

Notes on Isaiah 22, 23

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The Valley of Vision Vv. 1-14 In interpreting a section of Scripture like this, we always have to find what situation the prophet is addressing. What Isaiah is saying here is not obvious. There is revelry over something, and Isaiah indicates there should not be. There is also a great defeat by an enemy. There was not trust in the Lord. What is the time period of which Isaiah speaks? I think it was the time when Assyria closed in on Jerusalem?

This was a moment of terror. The Lord was punishing Judah and Jerusalem for its unfaithful trust in other things. Later Isaiah will report (in 36,37) that it was Assyria that ended up being destroyed outside the walls of Jerusalem. That is not in view in Isaiah 22, 23.

22:1 The sense is “what do you mean by this?” There is a strange disconnect here. Their celebration is oblivious to the death coming upon them. These things do not fit together and that is the point Isaiah is making. Their celebration happiness will end in agony.

22:2,3 The defeat was so terrible that many died without being slain in battle. They perished of other things; some just ran. Rather than being defeated they capitulated without a fight.

22:4 It is the prophet who sees what is coming and takes it seriously. Those who are full of gaiety, have no reason for their revelry. Disaster is ahead. If any would believe the prophet, they too would cease the revelry and take the matter seriously. Everything hangs on whether the Word of the Lord is being received and believed. For Isaiah this is so painful, he tells the party-goers to leave him because of his grief. This is what happens with the people of God. We believe what God says, and that very often gives us a totally different perspective on what makes others happy and us sad. Isaiah knows of the destruction of ‘the daughter of my people’.

22:5-7 Isaiah speaks of the valleys beside Jerusalem filled with enemy soldiers. The people looked out and saw life as usual; Isaiah looked across the same valley and saw what was coming, so the oracle is called a Valley of Visions. An army of chariots and horsemen would enter their valleys. Now the sound changes from the sound of celebration and cheers to the noise of war. The people hear the noise of the enemy pounding walls to break them down; death is near at hand; their cry of fear can be heard across the valley to the mountains beyond. Elam (the ally of Babylon) will surely attack and prevail. The Lord has said so. Though Jeremiah is the weeping prophet, here Isaiah weeps bitterly (v.4). Thus the scene changes from a city “full” of revelers to a valley “full” of enemy soldiers (vv. 2 & 7).

22:8-11 The self confidence of Judah What did they look to? Looking is sometimes a way to express faith. The people were to look to the serpent on the pole to be healed (Numbers 21:9). If we “look to the Son” (John 6:40), then we believe in Him and are saved. One must have a confidence in something. Isaiah grieves that his people did not look to the Lord. Notice the contrast between 17:7,8 when they look to their Maker and 22:11 where they do not. The great issue of faith is not how strong it is but to whom our eyes are turned. We are saved not by the quality of our believing, but by the One in whom we trust. Isaiah speaks in v.8 of a false trust. 31:1 is a perfect example of looking to Egypt with faith in the wrong direction.

They “looked to” weapons, their strengthened city walls, and they made great efforts to have a good supply of water. The water supply was a major issue. Covering over and protecting the supply from a spring outside Jerusalem was a major accomplishment in 2 Kings 20:20, and

2 Chronicles 32:1-5,30.

The defenses of Judah are stripped away (v.8) may be translated better, “When he removed Judah’s protective covering.” It is the Lord who sent the enemy against Jerusalem. This text does not deal with Jerusalem’s devotion to false gods; the point here is simply that they trusted in their defenses, weapons and water supply. They would get death, defection by leaders (v.3) and defeat. Isaiah’s vision has one main point, they did everything else to protect themselves except trust in the Lord. The thing we trust in is always our real god.

It was the Lord who made it (i.e. Jerusalem) as the place where he would be in the midst of his people – Psalm 46, “*God is in the midst of her...*” How can he the mighty Lord fail to protect his own from those who are weak against him? The very presence of the Lord among them did not mean they had faith in him. He was left out of their thinking, yet it was the Lord who gave them that city, and it was the Lord who planned (v.11) to take it away.

22:12-13 The call of the Lord is to repent in dejection for their sin. Instead they give themselves to revelry, a very important theme in this oracle! Even when they saw things crumbling, instead of turning to the Lord they sought all the pleasure they could get out of life. The response to God’s judgment was “eat, drink and be merry” (1 Corinthians 15:32), a very fitting description of Western decadence. Their misplaced trust let them down. When the results were in and the fulfillment of the word of the Lord was upon them, they still did not repent. Repentance is a wonderful gift of God (Acts 11:18). God was left out of their plans. Their hope was in other things and when it all went wrong, they partied knowing “tomorrow we die”. They were godless to the end and “refused to repent”, as in Revelation 16:9.

22:14 A play on words is the *uncovered* of v.8 (God’s protective covering removed) is matched by another uncovering. What is brought out into the open or revealed in v.14 is a statement from God to Isaiah. The prophet does not make up his message; it is not a cleverly invented story (2 Peter 1:16). Prophecy is never the prophet’s original thought (2 Peter 1:20,21). True prophecy has its origin in God. And so here in v.14 Isaiah speaks of the source of his message.

That message is that this sin will not be atoned for. What sin? Their self-confidence and false confidence, their rejection of God’s promise of protection, and his fidelity to his covenant with his people. This sin stretched over generations in the face of the many appeals of God’s prophets. They would bear the horrible consequences themselves. It is true that God is a God of mercy, yet he has no obligation to show mercy to anyone (Romans 9:14-18). His appeals were to people to repent so they could have mercy. They rejected mercy and God left them in their unrepentant state. He may extend or withhold grace; he always exercises justice. I will never say God showed me grace because I repented. That is backwards; I repented because God showed me grace. Otherwise I would be right in there with the unrepentant ones we read about in Isaiah 22.

Sin not atoned for, is a simple way to say it will not be forgiven. There is an unbreakable link between atonement and forgiveness. Not all sin is atoned for according to v.14. Had it been atoned for by the sacrifice of Christ, they would not have endured the wrath of God. His wrath cannot fall on the Redeemer and also on the sinner for whom atonement was made.

Isaiah says, “*the Lord, the LORD Almighty*”. This precise combination appears 4 times here and 4 times in chapter 10 (plus 1:24; 3:1,15; 19:4; 28:22). Lord (Adonai) shows he is sovereign; only persons in authority are called Adonai. LORD is his name Yahweh, the Lord who saves and redeems, the covenant keeping faithful One. Almighty is used to translate ‘of hosts’, or ‘of armies’; a word stressing his power. This is the Lord, the LORD Almighty they refused to trust and obey.

Shebna and Eliakim This is the only time an oracle is about individuals; these men are mentioned also in 36:3,11 and 37;2. Shebna is a self-serving and self-confident man, who characterizes what the earlier part of Isaiah 22 is saying. Eliakim is a trustworthy man who becomes the hope of those who trust in him.

22:15-19 Shebna has power; he is in charge of the palace. The question, “What are you doing here?” (like v.1) is derogatory. Shebna wanted a royal tomb to show his prominence. In life he rode in splendid chariots, but the Lord would depose him from his lofty office. Instead of a grand tomb his corpse would be thrown off in some unknown place. It would not be surprising if Shebna had coveted the throne – one to which, in God’s covenant with David, he had no right. Shebna coveted position and possessions. He is called a disgrace to his master’s house.

22:20-25 Eliakim is not a disgrace like Shebna, but an honor! (v.23). It was God who gave him position; he did not seize it for himself. God invested him with the insignia of office. He would be respected as a father to those who live in Jerusalem. Rather than being a disgrace and a competitor to the House of David, Eliakim was given such rank to serve it that he had the key to the House of David. He knew his place and wielded authority properly.

The Keys of the Kingdom Only here in all the Old Testament is there mention of the ‘key’, so important in the New Testament, where the key of David is held by Christ, the true Son of David (Revelation 3:7-10). To the apostles of the church Christ gave the keys to the kingdom of heaven, (Matthew 16:17-19). In other words, the authority of Christ to open and close the kingdom is given to the church to act in His Name directed by His word. His representatives proclaim the gospel and thereby *opens* it to those who repent and believe. They are admitted into Christ’s church. The church *excludes* or shuts out by discipline, those who disobey the Lord.

It is impossible to have such a corporate scenario of authority, inclusion, and exclusion from a body unless there is a church body in which these commanded responsibilities function. Thus the reformers never sought to get rid of the church, but to save it from its corruption. Life in Christ’s body is a Biblical obligation. It is a surprise that this truth is set out in terms of a key in connection with Eliakim, a man barely known in Scripture and one who was not himself a king. (There is a similar passage in 1 Chronicles 9:22-28.)

Why the big disappointment? God had given Eliakim position, making him a peg in a firm place. The glory of his family rested on him. The picture is of all these breakable dishes hanging on this peg. It will break, sheared off “in that day”. It is easier to see that God puts down the proud Shebna, but God also frustrates faith being placed in a faithful man like Eliakim. Only God is our refuge and strength; all other trusts, even in the best of men, will crumble.

The Fall and Rise of Tyre, Isaiah 23

23:1 Tyre was the chief port and trading nation in the Mediterranean Sea. The ships of Tarshish would come from far in the west. They hear the news: Tyre has been destroyed. There will be no harbor for their ships.

23:2,3 Tyre in ancient times was a harbor and an island offshore. Sidon also was a major city of Phoenicia. Now instead of the noise on their busy docks, there is silence. This is bad news in Egypt as well. It was Tyre’s merchants who carried grain from Egypt.

23:4,5 The sea speaks; it has no children any more to sail on it from Tyre and Sidon. Egypt will hear their shippers are gone.

23:6-9 To *cross over* is to flee as refugees where once they traveled for trade. The lively world-class city that once set up colonies and princes has been brought low by the Lord. He humbles all the famous of the earth.

23:10-12 With Tyre gone Tarshish would be free to do as it pleases. God has stretched out His hand to make kingdoms tremble. This oracle is about Phoenicia whose fortress cities will be destroyed by Assyria. They lose pleasure, peace and their once secure homes. Sidon too would be crushed.

23:12b-13 Refugees will not be very welcome in Cypress because they know how the Assyrians handled Babylon, long before Babylon became a great power. If the Assyrians could maul Babylon that way, then who would dare help their enemies by accepting refugees from Tyre? Why anger Assyria?

23:14 Tarshish had freedom from Tyre (v.10) but then suffered from Tyre's downfall because they were dependent on it for trade.

23:15 Tyre's judgment is not final. Tyre would be back in 70 years, the time between Sennacherib's campaign and the demise of Assyria. But after the 70 years are over, Tyre will be back in business as a harlot, v.16, making money again by whatever makes money. A very sudden change of theme happens. (Isaiah does this many times.) It appears that Tyre is just as wicked as before, but Tyre's future trade can have other motives than merely financial gain.

When the Temple was rebuilt Tyre was part of supplying material for it (Ezra 3:7), just as it did it the days of David for Solomon's Temple. That business was for the Lord. Tyre would be back alive and active again.

The profit of prostitution cannot be given to the Lord (Deuteronomy 23:18). Since her profits will be set apart for the Lord according to v.18, this prophecy must have in mind a wonderful change. Tyre's selfish motivation as a hoarder and profiteer has changed. They now give!! This is a benevolent Tyre, clothing and feeding those who live before the Lord. This she does voluntarily. Clearly Tyre has been saved from its sin and its old ways and motives. There is a Lord in Zion. Tyre would come to know and serves the Lord.

This is one more indication that the salvation of the Lord will extend to the nations. This theme came up in chapter 2 and keeps being repeated. The glory and honor of nations like Tyre will be brought into the New Jerusalem. (Note chapter 60.) Nothing impure will ever enter, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life (Revelation 21:26,27). In Isaiah this kind of glory is prophesied.