

Isaiah 11:10-16  
Jesus: A Banner for the Nations  
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Isaiah lived in dark and difficult times, but He knew as a prophet that times would get darker and even more difficult. During his lifetime, Isaiah witnessed the growing apostasy of King Ahaz, the king of Judah. He saw King Ahaz's growing disinterest in the living and true God, the God of the Bible. He saw King Ahaz's growing enchantment with the vain idols of paganism and with the apparent success of the pagan Assyrian empire. Isaiah saw the rise of the pagan Assyrian empire with its ruthless cruelty and insatiable greed and perverse idolatry. The Assyrian empire then seemed unstoppable, and the future appeared to belong to it.

Things were dark, but they would get darker. Isaiah looked to the future with the eye of the prophet, and he saw the coming desolation of the land and the deportation of the people. In the not too distant future, the Assyrians would totally conquer the northern kingdom of Israel and forcibly remove most of its surviving population and resettle them among other nations of the world. The Assyrians also later would attack the southern kingdom of Judah and overrun most of that nation. God would answer the prayers of good king Hezekiah and deliver Judah from the Assyrians. The Babylonians would then arise and overthrow the Assyrians. The Babylonian empire, over a century later, would finish what the Assyrians had started in

Judah. The Babylonians would conquer Judah, destroy the city of Jerusalem, and resettle most of the people of Judah in foreign lands for a seventy year period called the Babylonian exile. Isaiah lived in dark times, and Isaiah knew it was getting even darker.

They say that it is always darkest just before the dawn. As Isaiah looked into the future with the eyes of a prophet, he saw the rising of a Bright and Morning Star. While it is still the dead of night and before the first rays of dawn break forth over the horizon, the morning star heralds the coming dawn. The morning star, the planet Venus, brightly reflects the light of the sun while the sun is still completely below the horizon. The Bible identifies the metaphorical Bright and Morning Star. In Revelation 22:16, Jesus said, "I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star." The Bright and Morning Star is Jesus.

Jesus is also, as we read in this very verse, the Root and Offspring of David, or, as Isaiah called Him in our passage for today, the Root of Jesse. With that designation, "a Root of Jesse," Isaiah was referring to the coming desolation. The mighty house of David and Solomon which had towered like a mighty tree would be hewn down with the axe of divine judgment and reduced to a lowly stump. All that would be left would be the tree's stump and root, and that would be largely hidden in the ground. Isaiah called this the Root of Jesse because of its humble state. Before his son David was exalted as king, Jesse had been an humble man from the insignificant little town of Bethlehem. The house of David in its fall would return

to its lowly origins. So it is here prophetically called the root of Jesse.

The designation "a Root of Jesse" implies humiliation, but it also implies hope. The tree is hewn but the stump is not dead. There is life in the root. There is an indestructible vitality to this tree. The reason for this indestructibility is that there would ultimately be a Son of David, a Davidic king, who would be holy, harmless and undefiled. There would be a Son of David who would live a sinless life, who would obey God perfectly and completely in every thought, word and deed. There would be a Son of David who would establish an everlasting reign over a kingdom that would never fall. Jesus is the reason that the root of Jesse is indestructible.

Isaiah looked ahead with the eyes of the prophet, and he saw that after the nadir of humiliation would come the zenith of exaltation. The nadir of humiliation for the house of David was not the Babylonian exile. There was a much lower point, an infinitely deeper humiliation. The nadir was the cross when Jesus was lifted up in judgment.

John 3:14-15

- 14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even  
so must the Son of Man be lifted up,  
15 that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have  
eternal life.

Jesus accepted the sins of His people as His legal responsibility, and He went to the cross to pay for them.

2 Corinthians 5:21

21 For (God) made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

There upon the cross, Jesus experienced God's wrath against the sins He bore. As He experienced the agony of judgment, He cried out, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?" After drinking the cup of God's wrath to the full, He said, "It is finished!" Then He died physically. His spirit separated from His body and then went to be with the Father, and His body was buried in a tomb. Truly the Root of Jesse was then for a period hidden in the earth in a literal sense. Then on the third day, He rose from the dead. He rose in the same body in which He died. It bore the nail prints in His hands and feet and the scar in His side. Yet His resurrected body was in a higher, more glorious state of existence. Jesus had overcome death, and He now was alive forevermore. The hidden Root has become the standing Shoot, full of life and visible. He who was lifted up in judgment was on the third day lifted up in vindication. This revived, towering tree has become like a banner, like a standard raised up in a high and conspicuous place for the rallying of peoples. Jesus now draws all peoples, even the pagan Gentiles, to Himself.

John 12:32

32 "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself."

As the gospel goes forth, as the church preaches Jesus and Him crucified, even the Gentiles seek Him and the formerly pagan nations are discipled.

In this one verse, Isaiah 11:10, interpreted in the light of the clearer revelation of the New Testament, we see Jesus' resurrection: "a Root of Jesse shall stand"; we see the Great Commission: "the Gentiles shall seek Him"; as we see Jesus' ascension into heaven: "His resting place shall be glorious."

Under the old covenant, God's resting place was where He settled down to rule in the midst of His people. That place was the earthly Jerusalem, the earthly Mount Zion. There was a glory to it. Solomon's temple was constructed with cedar and covered with gold. The Shekinah glory of God dwelt within the holy of holies of the temple sanctuary.

Psalm 132:13-14

- 13 For the LORD has chosen Zion; he has desired it for His dwelling place:  
14 "This is My resting place forever; here I will dwell, for I have desired it."

God's resting place under the old covenant was earthly Zion. Jesus' resting place, the place where He settled to rule, is the heavenly Zion, a place of infinitely more glory. The resurrected Jesus has ascended into heaven, and He is seated at the right hand of the Father. He has been given the nations for His inheritance, and He has all authority in heaven and on earth.

Verse 10 explains the relationship of the resurrected Christ to the pagan nations of the earth. In the Messianic age, Satan is no longer be able to deceive the nations as he once did. The gospel

is being preached to every creature, and the nations are being disciplined in the age of the ascended Christ.

But what about Israel? What does the future hold for Israel? That is the subject found in verses 11 through 16. We will look at the future of Israel under three headings: return, reunite and retake.

First, **return**. The prophet Isaiah looked ahead from his own time to the time of the Babylonian exile, then over a century in the future. He prophetically saw the people of God scattered throughout the world of his day. He mentioned specific locations of the dispersed people: Egypt and other nations to the south, Assyria and other nations to the north and northeast and the islands and coastlands of the Mediterranean Sea to the west. At the time of the Babylonian exile, the scattered Jews were not all concentrated in the city of Babylon. Perhaps the clearest indication of the wide dispersion of the Jewish people throughout the world of that day is a statement in the book of Esther. The events in the book of Esther occurred during the time of the Medo-Persian empire which followed the Babylonian empire. We read in Esther 8:17 that there were at that time Jews in every province and city of the vast Medo-Persian empire.

The prophet prophesied that God would recover His people out of exile a second time. We can better identify the second recovery if we can first identify the first recovery. The first recovery was the exodus from Pharaoh's Egypt under Moses. In verse 16 of Isaiah 11, the prophet compares this second recovery to the Exodus experience.

Isaiah 11:16

16 There will be a highway for the remnant of His people who will be left from Assyria, as it was for Israel in the day that he came up from the land of Egypt.

Also, the language used in Isaiah 11:11 about God's setting His hand to recover His people is similar to language used to describe the earlier Exodus:

Exodus 13:14b

14 ... By strength of hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

So the first recovery from exile was the exodus and the second was the return to the land after the Babylonian exile. This prophecy had a fulfillment in the days of Ezra and Zerubbabel when a remnant of the Jews returned to Palestine and re-established earthly Jerusalem.

This return to the land after decades of exile is truly a miracle. Nations thus dispersed throughout the world normally lost their national identity. This return to the land under Ezra and Zerubbabel was just as truly a miracle of divine grace as was the exodus out of Egypt under Moses. Our passage for today stresses the supernatural and miraculous nature of this second gathering.

Two miracles associated with this first redemption out of Egypt were the crossing of the Red Sea and the crossing of the flooded

Jordan River. In both cases, God had miraculously opened up a dry path for the people through these watery obstacles to their return. In our passage for today, the prophet describes a vision of two watery obstacles, one to the south of Jerusalem, the Red Sea, and the other to the north of Jerusalem, the Euphrates River. This prophecy says that God will destroy the Red Sea and break up the mighty Euphrates River into seven shallow streams such that neither will present an obstacle to the return of God's people. God will remove all obstacles so that His people will return, as it were, on a easily traveled highway. These prophecies are not meant to be taken literally. They are illustrations of the powerful acts of God which enabled the return to the land from exile.

Our next point is **reunite**. First the return, then the reuniting. Long before the Babylonian exile, the people of God had been weakened through division. The Kingdom of David had reached its height during the reign of David's son King Solomon. Then Solomon's son Rehoboam at the beginning of his reign foolishly decided to raise taxes, which were already high, to an even more burdensome level. Ephraim, the powerful tribe to the north, reacted by separating from Judah and forming its own kingdom to the north. To prevent the people of the northern kingdom from returning to Jerusalem and its temple for the yearly religious feasts required by the law of Moses, Ephraim started its own apostate religion to the north with the worship of golden calves in the cities of Dan and Bethel. This was the division which had weakened God's people.

At the return from the Babylonian exile, people from all twelve tribes returned to re-establish Jerusalem and to rebuild the temple. God's people in the return from exile were again politically and religiously united. This is certainly another fulfillment of the prophesy we find here in Isaiah chapter 11.

First, return. Second, reunite. Third, **retake**. The prophet mentions the enemy nations around Judah which King David had conquered or subdued. There were the warlike Philistines, the marauding nomadic tribes to the east, the unbrotherly Edomites, the vain Moabites and the cruel Ammonites. The prophet says that these nations will be subdued again.

This prophecy was fulfilled to some degree in the years after the return from exile. For example, the re-established nation of Israel did have some impressive military victories under the Maccabees during the inter-testamental period, that period after the prophecy of Malachi and before the ministry of John the Baptist. Just to mention one, Israel conquered and assimilated the Edomites under the Maccabees. This inter-testamental conquest and assimilation of Edom explains why at the time of the birth of Jesus, Herod, an Idumean or Edomite, was King of Israel.

So there we have it. Isaiah foresaw a world wide scattering of the people of God. He also foresaw a time of revival and restoration for the people of God involving a return to the land, a reuniting of God's people and a reconquest of their and God's enemies. There was indeed a fulfillment of all of these prophesied elements of restoration -- the return, the reuniting

and the reconquest -- during the latter days of the old covenant era.

That does raise another question. There was a fulfillment of this prophecy during the latter days of the old covenant era, but was that the complete fulfillment? Were the events beginning with the return under Ezra and Zerubbabel the complete fulfillment or only the beginning?

My own opinion is that these early fulfillments were only the beginning. My opinion is that even though these prophecies were given in terms of the outward form of the old covenant, these later fulfillments will be in terms of the outward form of the new covenant. The shadows of the old covenant have been set aside forever and will never be restored. Prophecies can be given in terms of the shadows of the old covenant and then be fulfilled in terms of the substance of the new covenant. There are significant examples of this sort of interpretation in the New Testament. There are Peter's use of Joel's prophecy in Acts 2 on the day of Pentecost, James' use of Amos' prophecy in Acts 15 at the Jerusalem Council, and the interpretation of Jeremiah's new covenant prophecy in the book of Hebrews. Following the New Testament's examples on how to interpret Old Testament prophecies is an important part of using Scripture to interpret Scripture.

If we allow Scripture to interpret Scripture, then the ultimate fulfillment of Isaiah's prophesy will be realized in eternity on the new earth. At the second coming, the angels will go forth and gather God's people from the ends of the earth. That will be

a truly glorious gathering of God's people from the north and south and east and west. On the new earth, the enemies of God's people will certainly be subdued. In that day, Satan and his rebellion will be totally crushed, the redeemed will be delivered even from indwelling sin, and the curse will be purged from the earth. In that day, the people of God will certainly be united. The church's membership from both its outward visible perspective and its inward invisible perspective will be identical. In that day, the church will indeed be strictly a regenerate fellowship. There will be no hypocrites hiding among the faithful.

I believe that the new earth will be the ultimate fulfillment of the land promise given to Abraham. Even in the Old Testament it was prophesied that the land promised to Abraham would be extended to the ends of the earth in the age of the Messiah. "His dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth" (Zechariah 9:10). The Apostle Paul stated that the promise to Abraham and his Seed involved not merely the land of Canaan but the entire world (Romans 4:13). And the land promise was a "forever" promise (Genesis 13:15) and thus has to have a fulfillment which reaches into eternity.

We have considered the fulfillment during the latter years of the old covenant which was more literal in terms of form and less glorious in terms of substance. We have considered the fulfillment in eternity which will be less literal in terms of form and more glorious in terms of substance. There is also a fulfillment in this age. In this age, our sacred space is not on earth but in heaven (Galatians 3:26; Hebrews 12:22; 13:14).

According to the book of Hebrews, even Abraham interpreted the land promise to some degree in terms of the heavenly Jerusalem. Hebrews 11:10 says that Abraham "waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God." Hebrews 11:16 says that Abraham and his family now "desire a better, that is, a heavenly country."

In this age as the gospel goes forth and God's elect are gathered into the heavenly Jerusalem, there is a fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy about God's people being gathered from the ends of the earth. According to Matthew 24:31, the ascended Son of Man "will send His angels (or messengers) with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other." This verse is fulfilled throughout this age as Jesus' earthly messengers preach the gospel to the ends of the earth and thus gather people into the kingdom. This verse is fulfilled throughout this age as the church obeys Jesus' great commission and as the nations are disciplined.

Isaiah's prophecy also mentioned a renewed unity experienced by God's people. That certainly has a fulfillment in this age. Jesus draws to Himself both Jew and Gentile, both slave and free, both Greek and barbarian, both male and female. He has redeemed a people from every nation, tribe and tongue. As people in all this diversity are drawn to Jesus, they are also drawn to each other. There is a miracle of love in the Body of Christ. In fact, Jesus said that this unity is such a miracle that it proves to the world that God did indeed send Jesus as Savior. In times of spiritual weakness, the church is blown about by winds

of doctrine and there is increased division. But to the degree that the people of God are drawn to the Jesus of Scripture, there is a miraculous unity rooted in both truth and love.

Isaiah's prophecy also spoke of the reconquest of some traditional enemies of the people of God. That also has a fulfillment in this age in terms of the new covenant context. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 10:3-5:

- 3 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh.
- 4 For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds,
- 5 casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, ...

We have looked at the prophesied return. We have considered its fulfillment in the return from Babylonian exile to earthly Jerusalem. We have considered its fulfillment in the gathering of God's people in this age to the heavenly Jerusalem through the preaching of the gospel. We have considered its fulfillment in the gathering of God's people to a new glorified earth for eternity.

God has raised up Jesus as a banner for the nations, and Jesus is today gathering His elect from the four corners of the earth. I exhort you to come to Him today. Come to Him in faith, receiving Him and resting upon Him alone for salvation. To as many as receive Him, to them He gives the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.