

Pride and Prophecy

July 16 — *Isaiah 18:1-23:18*

Day 197 — 168 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

We read several of the prophecies of God's servant Isaiah, who lived many decades before the fall of Judah. He was one of those men whom the Lord sent to warn His people and other nations about their impending doom. However, what we read today was more than warnings; these prophecies were pictures of the end. Isaiah pointed to one nation after another and proclaimed its divine judgment — Ethiopia, Egypt, Babylon, Edom, Arabia, Tyre, even Judah.

Though we have discussed this topic before, it would be good to remind ourselves of several truths. First, *God is the Sovereign* of the universe, which includes all men and nations. Second, *He makes the rules* for men and nations; they are accountable to Him for their actions. Third, *He is the Judge* of all men and nations. Though it may seem that they may have their way or do as they please, they will answer to Him in the end. *Their judgment is in His hands.*

One more principle that becomes crystal clear when reading these prophecies is this — **"blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord"** (*Psalms 33:12*). Those nations that put their trust in the Lord find peace, protection, and provision; those nations that despise the Lord, do evil in His sight, or seek the help of false gods and man-made idols, reap the whirlwind.

Take note of Isaiah's warnings, "The Lord is advancing against Egypt... They will plead with their idols for wisdom. They will call on spirits, mediums, and psychics to show them which way to turn... What happened to your wise counselors, Pharaoh? If they are so wise, then let them tell you what the Lord Almighty is going to do. The wise men are fools; they are deluded" (*19:1, 3, 12*).

"The Lord Almighty called you to weep and mourn. He told you to shave your heads in sorrow for your sins and to wear clothes of sackcloth to show your remorse. Instead, you dance and play and sing, 'Let's eat, drink, and be merry. What's the difference, for tomorrow we die? The Lord will bring disaster on Tyre, empire builder and chief trader of the world. The Lord Almighty has done this **to destroy your pride and show contempt for all human greatness**' (*21:12-14; 23:8, 9*).

Daily Reflection

What is the attitude of the people of your country towards the things of God? Do they seek out and worship idols or false gods? Do they put their confidence in human greatness? How so?

Imagine Isaiah writing a prophecy to your nation. What would he have written?

Knowing what the Lord did to the nations that Isaiah prophesied about, what does that make you think about your people? What needs to take place to avert the coming judgment? Can you play a part in what needs to happen?

Enough Is Enough

July 17 — *Isaiah 24:1-29:24*

Day 198 — 167 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

As heavy as yesterday's passage was, today's prophecies from Isaiah were even weightier. In fact, the heading for *Isaiah 24* was, "Destruction of the Earth!" That's encouraging, isn't it? But, before we get too depressed, we must take note that Isaiah has, for a brief time, skipped over prophesying about contemporary Judah and, instead, prophesied about future Judah, distant future, like at the end of time.

Isaiah was privileged to get a glimpse of the last days, when Jesus will return, when Satan and his followers will be defeated and destroyed, when the evil of the world will be purged, and when the enemies of God's people will finally be defeated. Though the earth will be ruined in the process and things will look grim around the world, these are all good signs, for the Lord is about to set things right.

Note these words, "Look! The Lord is about to destroy the earth and make it a vast wasteland... The earth suffers for the sins of the people, for they have twisted the instructions of God, violated His laws, and broken His covenant. Therefore, a curse consumes the earth and its people. They are left desolate, destroyed by fire..." (24:1, 5, 6).

"In that day, the Lord will punish the fallen angels in the heavens and the proud rulers of the nations on earth... In that day, the Lord will remove the cloud of gloom, the shadow of death that hangs over the earth. **He will swallow up death forever.** The Sovereign Lord will wipe away all tears. He will remove forever all insults and mockery of His people..." (24:21; 25:8).

"In an instant, the Lord Almighty will come against the enemy with thunder and earthquake and great noise, with whirlwind and storm and consuming fire. All the nations fighting against

Jerusalem will vanish like a dream! Your enemies will dream of a victorious conquest over Jerusalem but to no avail..." (29:6-8).

Daily Reflection

As I have said before, while God is extremely patient, His patience gives way, at some point, to His justice. **He cannot allow evil to prevail forever.** "For only when He comes to judge the earth will people turn from their wickedness and do what is right. The Lord's kindness does not make them do good. They do not listen when He threatens. They do not see His upraised fist..." (26:9-11).

We have all witnessed parents who threaten their children with consequences but who never follow through with them. This type of parenting only encourages their children to defy their authority and do what they please. Ultimately, it ruins the child, dishonors the parents, and adds another deviant citizen to society. In the same way, **the Lord must follow through with His warnings or they are but empty threats.**

How do these prophecies contradict the notion that God is love and that He would never do such things as destroy the people of the earth?

Can love, discipline, punishment, and judgment coexist? Should they coexist? Explain.

In Gods We Trust

July 18 — *Isaiah 30:1-33:24*

Day 199 — 166 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

We continued reading the prophecies of Isaiah, in which the Lord shared His disgust with the fact that His people had turned to other nations to help them against their enemies. All they needed to do was turn to Him. "For without consulting Me, you have gone down to Egypt to find help. **You have put your trust in Pharaoh** for his protection. But, in trusting Pharaoh you will be humiliated and disgraced. For though his power extends to Zoan and Hanes, it will all turn out to your shame. He will not help you even one little bit... Egypt will give you nothing... Its promises are worthless... (30:2-5, 7).

"Destruction is certain for those who look to Egypt for help, trusting their cavalry and chariots instead of looking to the Lord... **Egyptians are mere humans, not God!** Their horses are puny flesh, not mighty spirits!" (31:1-3).

In the midst of their trouble, the people had refused to turn to God for help. In fact, they despised His prophets. "They tell the prophets, 'Shut up! We don't want to hear any more of your reports.' They say, 'Don't tell us the truth. Tell us nice things. Tell us lies...' But the Lord says, 'Because you despise what I tell you and trust instead in oppression and lies, calamity will come upon you...' (30:10-12).

As I read these passages, I couldn't help but think about the Church today, particularly in America. So many believers, pastors, even denominations are refusing to listen or adhere to the commands and wisdom of God's Word. "Shut up!" they shout. "We don't want to hear what the Bible really has to say. Tell us nice things. Tell us what we want to hear." **Instead of hearing, preaching, or following the truth, they would rather have their ears tickled and their hearts deceived.** It is all a game to them, and they want to make the rules.

But not so fast. **We cannot treat God's Word with such disdain and expect no repercussions.** There are consequences for rebellion against the Lord; calamity will befall those who put their trust in the world's faulty reasoning. *When we make our own way, we are, in essence, fashioning our own god and writing our own scriptures.* When we abandon the Lord's Word for others' wisdom, we are trusting in an idol and putting our hopes in human help.

Daily Reflection

Sin is deceiving. It looks harmless; it seems right, but, before you know it, one errant step after another has led you far away from the true path. Where is your hope? In what or whom do you trust? Are you adhering to God's Word or writing your own?

Why is trusting in human wisdom or the ways of the world so unreliable, so untrustworthy?

What lies have you been tempted to believe? How far off the true path have you stepped?

The Highway of Holiness

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July 19 — *Isaiah 34:1-35:10; Micah 2:1-5:15*

Day 200 — 165 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

We looked into more prophecies from Isaiah and Micah, but these were not predictions of the near future but of the distant future, the last days. They were also a stinging rebuke of Israel's leaders. "Listen, you leaders of Israel! You are supposed to know right from wrong, but you are the very people who hate good and love evil... Suppose a prophet full of lies were to say to you, 'I'll preach to you the joys of wine and drink!' That's just the kind of prophet you would like! You hate justice and twist all that is right. You are building Jerusalem on a foundation of murder and corruption. You govern on the bribes you can get... yet all of you claim to be depending on the Lord" (*Micah 2:11; 3:1, 9-11*).

However, to solve the problem, the Lord will send His own leader. "But you, O Bethlehem, though you are a small village in Judah, **a ruler of Israel will come from you**, one whose origins are from a distant past... He will stand to lead His flock with the Lord's strength, in the majesty of the name of the Lord His God. The people of Israel will be abandoned to their enemies until the time when the woman in labor gives birth to her son... Then, His people will live here undisturbed, for He will be highly honored around the world; and, He will be a source of peace" (*5:2-5*).

One of the tricky things about Old Testament prophecies is that they oftentimes have double fulfillments. For example, is this prophecy of Jesus regarding His first or second coming? The truth is that it relates to both. Obviously, Jesus was from Bethlehem and His first coming was highlighted by His birth; but, He did not deliver His people from their political enemies then. He will not do that until He comes again to judge the nations of the world.

Notice the descriptions of the last days. "Though many nations have gathered against you, calling for your blood, eager to gloat over your destruction, they do not know the Lord's thoughts or understand His plan. These nations don't know that He is gathering them together to be beaten and trampled like bundles of grain on a threshing floor... The Lord will settle international disputes. All nations will beat their swords into pruning hooks. All wars and military training will come to an end. Everyone will live quietly in their own homes in peace and prosperity, for there will be nothing to fear..." (*4:3-5, 11, 12*).

My favorite description is that of the restoration of hope, "A main road will go through that once deserted land. **It will be named the Highway of Holiness.** Evil-hearted people will never travel on it. It will be only for those who walk in God's ways; fools will never walk there. Lions will not lurk along its course; and there will be no other dangers there. Only the redeemed will follow it. Those who have been ransomed by the Lord will return to Jerusalem, singing songs of everlasting joy. Sorrow and mourning will disappear, and they will be overcome with joy and gladness" (*Isaiah 35:8-10*).

Daily Reflection

As troubled as our world seems today, it will get much worse. However, we need not fear, for we are people of hope. **Though we are powerless to stand against the tide of evil that is coming our way, we have a Savior who will make all things right!**

Though the last days will be tumultuous, they will end in triumph. *The evil that has prevailed for centuries will give way to that Highway of Holiness;* and, we will be the victors who will get to walk that way because of the feats of our conquering King!

The Enemy's Lies

Today In Your Reading...

We finished the prophecies of Micah and read of the invasion of the Assyrians into the land of Judah (703 BC). Reading these prophecies next to the deliverance of Hezekiah and the people of Jerusalem can seem a bit confusing, even contradictory. On the one hand, Micah forewarned God's people, "Listen! Fear the Lord if you are wise! His voice is calling out to everyone in Jerusalem, 'The armies of destruction are coming.' The Lord is sending them... 'I will wound you! I will bring you to ruin for all your sins! Your judgment day is coming swiftly now. Your time of punishment is here'" (6:9, 10, 13; 7:4). On the other hand, Hezekiah and the people of Jerusalem were spared of the devastation at the hands of the Assyrians.

What happened? Was Micah wrong? Were his prophecies misleading? No, while Hezekiah, a righteous leader, was king of the land, no evil would befall God's people. However, the prophecies of their fall would come true, not with the Assyrians but with another nation — Babylonia.

In the meantime, we witnessed the tactics of the Assyrian King, Sennacherib, as he attempted to pressure Hezekiah into surrendering Jerusalem. For centuries, besieging armies have tried every trick in the book to get cities to cave in to their demands. As if it weren't frightening enough to see thousands of troops surround the city, to see arrows of fire launched into their houses, to see battering rams constructed to break down the gates, or to watch day after day as ramps were built to scale the walls, **the most effective tactics were psychological.** *Enemies used their words to insult, to threaten, or to undermine hope and confidence.*

Sennacherib did all of these things, sending his messengers to stir up rebellion among the people. **"What are you trusting in that makes**

you so confident?" he asked. "Do you think mere words can substitute for military skill and strength? Which of your allies will come to rescue you? If you do not surrender, you will become so hungry that you will eat your own dung and drink your own urine... **Don't let Hezekiah fool you, saying, 'The Lord will rescue us!'** Have the gods of the other nations ever saved their people from our hands? **What god of any nation has been able to save his people from my power? Name just one!** So what makes you think the Lord will rescue Jerusalem?" (2 Kings 18:19-37).

Daily Reflection

Wow! How effective must these words have been to demoralize God's people? Sadly, **our spiritual enemy does the same thing to us today — undermine our confidence and trust in the Lord with his lies.**

What lies has the enemy whispered to you, to get you to abandon the Lord, to trust in your own power or in something or someone else, or to get you to surrender to temptation?

Words are powerful; lies are effective. What must you do to protect yourself from them?

Lay Down Your Letters

Today In Your Reading...

We continued with the Assyrian invasion of Judah, particularly of the siege of Jerusalem. Sennacherib, King of Assyria, applied pressure to Hezekiah, King of Judah, to surrender; but, **Hezekiah's confidence in the Lord outweighed his fear of the enemy.** He asked the people to assemble at the city gate, and he said to them, "Be strong and courageous! Don't be afraid of the King of Assyria or his mighty army, **for there is a power far greater on our side!** He may have a great army, but they are just men. **We have the Lord our God to help us and to fight our battles for us!**" (2 Chronicles 32:6-8). These words greatly encouraged the people.

However, Sennacherib was relentless. He continued to send messages to Hezekiah to scare him and demoralize the people. "Don't let this God you trust deceive you with His promises... You know perfectly well what the Assyrians have done wherever they have gone. They have crushed everyone who stood in their way! Why should you be any different?" (2 Kings 19:11).

I love Hezekiah's response to Sennacherib's letter. **He went up to the Temple and spread it out before the Lord and prayed.** "You alone are God of all the kingdoms of the earth... It is true, that the Kings of Assyria have destroyed other nations. They have thrown down the gods of those nations into the fire and burned them. But of course the Assyrians could destroy them! They were not gods at all, only idols of wood and stone, shaped by human hands. Now, O Lord, rescue us from their power; then, all the kingdoms of the earth will know that You alone are God!" (2 Kings 19:14-19).

Hezekiah put his trust in the Lord and He delivered Jerusalem. That night, He invaded the Assyrian camp and slew 185,000 soldiers. Sen-

nacherib then returned home, only to be assassinated by his own sons. God had indeed saved His people from danger.

Daily Reflection

As a Christian, **you have access to the same God as Hezekiah did,** not because of your righteousness but because of the righteous life and sacrifice of Christ. Because His blood has made you clean, you are able to approach the throne of God with confidence, call upon His name, and cast your cares before Him, "so that you may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:14-16; 10:19-22).

Hezekiah's name literally meant, **"The Lord Jehovah is strong."** His strength did not come from his own wisdom or abilities; it came from his trust in God. He laid his letter before the Lord and believed that God would fight the battle for him. Are you trusting God in this way? Are you laying your burdens before Him and trusting Him to be strong on your behalf?

What troubles you today? What is it that's weighing you down? Are you laying it down?

Know that the Lord your God listens to the prayers of His children. In Jesus' name, you can do what Hezekiah did and know for certain that God cares for you. Therefore, "be anxious for nothing, but, in everything, let your requests be made known to God, and the peace of God will guard your heart and mind" (Philippians 4:6, 7).

In Sickness and in Wealth

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July 22 — 2 Kings 20:1-19; Isaiah 38:1-39:8; 2 Chronicles 32:24-31

Day 203 — 162 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

We followed the life of King Hezekiah after the Lord's incredible defeat of the Assyrian army. It seems that the king became deathly ill from a terrible boil and was given the bad news that it would end his life. After praying for mercy, the Lord spared Hezekiah and granted him fifteen more years, perhaps to give him an heir (Manasseh), for God had promised David that he would always have a descendant on the throne.

However, today we got to see a little of the ugly side of Hezekiah. I appreciate the fact that the Bible, though it expresses the good that men achieved, it does not hide their shortcomings. As "righteous" as Hezekiah was and as many positive things that he accomplished for the Lord, he was still a man. He was imperfect. He made mistakes and battled with his own sins. It appears that his primary struggle was with pride.

After the Lord cured him of his boil, "Hezekiah did not respond appropriately to the kindness shown him and he became proud, so the Lord's anger burned against him and against Judah and Jerusalem. However, Hezekiah repented and the people of Jerusalem humbled themselves" (2 Chronicles 32:25, 26).

Hezekiah's pride might have hinged on the fact that "he was very wealthy and held in high esteem" (v.27). God had blessed him in every way imaginable and "he succeeded in everything that he did" (v.30). We are not told specifically what Hezekiah did to express his arrogance, but we might assume that he was boastful, pompous, or pretentious; or he was simply neglectful when it came to thanking God for His blessings.

One incident that occurred, which gives us some insight, is that he received envoys from Babylon. They were curious to know about Hezekiah's kingdom. Here "God withdrew from the king in

order to test him and to see what was really in his heart" (2 Chronicles 32:31). Rather than reflect glory to God for His favor, Hezekiah boasted of all his treasures and successes. **That which was "really in his heart" was not humility or gratefulness to God but a hunger for the attention and affirmation of others.**

Daily Reflection

In this account, you will find three observations. First, *God did not need to know what was in Hezekiah's heart; He already knew it.* However, He needed to reveal it to the king, which He did through Isaiah's prophecy concerning Judah's fall to Babylon. **Though it is hard for you to see or hear, it is good for you to know and remember what is really in your heart.**

Second, *you should be grateful that God does not withdraw Himself from you today.* His Spirit is always with you. You struggle enough with your sinful flesh, even with His help. Can you imagine where you would be without Him?

Finally, did you catch the king's responses to poor health and great wealth? In poor health, he sought the Lord with all his heart; but, in great wealth, he abandoned the Lord and put confidence in his own abilities. **As much as you hate to hear it, adversity is better for you than prosperity.**

Take a minute to reflect upon how you have responded to situations in your life lately. Have you remembered the Lord or have you forgotten Him? What has success done to your faith?
