

The Book of Isaiah

Lesson 9: Judgment and Hope Among the Nations -- Isaiah 18:1-23:18

Tucked into the middle of all these oracles against the nations is a sentence so surprising it can stop you in your tracks. After page upon page of judgment, God looks at Egypt, the ancient enemy that enslaved His people, and Assyria, the brutal empire that terrorized the world, and says of them: 'Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my inheritance' (19:25). His people. The work of My hands. Three old enemies named as one family under one God. If you ever doubted how wide God's mercy reaches, let that verse settle in.

These chapters continue Isaiah's tour of the nations: Cush and Egypt (18-20), a cluster of doom-oracles over Babylon, Edom, and Arabia (21), a startling turn inward to Jerusalem itself, the 'valley of vision' (22), and finally Tyre, the glittering merchant city of the sea (23). The running theme is the one Judah most needed to hear and the one we most need too: do not trust in alliances, do not trust in wealth, do not trust in human security. Trust God. Egypt cannot save you. Tyre's riches cannot save you. Your own fortifications cannot save you. Only the LORD can.

Judah was forever tempted to solve its problems by political maneuvering, cutting deals with Egypt to fend off Assyria, leaning on this empire or that one. Isaiah keeps pulling them back: your security is not in treaties but in your God. And the chapter that should sting us most is chapter 22, where the prophet turns from foreign nations to look at Jerusalem, God's own city, and finds her partying on the rooftops in the face of judgment, saying, 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die' (22:13). It is a sobering reminder that God's people are not immune to the very sins He judges in the nations.

Yet hope keeps breaking through the gloom. The vision of Egypt and Assyria worshipping alongside Israel foreshadows the day the gospel would reach the nations and gather a people from every land into the one church of Christ. And in chapter 22, a man named Eliakim is given 'the key of the house of David,' a key that the book of Revelation places in the hand of Jesus Himself, the One who opens and no one shuts. As we walk through these chapters, keep asking the question that haunts every page: where is my security really resting? Because Isaiah is gently, persistently prying our fingers off every false support and folding them around the only One who will never fail.

Group Discussion: Judah was constantly tempted to secure itself through alliances with Egypt and other powers rather than trusting God. As a group, discuss: what are the modern 'alliances' Christians are tempted to lean on for security instead of God, whether financial, political, relational, or otherwise? How can we tell when a good thing has quietly become a false refuge?

Personal Reflection: In Isaiah 22:13, the people of Jerusalem respond to coming judgment by partying: 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.' When you feel anxious or threatened, what is your version of that rooftop party, the way you distract or numb yourself instead of

turning to God? What would it look like to bring that anxiety honestly to the Lord this week instead?

Read Isaiah 18:1–23:18

Study Questions

1. In Isaiah 18 and 19, God pronounces judgment on Cush and Egypt, the very powers Judah was tempted to rely on for protection against Assyria. What does it teach us about misplaced trust when the nations we lean on for security are themselves under God's judgment (compare Isaiah 31:1; Psalm 146:3)?
2. Egypt was Judah's go-to ally and Israel's ancient house of bondage, yet God still judged it. Where have you leaned on a relationship, an institution, or a source of help that, deep down, you knew could not ultimately save you? What pulled you toward it?
3. In Isaiah 20, God has Isaiah walk stripped and barefoot for three years as a living sign that Egypt and Cush will be led away captive. What does this dramatic, costly sign-act reveal about how seriously God wanted His people to abandon their false confidence in Egypt?
4. Isaiah acted out a hard, humbling message with his own body for three years. When God has asked you to do something costly or humbling for the sake of His message, how did you respond, and what held you back or carried you through?
5. In Isaiah 21:9, the watchman cries, 'Fallen, fallen is Babylon,' a line Revelation 18:2 later echoes. Why does God repeatedly announce the certain fall of the proud world-powers, and what comfort and what warning does this hold for God's people in every age?

6. Isaiah 21 portrays a watchman straining through the night, waiting for the morning (21:11–12: ‘The morning comes, and also the night’). Where in your life are you in a season of watching and waiting on God in the dark? How are you keeping watch, and where are you tempted to give up?
7. In Isaiah 22, Isaiah turns from the foreign nations to judge Jerusalem itself, God’s own city, for partying in the face of judgment (22:12–13). Why is it significant that God holds His own people to account along with the nations, and what does this say about presuming on our status as God’s people (compare 1 Peter 4:17)?
8. The people of Jerusalem, facing crisis, threw a fatalistic party: ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die’ (22:13). When trouble looms, are you more tempted toward denial and distraction or toward honest repentance? What would genuine mourning and turning to God look like in your current trouble (22:12)?
9. In Isaiah 22:20–25, the unfaithful steward Shebna is replaced by Eliakim, who receives ‘the key of the house of David,’ the authority to open and shut. Revelation 3:7 places this very key in the hands of the risen Christ. How does Eliakim foreshadow Christ, and what does it mean that Jesus alone now holds the key that opens and shuts, the authority over entrance into God’s house and kingdom (compare Matthew 16:18–19; 28:18)?
10. Isaiah 23 judges Tyre, the wealthy merchant city, for her pride and trust in commerce, yet even her wealth is finally ‘dedicated to the LORD’ (23:18). Looking at your own life, what is one specific way Christ is teaching you to hold your money, success, or security loosely, trusting and serving Him with it rather than trusting in it?

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Isaiah 31:1–3, woe to those who go down to Egypt for help and trust in horses and chariots but do not look to the Holy One of Israel; Revelation 3:7–8, Christ holds the key of David, who opens and no one shuts, fulfilling Eliakim; Acts 8:26–39, the Ethiopian eunuch from Cush comes to Christ, an early sign of the nations being gathered to God as Isaiah 18–19 foreshadowed

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