

Article of the Month – September 2011

Missions & Eschatology (2) – Isaiah

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When we started our series on missions & eschatology we looked at the book of Exodus and saw that the Plagues of Egypt have prophetic significance for the Church of today. We now look at some eschatological elements in the book of Isaiah in order to discover their importance with regard to World Missions.

The prophets take the issue of World Missions a big step further. As Genesis proved to be a cornerstone for the following books, so Isaiah and his colleagues present vital building materials from the prophetic angle.

Isaiah's name (meaning 'Jehovah is Salvation') makes him a true missionary: a man sent of God¹ to proclaim His redemption to Israel and the nations. His book has many colors: there are eschatological elements speaking about the times of the end, the Millennium and the New Heaven and the New Earth. There are judgment prophecies, some having to do with the time in which Isaiah lived, some yet to come at the end of this era. Some connections with the book of Revelation make it easier to understand what time the prophet is speaking about.

Isaiah uses expressions, indicating that he does not speak of his own days (or not too distant future) only, *but about the time that is still future to us*. These are: 'In the last days'; 'In that day'; 'At that time'; 'In days to come' and 'The Day of the Lord'. When we see these, we need to be aware that he speaks about what is still future to us.

There are two main categories: *one group* of end-time-prophecies deals with God's *judgment* over the world and *another* speaks about the *blessings* God has in store for His own *after* that judgment. Although this author believes in the establishment of a Millennial Kingdom of world peace under Christ's rule, with His glorified Church on earth after His personal and physical return, to be followed by yet another era that the Bible describes as 'New Heavens and a New Earth', there are other people who believe only in the latter. For this study that is unimportant, because we only deal with implications for World Missions, and these will be finished by the end of the great tribulation.²

If we simplify the issue to the utmost, we can say that World Missions has a *warning function* for which it can use all Isaiah has to say about *judgment*. Similarly World Missions has a *vision-casting, encouraging and comforting role* to play by using all Isaiah says about the *bright future after that judgment*, God has in store for those who love and obey Him. It will also help our understanding, when we see how some of Isaiah's prophecies compare to the book of Revelation.

¹ Is. 6:8

² John 9:4 'Night is coming, when no one can work'

Since there are many eschatological verses in Isaiah, we have to limit ourselves by categorizing his prophecies as FB (future blessings) and J (judgments). Taking about an hour to read the indicated passages will bring the point home convincingly.

A bone of contention may be the question of whether these verses of blessing speak about Israel or the Church. I would like to comment that both Church and Israel will be blessed 'in that day': the one as a spiritual people, the latter as a natural people. Without doubt they will enjoy one another.

The texts ordered per group are:

1. Is. 2:1-4 (FB); 4:2-6; 11:6-16 (FB); 12:1-6; 18:7 (FB); 19:18-25 (FB); 25:6-9 (FB); 26:1,2,19-21 (FB); 27:2-6,12,13 (FB); 28:5,6 (FB); 29:18,19; 32:1-5 (v. 2-4 being a reversal of 6:9,10); 32:15-20; 33:17-24; 35 (FB); 40:10,11 (FB); 41:15-20,25-27 (FB); 43:18-20; 52:7-12; 54:11,12 (compare with Rev. 21); 60 (FB – v. 11,19,20: compare with Rev. 21); 61:4-11 (FB); 62 (FB); 64:1,2 (compare with Rev. 22:17,20); 65:9,10,17-25 (FB); 66:7-24.

Just read these passages and remember that we serve the only God Who is able to plan all this beauty *and* make it happen. No religion on earth has anything to offer that comes even close to what our God promises us!

2. Is. 2:6-22 (J – compare with Rev. 6:15-17); 5:30; 13:6,9,10 (J – compare with Rev. 6:12 & 8:12); 19:16,17 (J); 21:9b (J – compare with Rev. 18:2); 22:15-19 (Judgment over Satan); 24 (Great Tribulation); 27:1 (Judgment over Satan, compare with Rev. 13 & 17); 30:25; 34 (J – compare with Rev. 16-18); 47 (idem); 48:20a (compare with Rev. 18:2); 51:6a (compare with Heb. 1:10-12; 2 Pet. 3:10-12 and Rev. 6:14).

But reading all *these* passages confronts you with the horrors that must precede the above mentioned blessings. It is a great relief to know that whatever disaster may happen to us is not the end; the end will be gloriously magnificent – and eternal!

We must remember that Jesus 'for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God'.³ Similarly, 'our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us',⁴ as Paul said.

This seems to be the main eschatological lesson we learn from Isaiah: Yes, there will be suffering and a turmoil as the world has never seen. But that is not the end. The good news is that we await the apotheosis of human history, this great climax of glory: Jesus Christ's return. That is: unequalled glory for His children as well as unequalled dread for all who rejected Him. Part of our missionary task consists of preparing the world for that Day of all days.

³ Heb. 12:2

⁴ Rom. 8:18