

International Sunday School Lesson
Study Notes
August 2, 2015

Lesson Text: Isaiah 59:15-21
Lesson Title: Our Redeemer Comes

Introduction

The prophet Isaiah is thought to have been born around 762-760 B.C., and to have begun his ministry around 742-740 B.C. He prophesied over a forty-to-fifty-year period (740-690 B.C.), covering all or parts of the reigns of four kings of Judah: Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (Isaiah 1:1). Tradition says Isaiah could have possibly lived into the early reign of the wicked king Manasseh. Isaiah is the most quoted prophet in the New Testament, and along with Psalms and Deuteronomy, one of the most frequently cited of all Old Testament books. Many consider Isaiah the greatest of the Hebrew prophets.

Surprisingly few details are recorded about the personal life of Isaiah. His father's name was Amoz (Isaiah 1:1). His wife is called a "*prophetess*" (Isaiah 8:3). This title may have been given her only because she was the wife of the prophet. There is no biblical or historical record of her exercising the office herself. Isaiah had two sons, whom he named Shear-jashub (Isaiah 7:3), meaning, "a remnant shall return, indicating hope, and Maher-shalal-hash-baz (Isaiah 8:3), meaning, "speed the spoil, quick the prey," indicating judgment.

As far as we know, Isaiah spent his entire life in and around Jerusalem. He may not have traveled far from home, but his prophesy has traveled the world. He was an historian, statesman, poet, and most of all, a committed servant of God. As such, he became one of the greatest prophets in God's Word.

In our day of wickedness, evil, and open rebellion against God and His word, we often think that is a modern day phenomenon. On the contrary, at almost any point in Old Testament history, one will find similar evils taking place. This was surely true of Isaiah's day. The prophet's early years may have been somewhat peaceful. But it was not long until Judah began to rely on the surrounding nations for security and peace. Isaiah and many other prophets warned against making alliances with other nations, but to no avail. While Isaiah prophesied of a time when Jerusalem would fall and be taken into Babylonian captivity, he foresaw with great certainty the deliverance of God's people from exile. He also saw the coming of the great Deliverer, David's greater Son, who would be the Redeemer and whose work would affect all nations. What Isaiah saw gave him hope, even in some of the darkest days his nation ever knew. To know our Redeemer has come also gives us hope in the spiritual darkness of our day.

Our Redeemer Comes because Sin Separates from God (Isaiah 59:15-16a)

Isaiah 59 was written to teach Israel that sin causes separation from God. In Isaiah 59:1-8, Isaiah speaks on God's behalf, denouncing the sins of the people. Many words are used in this chapter to describe the sins of the nation: *iniquities, sins, defiled with blood, lies, perverseness, vanity, mischief, cockatrice eggs, spider's web, viper, works, violence, evil, wasting, destruction, crooked paths, obscurity, darkness, transgressions, departing, oppression, revolt, lying, and conceiving and uttering falsehood from the heart* (Isaiah 59:1-13). It is a very discouraging description of not only the sins of Israel but of us.

It is important to notice the change in pronouns in verses 9-15. In the first eight verses, Isaiah says *they* and *their*. In verse 9-15 he says, *us, we, and our*. He so identified himself with Israel that he confesses Israel's sin. He makes confession on behalf of the people, such as would be expected if they were honest with the Lord. He confesses the injustice, and absence of truth and righteousness in the land.

Verse 15

"Yea, truth faileth; and he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey: and the LORD saw it, and it displeased him that there was no judgment."

Isaiah continues describing how sin has separated the people of Israel from God. "Yea, truth faileth..." means "truth" is nowhere to be found. Isaiah sees stability, certainty, and loyalty to God as a missing person. "He that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey" refers to those who do not participate in the existing "evil" becomes "prey" to the enemy. If you attempt to live righteously in a wicked culture you become subject to persecution.

"The LORD saw" the condition of things in Israel and He sees our spiritual condition individually and nationally. God is not blind to the sin and injustice in our lives. What God "saw displeased him." The word "displeased" means "annoyed, angered." God was "displeased" that there was "no judgment" or justice in place. "Judgment" refers to governing the world based on God's character and holiness. Now what little moral restraint there is left is based on human opinion instead of the holiness of God. It is wrong to lie because God is truth. It is wrong to murder because God is life. God looked and found none of that "judgment" in the world and it angered Him.

Verse 16a

"And he saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor..."

The Lord also “saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor.” God looked for someone, anyone, to stand up and punish the wicked and restore righteousness, but there was none. None resisted the unrighteous and wicked; much less delivered Israel from her enemies. The word “wondered” conveys the meaning of “being astonished.” It is not that the Lord did not know there would be no one to intercede, but rather the shock of how far the people had fallen away from the Lord. Think about it, “there was no man.” There was no one who would intercede for the people and the land. God is dismayed there is “no intercessor” to make things right.

Our Redeemer Comes because Salvation is from God (Isaiah 59:16b-21)

Verse 16b

“...Therefore his arm brought salvation unto him; and his righteousness, it sustained him.”

God waited patiently for a disobedient people to turn to Him. He waited patiently for someone to lead them back to Him. None came back. None arose. “Therefore,” He would bring deliverance and salvation to Israel. He would be the Redeemer.

“His arm brought salvation unto him; and his righteousness, it sustained him.” “His” and “him” are references to Messiah. The “arm” of the Lord is a figure which describes the power and wisdom of God manifested in His redemptive acts in history (Exodus 6:6; 15:16; Deuteronomy 5:15; Psalm 98:1; Isaiah 53:1). Like a warrior God went forth to fight for His people. He Himself, took on the work of salvation.

“His righteousness, it sustained him” are beautiful words. Since there was no “righteousness” or justice to be found anywhere in the nation, God would make use of His own “righteousness” for the redemption of sinful man. “Sustained” means “to prop, to lean upon.” Commenting on this phrase, Matthew Henry writes, “Because they have no strength of their own, nor any active men that will set to it in good earnest to redress the grievances either of their iniquities or of their calamities, therefore his own arm shall bring salvation to him, to his people, or to him whom he would raise up to be the deliverer, Christ, the power of God and arm of the Lord, that man of his right hand whom he made strong for himself. Since magistrates and societies for reformation fail of doing their part, one will not do justice nor the other call for it, God will let them know that he can do it without them when his time shall come thus to prepare his people for mercy, and then the work of deliverance shall be wrought by the immediate operations of the divine Providence on men's affections and affairs.” (*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible.*)

Verse 17

“For he put on righteousness as a breastplate, and an helmet of salvation upon his head; and he put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloke.”

Figuratively speaking, the Lord presents Himself here as a mighty man of war, dressed as a warrior to do battle with the enemies of “righteousness.” The Apostle Paul drew on this terminology in describing the believer’s spiritual warfare with Satan (Ephesians 6:14; 1 Thessalonians 5:8). First, “he put on righteousness as a breastplate.” God’s “righteousness” protected the vital areas of the heart and lungs. Justice and righteousness are the center of life, the very breath and blood of living. Second, “and an helmet of salvation upon his head” speaks of protection for the brain, that vital organ for thought, decision, and direction in life. By wearing this piece of armor, God reveals to us that He is invincible and what He is doing in our redemption cannot be disappointed or defeated. Third, “and he put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloke.” The “garments of vengeance” signify that He is ready to destroy his people’s enemies, the Chaldeans, and other enemies of the Jews. “Clad with zeal as a cloke” means the Lord was passionate in what He was doing.

Taken together, the breastplate, helmet, and garments of vengeance express the cause and purpose of God’s redemptive action on the part of Israel. Like a mighty warrior, God clothed Himself in His own righteousness and justice and went to battle to secure salvation. Just before He left for battle, He wrapped a “cloke” or coat of love around Himself and marched to war! Hallelujah!

Verse 18

“According to their deeds, accordingly he will repay, fury to his adversaries, recompence to his enemies; to the islands he will repay recompence.”

The “adversaries” and “enemies” of God are not only the wicked of Israel, but also those who live on “the islands.” The “islands” are referring to places beyond the horizon, only accessible by sea. The point here is that all people in all places are subject to God’s judgment and justice. The Apostle Paul said, “*For there is no respect of persons with God*” (Romans 2:11).

God’s repayment for sin will be “according to their deeds.” God “will repay recompence” means people will get what they deserve. The punishment will fit the crime (Psalm 28:4). God’s “fury” and judgment is not a result of God reaching a breaking point or responding out of an emotion He cannot control. God’s judgment is perfect justice.

Verse 19

“So shall they fear the name of the LORD from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun. When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him.”

The end result of God’s judgment is “they shall fear the name of the LORD...” To “fear the name of the LORD,” is not to live in sheer terror but a reverential awe and humility before the holiness and righteousness of God. People and nations “from the west” and “from the rising of the sun,” or to the east, will fear and respect “the name of the LORD” which is God’s “glory.” This speaks of conversion of men as a result of God’s judgment. Men and nations that once did not “fear the name of LORD” will now bow in reverential awe.

When God’s enemies come against Him “like a flood,” God responds. “Like a flood” refers to a stream that is overflowing its banks, powerful, threatening. When that happens, “the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him.” The metaphor of “lifting up a standard” in regard to military resistance is common in Isaiah (Isaiah 5:26; 13:2; 18:3; 31:9). The “Spirit of the LORD,” or, the wind of God’s presence will carry the banner or ensign of victory against His enemies.

As God’s rule is established, He protects His people from every imaginable threat. The emphasis is on the full accomplishment of God’s will in the world. The holy one of Israel will reign as king over all that He has created. The people of God in Isaiah’s day need not fear any nation or any ruler. The enemies of the Lord will never triumph over Him. Even if they seem like an unstoppable flood!

Verse 20

“And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the LORD.”

In verse 20 and verse 21, the Lord is speaking in the first-person through the prophet Isaiah. When judgment comes to the nations of the world, the Lord will send “the Redeemer to Zion.” “Zion” speaks of Israel. The coming of “the Redeemer” is for “Zion” (Israel) and for “them that turn from transgression in Jacob.” All who “turn” from sin will be the beneficiaries of “the Redeemer.” The Messiah, the Suffering Servant, will redeem Israel and all Israelites who “turn” from sin.

The word “Redeemer” is the Hebrew word *goel*. The *goel*, sometimes translated “kinsman-redeemer,” is translated here simply as “Redeemer.” The “Redeemer” or *goel* had a clearly defined role in Israel’s family life. The kinsman-redeemer was responsible to buy a fellow Jew out of slavery (Leviticus 25:48). He was to make sure the murderer of a family member answered to and paid for the crime (Numbers 35:19). He was responsible to buy back family land that had been forfeited (Leviticus 25:25; Ruth 1-4). He was also responsible to carry on

the family name by marrying a childless widow (Deuteronomy 25:5-10; Ruth 1-4). In these, we see that the *goel*, the kinsman-redeemer, was responsible to safeguard the persons, the property, and the posterity of the family.

The word “Redeemer” is capitalized because Israel’s “Redeemer” is a person. “Redeemer” is also capitalized because Israel’s “Redeemer” is our “Redeemer,” the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is our near kinsman because He took humanity upon His divinity and identified with us (Philippians 2:7). He is the One who delivered us from the slavery of sin. He is the One who avenges all wrongs done to us. He is the One who guards our inheritance and keeps us eternally secure.

Verse 21

“As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the LORD; My spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the LORD, from henceforth and for ever.”

“As for me...” God is still speaking to the nation through Isaiah. God’s “covenant with them,” that is, Israel, is the promise of an *abiding Spirit* and an *enduring word*. God’s “covenant” has nothing to do with the obedience or disobedience of Israel. It is a covenant of grace. Israel is destined to be the custodians of His *Spirit* and His *word* forever! Because God’s “covenant” with Israel is “from henceforth and for ever,” God’s *Spirit* and His *words* are to remain objects of their attention forever.

How was the *Spirit* and the *word* to abide with Israel forever? This question is answered for us some eight centuries after Isaiah wrote them. Jesus Christ, the Redeemer, is the *Spirit* and He is the *Word*. He is the means by which God saves sinners, Jews and Gentiles, and will one day in the future restore blessings to His chosen people. Christ alone is the means by which God brings His perfect justice and salvation into the world.

Conclusion

Living in a world filled with evil and injustice makes it easy to become discouraged and angry. Listening to politicians and social experts can easily result in hopelessness. So what lies beyond the next national election? What evil and injustice looms on the horizon? What is the next biblical truth to be struck down by the courts and popular opinion?

No one has the answer to these questions. However, Isaiah reminded the people of his day that a just God would deal with it all someday. He also reminded them in spite of sin, God had a remedy. That remedy was the

promise of a coming Redeemer, God's Son, our Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ. Have you trusted Him to save your soul?

Amen.