

Isaiah Part 39: Jerusalem's glorious future and the LORD's day of vengeance

Isaiah 62 and 63 v 1 to 6

Jerusalem's glorious future (Isaiah 62 v 1 to 12)

“For Jerusalem's sake I will not be quiet, until her righteousness goes forth as brightness” (v 1) – Isaiah prophesied in a time when Jerusalem was still a city but spiritually bankrupt. Here, he prophesies a time when Jerusalem is desolate because she has been conquered by the Babylonians, but he speaks comfort to her discouraged and downcast citizens. The LORD assures them that he will not rest until Jerusalem is restored by a shining righteousness. While this prophecy is directed towards Jerusalem, it also stands as a representation of Israel, and in a more general sense, as a representation of all God's people.

“The nations shall see your righteousness” (v 2) – when God exalts Jerusalem the Gentile nations see it and recognize the LORD's righteousness. The work God does for Jerusalem will have an effect on the nations and their rulers (“kings”). “You shall be called by a new name” – this idea extends to verse 4, where the LORD ‘exchanges’ Jerusalem's old names (‘Forsaken’, ‘Desolate’) for her new names of glory (‘My Delight Is in Her’) and security (‘Married’). For Christian believers, the concept of a new name is found in Revelation 2 v 17 and Revelation 3 v 12. In heaven, when our transformation is complete, we will receive a new name that fits our transformed nature. “You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD” (v 3) – we may be familiar with the idea that we will receive a crown; it is more wonderful to consider that Jerusalem (and we) will be a crown of glory in the hand of the LORD.

“You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate” (v 4) – Jerusalem had experienced war and defeat and desolation. God's people understood what it was like to feel ‘Forsaken’ and ‘Desolate’, so they identify with those names. “But you shall be called My Delight Is in Her, and your land Married; for the Lord delights in you, and your land shall be married” – the days of forsakenness and desolation will pass, and there will come a time when Jerusalem and God's people will know that God delights in them, and will know the unbroken presence and love of God, as a wife should know the presence and love of her husband. “As the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you” (v 5) – they will know how much God loves them – see also Zephaniah 3 v 17 and Ephesians 3 v 18, 19.

- Consider the ‘word-pictures’ for God's people presented in this chapter, such as ‘bride’ and ‘watchmen’ – what can we learn from these illustrations?

“On your walls, O Jerusalem, I have set watchmen” (v 6) – because God loves and rejoices over Jerusalem, he will protect his people. Though they would be conquered by the Babylonians, the day will come when he makes Jerusalem “a praise in the earth” (v 7). The watchmen have a constant duty: all day and all night “they shall never be silent. You who put the LORD in remembrance, take no rest, and give him no rest until he establishes Jerusalem...” – the watchmen are ‘prayer warriors’, who pray constantly, giving God “no rest” until his people and his city are restored.

“The LORD has sworn by his right hand... ‘I will not again give your grain to be food for your enemies’” (v 8) – Jerusalem will no more be plundered by those who would steal her grain or new wine. Instead, those who have gathered it shall eat the grain and “praise the LORD” (v 9), and the drink the wine “in the courts of [his] sanctuary”. “Go through the gates; prepare the way for the people” (v 10) – since God's salvation is coming, the leaders must prepare the way for the people. They need to build up the highway, ready to usher people to salvation. “Lift up a signal over the peoples” – not only must the way be prepared, but it must also be marked by a signal, or banner, so people will be attracted to come.

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“Say to the daughter of Zion, ‘Behold, your salvation comes’” (v 11) – the way has been prepared and marked; now is the time for the LORD’s salvation to appear, and to come to Zion. Isaiah makes it clear that salvation comes not only to Zion (Jerusalem), but “the LORD has proclaimed [this] to the end of the earth.” “Behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him” – Revelation 22 v 12 is a quotation from this verse, and Paul continues this idea in 1 Corinthians 3 v 8 to 15, saying how when we appear before Christ, we will be judged according to our work for him. On that day, each one will receive his own reward according to his labour. “And you shall be called Sought Out, A City Not Forsaken” (v 12) – through her history, Jerusalem knew what it was like to be Forsaken. But in that day, she will be called Sought Out; everyone will know she was valued and chosen by God.

The LORD’s day of vengeance (Isaiah 63 v 1 to 6)

“Who is this who comes from Edom, in crimsoned garments from Bozrah” (v 1) – this prophecy describes the day of the LORD’s vengeance. He has come from Edom in the sense that He has judged there first, and now comes to the land of Israel. As the LORD arrives, he “is splendid in his apparel, marching in the greatness of his strength.” “It is I, speaking in righteousness, mighty to save” – this is the LORD’s reply to the question in the prophecy. He identifies himself by what he says (“speaking in righteousness”) and what he does (“mighty to save”). Even in judgment, glory and strength, he wants us to know he is mighty to save...

“Why is your apparel red, and your garments like his who treads in the winepress?” (v 2), and the LORD answers, “I have trodden the winepress alone... I trod them in my anger and trampled them in my wrath; their lifeblood spattered on my garments, and stained all my apparel” (v 3) – this prophecy is fulfilled when Jesus returns to the earth, and is clearly echoed in Revelation 19 v 13 to 15. “He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood” (Revelation 19 v 13) – these verses, taken together with this passage from Isaiah 63, suggests that Jesus’ first ‘mission’ is to rescue the Jewish remnant taking refuge from the antichrist during the Great Tribulation at “Bozrah” (= Petra) in Edom, and to bring God’s vengeance upon the enemies of Israel.

“I have trodden the winepress alone, and from the peoples no one was with me” (v 3) – this reminds us that this work of judgment belongs to Jesus Christ and him alone. Though we will be part of the heavenly armies that accompany Jesus (Revelation 19 v 14), the work of judgment belongs to Christ alone. This idea is further developed in verse 5: “I looked, but there was no one to help; I was appalled, but there was no one to uphold; so my own arm brought me salvation, and my wrath upheld me.” In God’s great plan, Jesus accomplishes two things alone. First, he atones for our sin alone: he alone hung on the cross, bearing the weight of all our sin. Second, he judges the world alone: God does not need us to execute his ultimate judgment; we leave that to Jesus.

“For the day of vengeance was in my heart, and my year of redemption had come” (v 4) – these words, prophetically spoken by Jesus, sound almost foreign to us. We rarely think of vengeance being in the heart of Jesus, but he said: ‘For the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son’ (John 5 v 22). Note that ‘vengeance’ is followed by ‘redemption’: this passage speaks of a ‘day of vengeance’, followed by an entire ‘year of redemption’...

Prayer –

Lord, we praise you for these wonderful promises to the people of Jerusalem,

We give thanks that we too in Christ shall be a ‘crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD’, that days of forsakenness and desolation will pass, and we can be sure that you delight in us.

We praise you that there will come a time when we experience your unbroken presence and love for eternity.

We give you thanks in Jesus’ precious name, Amen.