

## ***Isaiah Part 18: “A king will reign in righteousness”***

### **Isaiah 32 and 33**

#### ***A king will reign in righteousness (Isaiah 32 v 1 to 8)***

In the previous chapter, God assured that the Assyrians would be judged, and Judah would be delivered. But God didn't just want to remove the threat; he also wanted to bless Judah with a righteous king, so the promise is made: “Behold, a king will reign in righteousness” (v 1). Hezekiah certainly fulfils this prophecy: “And he did what was right in the sight of the LORD...” (2 Kings 18 v 3 to 6). But ultimately, Hezekiah is a picture of the King of kings, Jesus Christ (Jeremiah 23 v 5). “Princes will rule in justice” (v 1) – the king needs helpers, princes under him, who will also rule with justice. Hezekiah had such loyal princes, such as Eliakim, Shebna the scribe, the elders of the priests, and Isaiah himself (2 Kings 19 v 2). But who are Jesus' princes? His people are his princes! See 1 Peter 2 v 9; Revelation 5 v 10. Many of the trials and pains of this life have a purpose in the world beyond: training us to be princes, faithfully ruling with King Jesus...

- What blessings does God promise to his people after their trials in these verses, and also v 15 to 20? What (or who) makes all the difference (v 15)?

Spiritual renewal during the reign of Hezekiah will be like “a hiding place from the wind, a shelter from the storm, streams of water in a dry place, [and] the shade of a great rock in a weary land” (v 2). Those who can see will see better than ever, and those who hear will listen (v 3). But the glorious reign of Jesus is all these things for us as well. “The heart of the hasty will understand and know” (v 4) – spiritual renewal will promote an understanding of God's Word, and so hearts are changed. God will also bless in miraculous ways: “the tongue of the stammerers will hasten to speak distinctly” (v 4). “The fool will no more be called noble” (v 5) – renewal will also mean that spiritual reality will be exposed. No longer will there be deception by appearances; if a man is foolish, he will be exposed as such. “But he who is noble plans noble things” (v 8) – righteousness and wickedness will each be seen for what they are, and treated accordingly.

#### ***Complacent women warned of disaster (Isaiah 32 v 9 to 20)***

Before the righteous king can come, the ‘women who are at ease’ and the ‘complacent daughters’ have to get ready. “At ease” is the same word as “secure dwellings” in verse 18, and “complacent” is the same word used for “peaceful habitation”. Instead of leading indulgent, self-focused lives, the complacent women will “tremble... shudder... and tie sackcloth” around their waists. God will use the difficult times caused by the Assyrian invasion to wake Judah up: “For the grape harvest fails, the fruit harvest will not come” (v 10). The tough times will affect everyone – the joyous houses in the exultant city, the palace, the populous city...

“Until the Spirit is poured upon us from on high” (v 15) – God will use the Assyrian invasion, the tough times, and the people's humble mourning to prepare them for an outpouring of his Spirit. It is only the Spirit of God that can make the difference; the tough times will last ‘until’ the Spirit is poured out. God wants to do more than scatter a few drops of blessing; he wants his Spirit to be ‘poured out’ upon his people. The true outpouring of the Holy Spirit does not come from human effort: it comes from heaven, from ‘on high’.

“The wilderness becomes a fruitful field” – when the Spirit is poured out, what was barren and desolate becomes full of life and fruitfulness, what was good before (‘a fruitful field’) becomes even better (‘a forest’). “Justice... righteousness... peace... quietness and trust forever” (v 16, 17) – these are the qualities that characterise the outpouring of the Spirit. “My people will abide in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places” (v 18), even though “it will hail when the forest falls down, and the city will be utterly laid low” (v 19). We live on a principle higher than circumstances. Even if we feel the pelting hail, or are brought low in humiliation, it does not matter if we are filled with God's Holy Spirit...

***[MORE OVER...]***

## *O Lord, be gracious to us (Isaiah 33 v 1 to 24)*

“Ah, you destroyer... you will be destroyed” (v 1) – this prophecy, spoken before the Assyrian invasion, shows that this seemingly unstoppable army will in fact be stopped. Those who did the plundering will be plundered, and will be dealt with treacherously by others. Jesus spoke of this same principle in Matthew 7 v 1, 2: “For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the same measure you use, it will be measured back to you.” God has every right to deal with us as we have dealt with others.

“O LORD, be gracious to us; we wait for you” (v 2) – in the face of the Assyrian threat, God’s people no longer look to the Egyptians, or to themselves. They look to God, and cry out, ‘Lord, be gracious to us’. “When you lift yourself up, nations are scattered” (v 3) – the people of Judah have a confident expectation that their prayers will be answered. “The LORD is exalted” (v 5) – the difficult times are hard, but they bring God’s people to a better view of who God is. Because they have been brought low, they see that God is exalted. “He will fill Zion with justice and righteousness” – the people pray this in anticipation of the answer. We too can, by faith, give God thanks ahead of time! “The fear of the LORD is Zion’s treasure” (v 6) – respect and reverence towards God means that we will not cower in fear, but we will rightly honour him.

“Their heroes cry in the streets... the land mourns and languishes” (v 7 to 9) – when God’s judgment comes to the earth, everyone is brought low before him. The ‘heroes’ will cry, and the ‘envoys of peace’, who trusted in other nations instead of God, will weep bitterly. “Covenants are broken” (v 8) – reminds us that Isaiah looks ahead to end-times, when the ‘prince who is to come’ will make, and then break, a covenant with God’s people (Daniel 9 v 27). Even mighty Lebanon, with her majestic forests of cedar, “is confounded and withers away” (v 9). “Now I will rise” (v 10) – as the whole earth is brought low by God’s judgment, God will lift himself up. “And the peoples will be... burned in the fire” (v 12) – God’s judgment will come like fire, and the worthless works of man will be burned like chaff and stubble.

“The sinners in Zion are afraid” (v 14) – of course they are: God’s judgment is coming! “He who walks righteously... will dwell on the heights” (v 15, 16) – though sinners are terrified at the impending judgment, the righteous are comforted that God is coming to set things right. “Your eyes will behold the king in his beauty” (v 17) – God will bless the righteous with a ‘place of defence’, ‘fortresses of rocks’, and unfailing food and water. But above these material blessings, they will see the ‘king in his beauty’: in the immediate sense, this refers to Hezekiah, but ultimately this refers to our beautiful Saviour Jesus Christ.

- In the picture of God’s kingdom in verses 17 to 24, what are the characteristics of his people, what will the Lord do for them, and be to them, and what blessings will they enjoy?

“Your eyes will see Jerusalem, an untroubled habitation” (v 18) – in the midst of the Assyrian threat, God will preserve Jerusalem: not one of its cords will be broken. God’s blessing on Zion will bring ‘broad rivers’ to this barren, desert land. But won’t a wide river give a path to an enemy coming on ships? No, because “the LORD in majesty will be for us a place of broad rivers and streams, where no galley with oars can go, or majestic ship can pass” (v 21) – the ships turned out to be not so majestic after all: “Your cords hang loose; they cannot hold the mast firm in its place, or keep the sail spread out” (v 23). It is foolish to fear the majestic ships instead of trusting the majestic LORD. “For the LORD is our judge; the LORD is our lawgiver; the LORD is our king; he will save us” (v 22) – this verse underpins the US Constitution, in that it describes the ‘separation of powers’ of government into the judicial (‘judge’), legislative (‘lawgiver’) and executive (‘king’) branches. “And no inhabitant will say, ‘I am sick’; the people who dwell there will be forgiven their iniquity” (v 24) – ultimately, healing and forgiveness will be the hallmarks of God’s kingdom.

*Prayer – Lord, thank you for these words of comfort, reassurance and promise. Lord, be gracious to us, for we wait for you. Lord, be our arm every morning, and our salvation in times of trouble. Help us to remember that the effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever. We praise you in Jesus’ name, Amen.*