

The World's Destiny

Themes in Isaiah and Other Prophets as the Background to Jesus' Saving Gospel about the Kingdom

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“The prophets speak of little else than these two topics: how and why God's people may expect to be punished by a variety of disasters soon, and why they may expect to be rescued and restored eventually” (Douglas Stuart, *Word Commentary*, Hosea-Jonah, p. xxxii).

Cp. “The Book of Ezekiel is occupied with two great themes: the **destruction** of the city and the nation; and the **reconstitution** of the people and their eternal peace. The book thus falls into two equal divisions, 24 chapters each” (A.B. Davidson, *Ezekiel, Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges*, p. ix).

Cp. “The book of Zephaniah falls into two general divisions, chs. 1:2-3:8, a threat of **judgment** on the world, on Israel and on the nations; and second a promise of **salvation** equally universal (3:9-20)” (*Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges, Zephaniah*, p. 104)

cp. Jer. 32:42: “For thus says the Lord, ‘Just as I brought all this great **disaster** on this people, so I am going to bring on them all the **good** which I am promising them.’”

cp. Isa. 9:1: “There will be no more gloom for her who was in anguish.”

The Eschatology of Isaiah

(based on J. Skinner, D.D., *Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges*, 1905)

“The belief in an impending dissolution of the existing order of the world appears to be of the essence of Hebrew prophecy.”

This idea stems from their ethical conception “about **God's final purpose with the world**...The general representation which meets us in the prophecy of the 8th century is that of a **sudden and violent upheaval of the physical and social conditions of human life** to be followed by a **new order of things in which the divine rule on earth is realized [the Kingdom of God]** and all nature becomes subservient to the needs of a renewed humanity...Nature is not so much superseded as idealized...This is not as a result of progressive amelioration of earthly conditions but as the immediate sequel to the **political catastrophe** which the prophets saw to be imminent.”

Four Main Topics

1. The Day of the Lord
2. The Remnant
3. The Messianic King
4. The Inviolability of Zion (Jerusalem). It will be the capital of a new world-order (“the inhabited earth of the future about which we speak,” Heb. 2:5)

1. The Day of the Lord. Isa. 2:12-21: “A day of universal overthrow in which all that is ‘high and lofty’ in human civilization will be laid low, when men will fling their idols to the rats and the moles and hide themselves from the glory of Yahweh's majesty when he rises up to cause the earth to tremble. The **earthquake** is an important part of God's intervention. The fundamental conception of the **Day of the Lord** is that of a **theophany** — a visible apparition of Yahweh breaking through the material fabric of the universe and revealing His immediate presence [cp. **Parousia, Second Coming of Jesus as God's agent**]. The great being whom Isaiah saw seated on His throne (Isa. 6) rises (3:13) in awful grandeur to shake the earth; the veiled glory which is the fullness of the whole earth (6:3) now breaks forth in dazzling and terrifying splendor. This is an integral part of His eschatology” (p. lxff).

“**The Day of the Lord** is often indicated by the phrase ‘in that day.’ **Assyria** is conceived as Yahweh’s agent to punish the sin and humble the pride of Israel, but **an overthrow of Judah is looked for also from the Assyrian attack [this did not happen historically]**. This is not the complete purpose of Yahweh. There is also to be a destruction of **Assyria**. Every anticipation of that crowning act of judgment shows that Isaiah regarded it as brought about by the personal and supernatural intervention of the Holy One of Israel. And when after the retreat of Sennacherib (BC 701) he still announces the doom of impenitent Jerusalem (22:1-14), it is clear **that he did not think of his expectation of judgment as exhausted by the Assyrian invasion**. Hence the essential idea of **the Day of Yahweh** remained with Isaiah till the close of his career and pervaded all his forecasts of the approaching climax of human history.”

“Isaiah felt that the hour of decisive conflict between Yahweh and the world-power was at hand [cp. ‘the Kingdom of God is at hand,’ Mark 1:14-15]; and he believed that in the last extremity **Jerusalem would be saved** by the intervention of the Almighty (29:7ff, 31:5). This thought finds expression in 31:8ff and still more powerfully in an imaginative picture [so the author thinks, but Isaiah *predicted*, he did not fantasize!] of the judgment of **Assyria** in 30:27-33...The crisis of **Jerusalem’s** fate becomes the occasion of the majesty of God to which Isaiah had looked forward from the beginning of his work, and which he had with increasing distinctness connected with the overthrow of the Assyrian power. The **whole history of redemption converges to this one event**; it is the consummation of Yahweh’s work of judgment both **on Israel and on Assyria**, and the inauguration of **the reign of holiness [the Kingdom of God]** and righteousness and peace reserved for the purified **remnant** of the nation” (p. xxxix).

2. The Remnant. “The doctrine of the **remnant** first appears in the name of the son of Isaiah, ‘Shear Yashuv’ (= ‘A Remnant will return, repent’) who accompanied Isaiah in his memorable interview with Ahaz in 735 BC. The idea of **the remnant** implies a certain continuity between the present order of things and the perfect order of the future. There had been a **remnant** of 7000 who ‘had not bowed the knee to Baal’ in the time of Elijah. The boy’s name, ‘Shear Yashuv’ (‘The remnant will return’) first indicates that if Judah is faithful the nation as a whole can escape the coming disaster, the world-crisis; if not then only a **remnant** of the nation of Judah would inherit the promise of the Messianic Age [cp. ‘Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the Kingdom,’ Luke 12:32]. When Ahaz refuses, the promise of salvation is restricted to a **remnant** which might be larger or smaller according to the number of individuals who would believe the prophet’s message (about faith) and with him wait for the manifestation of the Kingdom of God [i.e., believe the Gospel, Mark 1:14-15].

“The remnant has therefore two aspects. It is a purely eschatological idea (10:20-23). Here the remnant is ‘those who escape in Israel’ in the final crisis. But even in Isaiah’s time there is a little band of disciples forming a remnant, who consciously form an inner circle of religious fellowship (cp. Daniel and his friends), a nucleus of the future people of God. They are a ‘kernel,’ an indestructible germ of true godliness that gave to Isaiah the assurance that in spite of public failure his word had yet an abiding value for the perfect religion of the future. [Jesus assembles this remnant by the propagation of the creative seed Message of the Gospel of the Kingdom, Luke 8:11, Matt. 13:19.]”

3. The Messianic King. “This term designates the ideal king of the House of David who is the perfect representative of the Kingdom of God [cp. Acts 8:12, King and Kingdom]. Three outstanding passages describe this King (9:2-7, 11:1-9, 32:1-5). [+ 7:14] In two of these passages the destiny of the nation is made to turn on the birth of the promised child; and the child is the same as the wonderful ruler in 9:6ff. Ahaz is all that a king should *not* be, but he will be replaced by the **great future ruler**,

the Messiah. [This drama can be acted out in every generation: bad ruler, prophet who challenges him, remnant, promise of the perfect King and Kingdom.]

“The King **borders on the divine**; his fourfold name expresses some extraordinary and mysterious relation to God. He is called ‘Wonderful, Counselor, Hero-God, Father of the Coming Age, Prince of Peace.’ In 11:1 he is described as the shoot from the stock of Jesse. He is uniquely endowed with the Spirit of Yahweh for the perfect discharge of his kingly functions. In 32:1 he appears as an ordinary good king, reigning in righteousness and associated with princes of a like spirit ruling in judgment. [The NT develops the idea of Christians preparing for these positions of co-rulership with Jesus in the Coming Kingdom, Mat. 19:28, 1 Cor. 6:2, 2 Tim 2:12; Rev. 2:26; 3:21; 5:10; 20:1-6.]

“What can we say about the superhuman nature of this King? He is in some sense a divine or semi-divine being. **This is not to say that Messiah is God, or even a God/man in the Christian sense** — such a conception would have been impossible in the time of Isaiah [or at any time!], but neither is he an ordinary mortal distinguished from other men only by the office which he holds...The Messiah is God’s gift to the nation in the crisis of its destiny, and the pledge that the whole power of God would be put forth for the establishment of His Kingdom (‘The zeal or passion of Yahweh will perform this,’ 9:7). The kingly perfection of the Messiah is ascribed, in accordance with the common teaching of the OT, to the indwelling of the spirit of Yahweh who imparts to him **the insight and energy and piety** necessary for the discharge of his high functions. The perfect discharge of the ethical functions of **royalty** is a task of such transcendent importance as to require the unique endowment of divine virtues which is the distinctive feature in the more ideal portraits of the Messiah.”

4. The Inviolability of Zion. “Jerusalem is to be the center of **the future Kingdom of God** (1:26, 2:2-4; 4:2-6; 8:18; 10:32ff; 14:32; 18:7; 28:16; 29:1; 30:19; 29, 23, 20ff.; 37:32). The thought that Zion would occupy the same central position in **the ideal age** as in the present is the natural and inevitable consequence of the general principle that the future dispensation is always represented under forms derived from the present. **Jerusalem** will be spared in the impending crisis of judgment and form the refuge for those who are saved from the wreck of nations so that its sanctity, along with the permanence of the **Davidic Kingdom**, is a pledge of the indestructibility of Israel. 14:32: ‘Yahweh has founded Zion and there the poor of his people will find refuge.’ In 10:12 the destruction of **Assyria** is spoken of as following the chastisement of Jerusalem...**It is predicted that the annihilation of the Assyrians will be on the soil of Palestine.**”

Compare Obadiah

(Comments based on T.T. Perowne, B.D. *Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges*, pp. 19ff)

“The destruction of Edom and the restoration of Israel shall eventually issue in the promised, though still future and long-looked for consummation, when **‘the Kingdom shall be the Lord’s’** (v. 21). The prophecy has undoubtedly a wider range and a more distant scope: **A ‘typical’ or allegorical meaning has very generally been ascribed to Edom in this and other OT prophecies.** When their ancient foe had passed away, the Jews, not unnaturally perhaps, recognized Rome, their latest oppressor, in the Edom of their prophets, and comforted themselves that on this second Edom as on the first, the predicted vengeance would one day fall. Thus we find their rabbis asserting that ‘Janus, the first King of Latium, was grandson of Esau,’ and that both **Julius Caesar and Titus were Edomites.** When the Roman Empire became Christian, then the Christians generally came to be regarded as Edomites by the Jews. The persecutions which Christians have heaped upon them go far, it must be confessed, to justify the reference [!], and it is scarcely surprising that with modern Jews it is a canon of interpretation that by the **Edomites are meant the Christians.** Their Messiah when he comes is to gather Israel from all the countries of their dispersion into their land and destroy their Edomite, that is Christian, oppressors. Within the Christian church Edom has been held to represent the enemies of

herself and of her Lord, **while the restoration of Israel to her own land and their diffusion throughout its limits have been interpreted to signify the spread of Christianity throughout the world.** That such an allegorical (Gal. 4:24) or as it has sometimes been called *spiritual* interpretation of OT prophecy is rightly recognized by the Church we cannot doubt. Her children are the seed of Abraham (Gal. 3:29). All the promises are theirs (2 Cor. 1:20). To her and to them all the glowing future belongs. They shall share His throne and His dominion when ‘the Kingdom shall be the Lord’s.’

“But the question still remains, whether beyond not only those first literal fulfillments of this and similar OT prophecies, which may be traced in the past or present history of the world, but beyond also that spiritual or allegorical fulfillment of them which the church of Christ is warranted in claiming and enjoying for herself, *there may not lie yet another fulfillment of many of them...* which may fully satisfy the conditions and exhaust the terms of those ancient predictions. [This is a wonderful truth which has never been widely recognized.]

“That such a fulfillment was contemplated, and is to be expected still, it seems reasonable to believe. [This is Premillennialism.] **The canon of interpretation which excludes the Jew, as such, from any participation in the promised future, breaks down continually when we apply it to the prophetic writings of the OT.** The literal and ‘spiritual’ elements refuse to yield to its requirements. We cannot, without doing violence to language and connection, dissociate the blessing and the curse, heaping all the one upon the ‘Ebal’ of the Jewish nation, while we crown with all the other the ‘Gerizim’ of the church of Christ. The NT steps in to prevent such a process. There, too, the future of the Jew, as such, is painted in glowing colors (Rom. 11). They are destined to be converted: ‘And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Zion the deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob.’ And then **‘the Kingdom shall be the Lord’s’** (Obad. 21).”

What an excellent statement!

Compare the theme of **Amos** (*Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges*, S.R. Driver, 1907, p. 97). Chap. 9:11-15: “an epilogue containing the promise of a brighter future. **The dynasty of David, though now humbled, will be reinstated in its former splendor and power (9:1-12) and the blessings of peace will be shared by the entire nation.**”

Why is this extraordinary information, held in common by the prophets and developed by Jesus, about the future of our world **not believed** and taught by the churches claiming to be the custodians and expositors of Holy Scripture?

Note the Apostolic authority for the **great restoration** to be expected in the future: “Heaven must retain the Messiah until **the restoration** of all things of which God has spoken through the mouth of all His holy prophets” (Acts 3:21).

Are you prepared for a place in this glorious restoration (*apokatastasis*) of which all the prophets speak? This is the challenge of the Gospel (Mark 1:14-15; 4:11-12, Luke 8:12). “Unless they believe the Gospel [of the Kingdom, Matt. 13:19] they cannot repent and be forgiven.”

The information above will lend new meaning to Jesus’ main message: “Repent, **for the Kingdom of God is at hand!**” (Mark 1:14-15).

In contemporary terms: “Change drastically, because (as the prophets of Israel announced and Jesus confirms) God’s world government is about to take over the world and introduce a new era of history.”