it.

That tree is the house of David. God had promised David, *Your house and kingdom will endure before me forever, and your throne will be established forever*, 2 Samuel 7:16. Then Ahaz sent word to the king of Assyria: *I am your servant and your son*, 2 Kings 16:7. A son of David had handed David's throne to a foreign king for safekeeping. Isaiah had already been told where this would end. The nation would be felled like an oak, and *the holy seed is the stump*, 6:13.

If the tree is coming down, what happens to *forever*?

Isaiah answers with a Person, a world made new, a road home, and a song. This lesson closes the first part of the book. It also brings us back to the verse we were told to hold on to.

A Shoot from the Stump (11:1–5)

Then a shoot will grow from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots will bear fruit, 11:1.

Isaiah doesn't say *the stump of David*. He reaches back past the palace to David's father, a farmer in Bethlehem. The royal line will be so reduced that it's fair to call it what it was before it was royal.[78] Assyria, the forest of chapter 10, is cut down and stays down. The stump of Jesse still has life in its roots.[79] A green shoot comes up out of what looked dead.

For Isaiah's hearers that was the point. God's promise to David would outlive Ahaz.

What will this King be like? *The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—a Spirit of wisdom and understanding, a Spirit of counsel and strength, a Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord*, 11:2. Set that beside Ahaz and the king of Assyria. Ahaz took counsel from his own fear and bought his strength from Assyria. The king of Assyria bragged, *I have done this by my own strength and wisdom, for I am clever*, 10:13. This King has wisdom and strength too, and He has them because the Spirit gives them.[80] Fearing the Lord is no burden to Him: *His delight will be in the fear of the Lord*, 11:3.

Next, Isaiah shows Him as Judge sitting on the bench. *He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, he will not execute justice by what he hears with his ears, but he will judge the poor righteously and execute justice for the oppressed of the land*, 11:3–4. One chapter earlier the men in charge were *writing oppressive laws to keep the poor from getting a fair trial*, 10:1–2. Appearances and rumors won't fool this King. He doesn't need an army, either. *He will strike the land with a scepter from his mouth*, 11:4. He speaks, and it is done.

He dresses for the work. *Righteousness will be a belt around his hips; faithfulness will be a belt around his waist*, 11:5. A man tightened his belt before he worked or fought. This King is ready for both.

The Wolf and the Lamb (11:6–9)

Then the picture widens from the King to the world He rules.

The wolf will dwell with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the goat, 11:6. The calf and the young lion are together, and *a child will lead them. The lion will eat straw like cattle*, 11:7. *An infant will play beside the cobra's pit, and a toddler will put his hand into a snake's den*, 11:8. Every parent reading that verse flinches. In Isaiah's world it's safe.

Ever since Genesis 3 the snake and the child have been enemies. Here the old curse is lifted.

How literally are we meant to take the animals? Honest readers land in different places. Gary Smith's counsel is sound: don't spend your energy working out how a lion digests straw, because the picture exists to show how completely God can transform what He touches.[81] Whatever else it is, the picture isn't an earthly kingdom with sin still in it. In Isaiah's world no one does harm at all. That peace starts wherever Christ's rule takes hold of people, and it is filled out in the new heavens and new earth, where 65:25 repeats the wolf, the lamb, and the lion eating straw.[82]

Then verse 9 gives the reason. *They will not harm or destroy each other on my entire holy mountain, for the land will be as full of the knowledge of the Lord as the sea is filled with water.* In the throne room the seraphim sang that *his glory fills the whole earth*, 6:3. It's the same Hebrew word for earth or land. The glory Isaiah saw filling the earth in chapter 6 becomes something people know in chapter 11. People who know the Lord stop devouring each other.

Judah lived surrounded by nations that behaved like wolves, and this was a promise worth holding on to.

A Banner for the Nations (11:10–16)

On that day the root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples. The nations will look to him for guidance, and his resting place will be glorious, 11:10.

Read that next to verse 1. There He was a shoot growing out of Jesse's roots. Here He's the root itself. How can one person be both Jesse's descendant and the root Jesse grew from? Isaiah doesn't explain it.[83] He leaves the question standing, and the New Testament picks it up.

A banner was a pole set on a hill so scattered troops could see where to gather. This King is the rallying point, and the first ones streaming to Him are *the nations*. Gentiles come seeking the son of Jesse.

Then the Lord gathers His own people. *On that day the Lord will extend his hand a second time to recover the remnant of his people*, 11:11. The first time was Egypt. It's the same hand Pharaoh felt, reaching out again, this time to bring people home.[84] Isaiah names the places: Assyria, Egypt, Pathros, Cush, Elam, Shinar, Hamath, and the islands of the west. That covers south, east, north, and west. Nobody is too far away for that hand.

They come home reconciled, too. *Ephraim will no longer be envious of Judah, and Judah will not harass Ephraim*, 11:13. In chapter 7 Ephraim was marching on Jerusalem. Here the feud is over.

Verse 14 has them swooping down together on the Philistines, Edom, Moab, and Ammon. These were David's old enemies, and Isaiah describes a kingdom spreading the way kingdoms spread in his day. This is metaphor, the same kind Paul uses when he tells Christians to put on armor, Ephesians 6:11.[85] The nations fall to the Prince of Peace when the gospel reaches them.

There will be a highway for the remnant of his people who will survive from Assyria, as there was for Israel when they came up from the land of Egypt, 11:16. Watch for that highway. It runs through the rest of Isaiah, at 19:23, 35:8, 40:3, and 62:10.[86]

The Song of the Saved (12:1–6)

Part One of Isaiah opened with God taking His people to court, 1:2. It closes with a song.

On that day you will say: "I will give thanks to you, Lord, although you were angry with me. Your anger has turned away, and you have comforted me," 12:1. Four times in Lesson 8 we heard the refrain *his anger has not turned away*, 9:12, 17, 21; 10:4. Here it finally has. The same God who kept His hand raised now comforts.

Then comes the verse this study asked you to carry from the start. *Indeed, God is my salvation; I will trust him and not be afraid, for the Lord, the Lord himself, is my strength and my song. He has become my salvation*, 12:2.

The second half of the verse is a quotation. *The Lord is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation* is what Moses and Israel sang on the far bank of the Red Sea, Exodus 15:2. Chapter 11 ended with a new exodus, so chapter 12 sings the old exodus song. Then look at the middle of the verse. *I will trust him and not be afraid.* Isaiah had told Ahaz, *Calm down and be quiet. Don't be afraid*, 7:4. Ahaz was afraid, and he trusted Assyria. Here are people who have learned what Ahaz wouldn't.

The song moves from one voice to many. *You will joyfully draw water from the springs of salvation*, 12:3. In verses 1 and 2 the Hebrew *you* is singular, the forgiven person. From verse 3 it turns plural. The saved don't keep it to themselves: *Make his works known among the peoples*, 12:4. *Let this be known throughout the earth*, 12:5.

The last line reaches back to the throne room. *Cry out and sing, citizen of Zion, for the Holy One of Israel is among you in his greatness*, 12:6. In chapter 6 the Holy One sat on a throne, and Isaiah was sure he was ruined. Here the Holy One lives among His people, and they sing about it.[87] Same God. He has dealt with their sin, and now they can stand to have Him close.

Looking to Christ

Paul ends the body of Romans with a string of Old Testament texts about Gentiles praising God, and the last one is ours. *And again, Isaiah says, The root of Jesse will appear, the one who rises to rule the Gentiles; the Gentiles will hope in him*, Romans 15:12. Paul quotes the Greek translation of 11:10, so the wording runs a little differently from the CSB of Isaiah, but the point holds. The banner has gone up, and Gentiles are gathering to Jesus.

Paul uses the verse for a practical end. Jewish and Gentile Christians in Rome were eyeing each other the way Ephraim eyed Judah, and Paul tells them, *Therefore welcome one another, just as Christ also welcomed you, to the glory of God*, 15:7.

John fills in the rest, first in his Gospel and then in Revelation. In the Gospel, the Baptist says, *I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and he rested on him*, John 1:32. The Spirit rests on the shoot of Jesse, just as 11:2 said. And at the end of the Bible Jesus answers the riddle of 11:1 and 11:10 in His own words: *I am the Root and descendant of David*, Revelation 22:16.

Applying the Text

Don't measure God's promises by the size of the stump. When Isaiah wrote, the house of David looked finished, and seven centuries later the heir to the throne was a carpenter in Nazareth. God was keeping His word the whole time. Whatever looks cut down in your life, your marriage, your congregation, or your hope for a child who's drifted, God can still bring a shoot out of a stump.

Judge the way the King judges. He doesn't decide by what His eyes see or what His ears hear. Most of us do exactly that. We size people up by their clothes, their accent, or the last thing someone told us about them. Ask God for the patience to find out what's true before you settle what you think.

Let the church look like 11:13. The gathered people of God are supposed to be the place where old rivalries end. If there's someone in your congregation you've quietly kept at a distance, Paul's word applies to you: welcome them as Christ welcomed you.

Learn the song before you need it. Isaiah 12:2 is a confession for frightened people, and Ahaz shows what happens to a man who has no such song when the armies come. Memorize the verse this week. Say it out loud. Have it ready before the bad news arrives.

For Discussion

1. List every quality of the coming King in 11:1–5. Which of them would the people of Judah have noticed missing in Ahaz?

2. In 12:1–6, what changes between verse 2 and verse 3? Who is speaking, and to whom is the song finally addressed?

3. Why does Isaiah say *the stump of Jesse* instead of *the house of David*? What does that tell you about the condition of David's line?

4. According to 11:9, no one will harm or destroy, for the land will be as full of the knowledge of the Lord as the sea is filled with water. How does knowing God change the way people treat one another? Where have you seen that happen?

5. The King in 11:3 won't judge by what He sees or hears. When was the last time you formed an opinion of someone on exactly that basis, and turned out to be wrong?

6. Isaiah 12:2 pairs *trust* with *not be afraid*. What are you afraid of right now? What would trusting God about it look like this week?

Looking Ahead

Lesson 10: The Fall of the Morning Star (Isaiah 13–14)

Part Two of Isaiah opens, and the prophet turns from Judah to the nations. The first oracle is against Babylon, long before Babylon ruled anyone. The stars go dark and the earth shakes, and a proud king goes down to the grave to a welcome he didn't expect.

Before you come: read Isaiah 13–14. Mark every nation and king the chapters name, and underline each time the prophet speaks about *the day of the Lord*.

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[78] Young, *Isaiah*, 1:378. On 11:1 he observes that Isaiah does not call it the house of David but only the rootstock of Jesse, pointing to the line's lowly origin in Bethlehem, to emphasize how far the dynasty would fall.
[79] Motyer, *Isaiah*, 115–116. On 10:33–34 he suggests that the felling of the forest may once have opened the poem of the messianic King, so that the clearing of Assyria prepares the ground for the shoot of Jesse; in its present place it describes Assyria's destruction at the very gates of Zion. Young, *Isaiah*, 1:379, draws the same contrast: Assyria is cut down forever, while life remains in the roots of David's house.
[80] Smith, Gary, *Isaiah 1–39*, 272. On 11:2 he sets the Spirit-given gifts of counsel and power against the plans of Ahaz and the king of Assyria, both of whom acted from a shortsighted human perspective whose main purpose was military survival rather than trust in God.
[81] Smith, Gary, *Isaiah 1–39*, 269. On 11:6–9 he cautions against trying to explain how lions survive on straw or how wild beasts change their behavior, and argues that the picture communicates God's transforming power whether one reads the animals literally or metaphorically.
[82] Young, *Isaiah*, 1:390–391. On 11:6–9 he weighs the figurative and literal readings, and argues that the passage cannot describe a millennium, since advocates of that view allow for sin during it, while Isaiah pictures a world without sin. The peace begins wherever people receive the Messiah's peace and reaches its fullness only in the new heavens and new earth.
[83] Motyer, *Isaiah*, 119. On 11:10 he asks how the same person can be both the shoot coming from Jesse and the Root from which Jesse comes, and calls it an enigma left unexplained until Luke 1:32.
[84] Young, *Isaiah*, 1:395. On 11:11 he notes that the Lord's hand recalls the exodus: once for chastisement, a second time for deliverance, so that the hand Pharaoh felt in judgment the remnant will feel in rescue.
[85] Motyer, *Isaiah*, 121. On 11:14 he argues that the picture of conquest is a consistent use of metaphor rather than a forecast of events, comparable to Paul's armor in Ephesians 6, and that the nations fall to the Prince of Peace through the gospel.
[86] Smith, James, *Major Prophets*, 55. On 11:16 he observes that the highway is a common image in Isaiah that reappears in the New Testament, a way clearly marked by God out of bondage and through the wilderness toward home.

[87] Motyer, *Isaiah*, 77. On chapters 6–12 he notes that the song of chapter 12 matches Isaiah's experience in chapter 6 point for point: anger turned away, a commission to tell the world, and the Holy God dwelling among His people, forming a complete bracket around the section.