

“The Lord Almighty Has Spoken”
Isaiah 14:24 – 16:14
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In 1956, then leader of the Soviet Union, Nikita Khrushchev, told a group of ambassadors from the Western world, “*Whether you like it or not, history is on our side. We will bury you!*” Khrushchev later clarified he wasn’t predicting the Soviet Union would destroy the West, but was predicting the historical triumph of communism, that it would outlast capitalism. Khrushchev’s proud and boastful prophecy was not fulfilled because experts say capitalism remains the dominant economic system. Khrushchev’s arrogant statement was, as the Old Testament says, “written in the annals of historical records.”

I’m sure you’ve seen Halloween decorations in stores since what.... Easter?! I dislike Halloween more than any time of the year, even though the two youngest kiddos in my life don’t agree. One will be a race car driver and the other a ninja. In my opinion, too often Halloween glorifies evil and promotes fear, so I’ll tell them a couple non-scary Halloween jokes like: What do you call a fat pumpkin? A “plumpkin”. What do birds say on Halloween? “Trick or tweet!” I know, pretty bad, right? But those jokes won’t scare them or make them afraid. So, how does that relate to our lesson in Isaiah? Isaiah wasn’t afraid to deliver terrifying messages of the coming judgments of God.

Isaiah, the great prophet of God, had “...the courage of a Daniel, the sensitivity of a Jeremiah, the pathos of a Hosea, and the raging anger of an Amos... his courage is of such a nature that he never, not even for a moment, shows himself to be weak or timid.”

(Commentator, Harry Bultema)

Isaiah wasn’t scared about his message, but three nations should have been terrified to receive it. Devastating judgments were coming upon them, but as with all enemies of God, their pride prevented panic, until the judgment rained down on them.

Thus far in Isaiah, are you noticing this theme: “God’s purpose will be accomplished”? Certainly, that is true in this week’s passages. God’s purposes and plans will be accomplished because, well, God is God!

The foundation of God’s plans is His omniscience. Every single detail of human history has been determined by Him. Nothing surprises Him. His timing is matchlessly perfect, even though at times it’s tough to wait upon. Like the lyrics of a Toby Mac song, “God is never early; He’s never late.”

God is in control of the world. “A person’s heart plans his way, but the LORD determines his steps.” (Proverbs 16:9) He directs and allows events to fulfill His plans, and we need to remind ourselves of that when we watch the news. God said, “I declare the end from the beginning, and from long ago what is not yet done, saying: ‘My plan will take place, and I will do all My will.’” (Isaiah 46:10)

In this lesson, we’ll see that God’s plans and purposes would not be stopped. About His judgments, God will aim at Assyria, panic the Philistines and mow down Moab.

“The Lord of Armies has sworn: ‘As I have purposed, so it will be; as I have planned it, so it will happen.’”
(Isaiah 14:24)

How can any believer read that verse and not be overwhelmed with confidence that whatever the sovereign Creator decides, it cannot be thwarted? Whatever happens on our little Earth and to all who walk on it, His plans will “be” and “happen” as He has purposed.

Through Isaiah’s prophecies in our lesson, he wrote what the Lord planned for the nations of Assyria, Philistia and Moab, all enemies of His chosen Israel. The events in today’s passages demonstrate God’s sovereign power.

JUDGMENT OF ASSYRIA

“I will crush the Assyrian in My land; on My mountains I will trample him down. His yoke will be taken from My people, and his burden removed from their shoulders.” (14:25) It was **God’s** intention, **His** plan, **His** purpose to bring down Assyria and lift the yoke from His people. The yoke of burden or oppression. Isaiah’s audience was an agricultural people and would relate to a yoke symbolizing oppression.

“This is the plan prepared for the whole earth, and this is the hand stretched out against all the nations.” (14:26) The Lord’s purpose will be carried out, not just for the tiny nation of Israel, but over the entire world for there is no nation outside of His reach. The song, “He Holds the Whole World in His Hands” is certainly applicable. Elsewhere in Scripture God says:

“My word that goes out from My mouth shall not return to Me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.” (Isaiah 55:11)

GOD’S TOOL OF DISCIPLINE

God used Assyria, “the rod of His anger” (Isaiah 10) to punish the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah for their wickedness and unfaithfulness to their covenant with Him. But Assyria went too far. Various historians compare Assyria to the Nazis as far as one the most brutal military powers in history. They were excessively cruel, used torture, impalements, massacres, decapitations. Need I go on? In chapter 14, Isaiah wrote that God would hold Assyria accountable for their excessive cruelty, pride and godlessness.

“The Lord of Heaven’s Armies has spoken - who can change His plans? When His hand is raised, who can stop Him?” (14:27)

Way before Isaiah’s time, God sent a prophet to a very wicked city, which just so happened was in Assyria. But instead, the prophet bought a one-way ticket for a Mediterranean cruise in the exact **opposite** direction God wanted him to go. The prophet ended up with seaweed for a hat. God doesn’t take no for an answer, and neither will He allow man to change His plans and purposes. They will occur despite human opposition. No one can prevent or turn back what the Lord of Armies has purposed.

“God’s hand that is outstretched can either be outstretched in judgment or outstretched in deliverance and it’s up to us which it is.”
(John Oswalt, Old Testament scholar)

JUDGMENT OF PHILISTIA

Using symbolism and imagery, Isaiah turned from Assyria to spell out the coming judgment on another of Israel’s ancient enemies, the Philistines.

"Do not rejoice, all you Philistines, that the rod that struck you is broken; from the root of that snake will spring up a viper, its fruit will be a darting, venomous serpent." (14:16)

Around the time Judah's King Ahaz died, history says Philistia and Judah revolted against Assyria which brought temporary peace. Philistia believed the victory caused "the rod that struck them" to be broken. However, Isaiah warned the Philistines not to rejoice too quickly because a more dangerous power would rise to destroy them. The Assyrian "snake" would return as an even more venomous viper.

"I will kill your root with hunger, and your remnant will be slain. Melt away, all you Philistines! A cloud of smoke comes from the north, and there is not a straggler in its ranks." (14:30b,31)

Isaiah's prophecy makes it clear: it was the Lord who was responsible for the judgment on Philistia. History tells us the Assyrians would defeat the Philistines and the Lord would bring a famine upon them so severe it would wipe out survivors. The Assyrian army would come from the north like smoke wafting over the land with "not a straggler in its ranks" – poetic, but terrifying. The Assyrian warriors would be stronger than ever and will not falter in their devastation.

"The Lord of Armies has sworn: As I have purposed, so it will be; as I have planned it, so it will happen." Isaiah 14:24)

Isaiah paused in his oracles to tell Judah what to answer when other nations ask what's happening with Philistia.

"The Lord has established Zion, and in her, His afflicted people will find refuge." (14:32) Their answer? "God founded Israel and He will protect us."

That truth speaks to God's protection of the remnant of His people, a recurring theme in Isaiah and throughout the Old Testament. God demonstrates His hand and His plan to continue His covenant promises. And despite their consistent disobedience, He will protect Israel according to His sovereign time frame. But not so with the Philistines. They don't exist as a people today.

Notice the difference in the futures of Philistia and Judah. Philistia's future would be famine and destruction. Judah's future would be to find refuge.

About God's plan for Assyria and Philistia, history shows that Assyria would eventually fall to the Babylonians and Medes, and Philistia would come under Assyria's rule.

Job testified: "I know that you can do anything and no plan of yours can be thwarted." (Job 42:2)

JUDGMENT OF MOAB

In the short chapters of 15 and 16 is the dominant theme of grief as Isaiah paints a picture that is bleak for yet another foreign nation. This time the nation of Moab.

The Moabites descended from a refugee family. Lot and his daughters fled the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and sought refuge in a cave. The daughters thought the human race had been wiped out, so they got their father drunk and had sons by him. The older daughter's son was named Moab.

The nation of Moab had a long history of hostility with Israel dating back to the Exodus when they refused to give food and water to the Israelites. Moses told Israel, "Do not seek a treaty of friendship with Moabites or Ammonites as long as you live." (Deuteronomy 23:6) Moab was an evil, pagan nation that sacrificed children to their gods.

The Moabites would be like other refugees fleeing their countries to escape war, persecution, and natural disaster. I'm sure you've seen documentaries of European refugees fleeing Hitler's war machine or those trying to escape Vietnam and more recently, Ukrainians fleeing the Russian invasion. Trying to escape atrocities of war, refugees flee in desperation, cling to leftovers of their former lives as they march, and sometimes run, for their lives.

MOABITES WILL FLEE

Isaiah's description of the Moabite refugees was poignant: "Like fluttering birds pushed from the nest..." (16:2) The Moabites would be like confused, frightened birds, fleeing and scattering from the safety of their nest - their homeland.

In these, chapters, Isaiah also foretells how God's judgment would affect Moab's land, that its false religion was useless, its grief would magnify, and still, more judgment was yet to come.

ENVIRONMENTAL DEVASTATION

Cities would be destroyed. The enemy will be so strong, so numerous, that two of their major cities will each be destroyed in just one night! Because of drought, fields and vineyards would be barren. The refugees would find even more reason to weep when they reach the oasis of Nimrim. It would be dried up and the grass dead. There would be no water or food for man or animal which likely meant their pack animals would be left to die causing the refugees to transport belongings on their own backs. Their once fertile land will be trampled and destroyed. Grain fields, vineyards and orchards will wither. Isaiah will weep for "silent" harvests.

OH, CHEMOSH! WHERE ARE YOU?

"Dibon goes up to its temple, to its high places to weep. Moab wails over Nebo and Medeba." (15:2)

The people flocked to their temples and prayed to their Moabite god, Chemosh, but their prayers won't be answered. Where was Chemosh? He was sitting right there, unmoved, just where they left him. Afterall, *it* was an inanimate piece of stone or wood which could not protect or comfort. Isaiah wrote that Moab's prayers to Chemosh would: "only wear [themselves] out."

DEEP MOURNING

In these chapters there are numerous references to deep, nation-wide mourning. Moabites would mourn from one end of the nation to the other as one city after another would be wiped out. In addition to great weeping, other signs of grief will be that they will wear sackcloth, burlap-like material worn as a constant, physical reminder of pain, and grief. Men also shaved their heads and beards, a sign of deep misery and anguish.

"My heart cries out over Moab; her fugitives flee...They go up the hill...weeping as they go; on the road ... they lament their destruction. (15:5) "My heart laments for Moab like a harp ..." (16:11)

There is lamenting for Moab as they move from destruction to destruction. "My heart moans like a harp", is an expression of great sympathy! While it appears Isaiah is the mourner here, scholars believe that it was *also* God who mourned, Isaiah reflecting God's own heartbreak over the destruction of Moab.

At the very least, it's clear that the "mourner" was expressing compassion for the suffering of the Moabites. Moab rightly deserved God's judgment and they would experience His wrath, yet surely God's heart would grieve just as His Son, Jesus, grieved over the destruction that would come to Jerusalem.

We deserve the same justified wrath of God, and yet, "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8) In Ezekiel 33:11, God said, "As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die?" Applying that to our world today, I believe God would ask, "Why will you **choose** to die, when you can be forgiven through My Son, Jesus, and have life eternal?"

FUTURE DESOLATION

"...the waters of Dimon are full of blood" (15:9a) It's believed that because of the great slaughter, the water supply will be contaminated with human remains and be red with their blood. Yes, that's horrific, but Moab's suffering won't be over: "...but I [the Lord] will bring still more upon Dimon - a lion upon the fugitives of Moab and upon those who remain in the land." (15:9b) A lion was a metaphor that another catastrophe was coming. And the Lord of Israel took full credit for future judgments against Moab.

Moab is then counseled to do something to save their skin.

MOAB WILL ASK ISRAEL FOR HELP

"Send lambs as tribute to the ruler of the land, from Sela, across the desert, to the mount of Daughter of Zion. Let my refugees stay with you; be a refuge for Moab from the aggressor. When the oppressor has gone, destruction has ended, and marauders have vanished from the land then...." (16:1,4a)

Sending lambs to a nation was a tribute for protection. It isn't written here, but Moab settling in Judah would mean if they wanted Judah's help, they would have to submit themselves to Judah's God.

Scholars believe the rest of verse 4 is in reference to the promised future King of Israel, the Messiah.

"...in love a throne will be established; in faithfulness a man will sit on it— one from the house of David—one who in judging seeks justice and speeds the cause of righteousness." (16:4b)

While this verse may seem to have been spoken by a leader of Moab who, in the first part of the verse asked Judah to let his refugees stay with them, the words were likely from Isaiah himself clearly being a prophesy about the Millenium.

In the Millenium, King Jesus will rule in Israel. His throne will be "established in love." That love will be "hesed" love, the Hebrew word used here. Hesed love cannot be totally translated in English because it combines numerous aspects of love into one word. Aspects such as: mercy, grace, goodness, compassion, loyalty, etc. Hesed is most often used to describe the nature of God's love - Divine love, steadfastly committed to His people, even when they are unfaithful.

The future King will manifest that kind of love. King Jesus will be faithful. He will judge in justice and in righteousness.

What did Moab do to deserve God's judgment? In chapter 15 verse 7, Moab boasted about their wealth and abundance. In chapter 16 Isaiah said: "We have heard of Moab's pride— how great is her arrogance! — of her conceit, her pride and her insolence; but her boasts are empty." (16:6) Add to those sins, idolatry, for Moab would go to their false god's sanctuary to pray. Which Isaiah said: "...will do them no good." Pride is the primary reason for God's judgment of Moab.

About pride, I read that someone joked, "Pride is not one of my faults but if I had one, that would be it." It's been said that pride is often the root from which all other sins develop. Thomas Aquinas reasoned

that pride is the "original sin", the most anti-God sin. It includes self-righteousness, conceit, arrogance. Hmm, sounds like Moab but also our world today.

Pride is characterized by an excessive belief in one's own importance; refusal to follow a higher authority. Dan explained last week how Satan exalted himself over God. "Some of the biggest cases of mistaken identity are among those who have trouble remembering that they are not God." (Thomas Sowell)

These chapters are filled with Isaiah's words given to him by God. Only the Lord God knows the future. Not, *sort of* knows, or *maybe* knows and He doesn't need a horoscope.

Man tries to predict the future. This quote sums up why he isn't successful: "The only way to predict the future is to have power to shape the future." God's omniscience means He knows *everything*. God's omnipotence means He can do *anything*, including shaping the future.

Over the centuries, people have announced prophecies and predictions that not only did not occur but were often comical. Perhaps you've heard of some of these:

- In 1955, the president of a vacuum company predicted that nuclear-powered vacuum cleaners would be a reality by 1965.
- In 1429, a German astrologer predicted a flood would cover the world in 1524. Guess he hadn't read in the Bible where God said He would never again flood the world.
- In 1946, someone predicted television would soon be worthless, that "People will soon get tired of staring at a plywood box every night." Well, at least his description of what happens when the TV is on was accurate.
- Harold Camping predicted the end of the world 12 times. He based his predictions on biblical numerology. I wonder what he thought about Matthew 24:36: "About that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."

However, Isaiah, a true prophet of God, wrote a prophecy which was historically accurate, *and* it contained a time frame:

"Within three years, as a servant bound by contract would count them, Moab's splendor and all her many people will be despised, and her survivors will be very few and feeble." (16:14)

Isaiah proclaimed that within three years God's judgment would come to pass, that Moab's "glory days" as a nation would be gone and whatever Moabites were left would be "few and weak." Within three years after Isaiah wrote those words, Moab experienced devastating attacks by Israel, the Assyrians and Babylon weakening Moab to a state of insignificance.

God's *plans* cannot be thwarted.

- "As the Lord of Armies has planned it; who can stand in His way?" (14: 27)

God guides all events to achieve His *purpose*.

- "As the Lord of Armies has purposed, so it will be." (14:24)

Isaiah's prophecies from God were not just for those living in Isaiah's time. His message is timeless and applicable throughout history, to all people:

- to give Assyria, Philistia and Moab a chance to turn from pride and wickedness before judgement fell upon them.
- to demonstrate that God controls the rise and fall of nations. He's in the throne room of all rulers.
- for all nations and all people to know that everyone will be accountable for whom they choose to follow.
- to remind Israel that the Lord established them and in Him they will find refuge.
- to know that God alone has the power to do what He says He will do.
- that amidst destruction, the only refuge is the Lord of Heaven's Armies, if pride doesn't prevent them from accepting it.

Praise His name that the Lord doesn't just intervene in nations but through the work of His Holy Spirit, He intervenes in individual lives, convicting us of our sin, enabling us to come to faith, because no person, no nation, can be saved without Jesus's redemption.