

Wednesday, November 30, 2022

Hi everyone, welcome to our daily devotionals. Today's passage comes from Isaiah 14:1-23.

Isaiah 14:1-23

[1] For the LORD will have compassion on Jacob and will again choose Israel, and will set them in their own land, and sojourners will join them and will attach themselves to the house of Jacob.

[2] And the peoples will take them and bring them to their place, and the house of Israel will possess them in the LORD's land as male and female slaves. They will take captive those who were their captors, and rule over those who oppressed them.

[3] When the LORD has given you rest from your pain and turmoil and the hard service with which you were made to serve, [4] you will take up this taunt against the king of Babylon:

“How the oppressor has ceased,
the insolent fury ceased!

[5] The LORD has broken the staff of the wicked,
the scepter of rulers,

[6] that struck the peoples in wrath
with unceasing blows,

that ruled the nations in anger
with unrelenting persecution.

[7] The whole earth is at rest and quiet;
they break forth into singing.

[8] The cypresses rejoice at you,
the cedars of Lebanon, saying,

‘Since you were laid low,
no woodcutter comes up against us.’

[9] Sheol beneath is stirred up
to meet you when you come;

it rouses the shades to greet you,
all who were leaders of the earth;

it raises from their thrones
all who were kings of the nations.

[10] All of them will answer
and say to you:

‘You too have become as weak as we!
You have become like us!’

[11] Your pomp is brought down to Sheol,
the sound of your harps;

maggots are laid as a bed beneath you,
and worms are your covers.

[12] "How you are fallen from heaven,
O Day Star, son of Dawn!
How you are cut down to the ground,
you who laid the nations low!
[13] You said in your heart,
'I will ascend to heaven;
above the stars of God
I will set my throne on high;
I will sit on the mount of assembly
in the far reaches of the north;
[14] I will ascend above the heights of the clouds;
I will make myself like the Most High.'
[15] But you are brought down to Sheol,
to the far reaches of the pit.
[16] Those who see you will stare at you
and ponder over you:
'Is this the man who made the earth tremble,
who shook kingdoms,
[17] who made the world like a desert
and overthrew its cities,
who did not let his prisoners go home?'
[18] All the kings of the nations lie in glory,
each in his own tomb;
[19] but you are cast out, away from your grave,
like a loathed branch,
clothed with the slain, those pierced by the sword,
who go down to the stones of the pit,
like a dead body trampled underfoot.
[20] You will not be joined with them in burial,
because you have destroyed your land,
you have slain your people.

"May the offspring of evildoers
nevermore be named!
[21] Prepare slaughter for his sons
because of the guilt of their fathers,
lest they rise and possess the earth,
and fill the face of the world with cities."

[22] "I will rise up against them," declares the LORD of hosts, "and will cut off from Babylon name and remnant, descendants and posterity," declares the LORD. [23] "And I will make it a possession of the hedgehog, and pools of water, and I will sweep it with the broom of destruction," declares the LORD of hosts.

Yesterday, we looked at Isaiah 13, an oracle against Babylon and all its people. And in many ways, Isaiah 14 is a continuation of this. The majority of our passage also describes Babylon's future downfall in great detail. But I think the key difference in Isaiah 14 is the first two verses, that it's through Babylon's demise that God will once again have compassion upon Israel.

God's compassion can be very difficult to wrap our heads around. If you've been following along with us through the book of Isaiah, or if you've read through it before, you'll notice that it seems like one minute God is saying He is not having compassion on Israel and the next minute He is having compassion. And that's actually correct! Sometimes they experienced blessing and sometimes judgment in relation to their obedience to the covenant.

In Isaiah 9:17, Isaiah prophesied that because Israel turned away from the Lord and did not inquire of Him, the Lord had no compassion on them. But then in verse 1 of our passage today, Isaiah 14:1, the Lord promises that He will have compassion on Jacob and will again choose Israel. No compassion...and then compassion!

And what's interesting here in the very first verse is that God refers to the Jews as "Jacob" while still in their sin, and then renames them as "Israel" at a later time. When God renames people, in many ways, he's giving them a new identity. And this prophecy tells us that God is going to restore Israel's identity as no longer a nation lost and scattered in Babylonian exile, but, out of His compassion, He will restore them to be His people and He will be their God.

Babylon will fall and will fall greatly. In verses 3-23, Isaiah gives graphic imagery of Babylon's downfall. Their kingdom will become weak. Their kings will have no place to be buried in glory. There will be no remnant for the people of Babylon. But there will be a remnant of Israel who return to their land and they will have the last laugh on Babylon, their enemy. God permitted Babylon to have power in order to punish His rebellious people, but He says that He will again have compassion.

God's compassion will come when Babylon falls, which is 539 BC. In the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, God raised up the Persian Empire, made it a great power, and enabled it to conquer Babylon in order to end the Babylonian captivity of the Jews, so that Israel could return to their land.

But this prophecy of compassion and grace would not only affect Israel, but also the Gentiles (non-Jews), who would align themselves with Israel. In verse 2, God promised that the oppression of God's people by foreign nations will be reversed, and "the house of Israel will possess them in the LORD's land as male and female slaves." I found the ESV Study Bible very helpful with this verse. Regarding this language of slaves, the Study Bible says that "this is probably not a reference to literal slavery but is a poetic symbol of Gentiles being welcomed (at some time in the future) among God's people and gladly taking places of service in God's kingdom." Many foreigners, nationalities, will come and join Israel as allies, implying that these people will be shown compassion and grace as well.

As I think about God's promise to restore the Kingdom of Israel, in which a remnant will return to their land and Gentiles will live among the people of Israel, I wonder if the restoration of the Kingdom of Israel can point to the restoration of a greater kingdom, the Kingdom of God through Jesus Christ, how it is through Christ that there is now no distinction between Jews and Gentiles, and we are one people under the banner of Jesus Christ.

For those who believe in Jesus Christ, we *have* received God's compassion through Christ. We all, Jews and Gentiles alike, have fallen in sin and disobedience, we deserve eternal exile from the presence of God, and yet He showed compassion on us through His Son Jesus. And it's because of Christ that we've been invited into the Lord's land, into His Kingdom. So yes - on one hand, we have received God's compassion through Christ. On the other hand, I think God's compassion extends not only to us but to all who have yet to know Christ. So by the power of the Holy Spirit, we point people to the compassion of Christ, greatest displayed on the Cross.

So today, I want to invite you to (1) give thanks to the Lord for His compassion through Jesus, and (2) pray for more people to repent and turn to the Lord and come into His Kingdom. Let's pray.