

The Church of the Servant King

Prophecy Series

(Proph14W_Prophecy in the Prophets_Isaiah_Chps1-39_Part 5)

Chapters 1-39 – Part 5

Isaiah 27 – Israel’s Future Restoration

This chapter of Isaiah deals with Israel (i.e. the Northern and Southern Kingdoms) future regathering and restoration. In this chapter, Isaiah again uses the phrase “in that day” on at least four occasions (**vv. 1, 2, 12 and 13**). In each case, the phrase introduces a section that carries eschatological overtones and provides a good outline for the chapter as follows:

- ❖ The defeat of Israel’s enemies (**v. 1**)
- ❖ The future blessing and former discipline of Israel (**vv. 2-11**)
- ❖ The gathering of Jewish and Gentile believers (**vv. 12-13**)

The defeat of Israel’s enemies (v. 1) – In this verse, Isaiah uses rather strange imagery to describe a thought that he is trying to convey. The chapter division here is unfortunate because verse 1 carries the thought of the previous two verses forward – the thought of judgment associated with the Lord’s coming.

What is “Leviathan the fleeing serpent” or “the twisted serpent?” Why is this thing described as a “reptile that is in the sea?” Why would the Lord be interested in punishing or even slaying this creature? All of these questions have answers and they need to be answered prior to moving forward.

Scripture contains several references to this creature to which reference is made using the titles “Rahab – the proud one” or “Leviathan – the twisting one.” At least five of the texts are within a context that deals with the creation of the world and in several passages, this monster is associated with the sea (e.g. Job 26:12-13; Psa 74:13-17; Psa 89:9-10; Isa 27:1).¹

12 He stirs up the sea with His power, and by His understanding He breaks up the storm. 13 By His Spirit He adorned the heavens; His hand pierced the fleeing serpent. (Job 26:12-13)

13 You divided the sea by Your strength; You broke the heads of the sea serpents in the waters. 14 You broke the heads of Leviathan in pieces, and gave him as food to the people inhabiting the wilderness. 15 You broke open the fountain and the flood; You dried up mighty rivers. 16 The day is Yours, the night also is Yours; You have prepared the light and the sun. 17 You have set all the borders of the earth; You have made summer and winter. (Psa 74:13-17)

9 You rule the raging of the sea; when its waves rise, You still them. 10 You have broken Rahab in pieces, as one who is slain; You have scattered Your enemies with Your mighty arm. (Psa 89:9-10)

In that day the Lord with His severe sword, great and strong, will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan that twisted serpent; and He will slay the reptile that is in the sea. (Isa 27:1)

¹ Bruce K. Waltke, “The Creation Account in Genesis 1:1-3 – Part 1: Introduction to Biblical Cosmogony,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 132:525 (January, 1975), 32-36.

Similar imagery is found in several other ancient mythologies, e.g. Sumer, India, Anatolia, Mesopotamia, Greece, and Canaan. So, was Isaiah validating these ancient mythologies? Was Isaiah, in effect, indicating that there was such a sea monster known as Leviathan? The answer is “no.” Isaiah was simply *borrowing* the *imagery*, **not** the *theology*, of these ancient cultures.²

It is inconceivable that these strict monotheists [*Jewish prophets, leaders and society*] intended to support their view from pagan mythology, which they undoubtedly detested and abominated, unless they were sure that their hearers would understand that their allusions were used in a purely figurative sense.³

It does not seem possible any longer to deny the presence of mythological allusions in the Old Testament. They appear almost entirely, as far as present research has shown, in poetic passages, where they add vividness and color to the imagery and language. They do not, on the other hand, permit one to affirm the existence of creation myths among the Hebrews, corresponding to those of Mesopotamia and Canaan....The creation accounts of the Bible were studiously composed to exclude mythological elements. The fact that such allusions were freely admitted in poetry indicates no more than this, that the Hebrews were acquainted with Semitic myths. Where these are cosmogonic myths, the work of the creative deity, or his victory over chaos, is simply transferred to Yahweh; other deities involved in the myths are ignored. In no sense can it be said that the Hebrews incorporated “mythopoeic thought” (to borrow a word from Frankfort) into their own religious conceptions; they did, however, assimilate mythopoeic imagery and language.⁴

Therefore, in verse 1, Isaiah borrows some imagery from the mythological traditions of other cultures to illustrate the fact that at the Lord’s 2nd Advent, He (the Lord) will destroy His enemies and He will eventually destroy Satan himself who is represented by “Leviathan – that twisted serpent.” The fact that this creature is pictured as living in the sea is no doubt an allusion to the fact that Satan is not subject to man’s control as is the sea. It was also a place associated with deep darkness and the unknown in ancient mythology – thus death.

The Future Blessing and Former Discipline of Israel (27:2-12) – Old Testament prophets frequently made use of a “vineyard” as an analogy for God’s own people and nation. In **verses 2-6**, Isaiah describes the “*Song of the Vineyard*” that will be sung in the day of God’s restoration of His own people and nation – i.e. Israel at His 2nd Advent.

Earlier in Isaiah 5:1-7, the prophet described another “song of the vineyard” which depicted how the “vineyard” was to become a wasteland as a result of God’s judgment upon the sins of the people in violation of their covenant relationship with Yahweh. However, here in chapter 27, the “vineyard” is to be made fruitful again.

The fruitfulness of His nation will be the result of His protection, care and even judgment so as to preserve His remnant (**v. 3**). Nothing and no one will be able to deter Him from this purpose (**v.4**). God desires that His own turn to Him in repentance for their source of refuge and protection (**v. 5**). When the Kingdom age arrives, Jacob (a synonym for Israel) will be productive again (cf. Isa 35:1-3, 6-7; Amos 9:13-14; Zech 14:8) and through her, Gentile nations will be

² Ronald B. Allen, “The Rahab-Leviathan-Dragon Motif in the Old Testament,” (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1968), 63 cited in Waltke, “The Creation Account in Genesis 1:1-3,” *BibSac*, 34.

³ Waltke, “The Creation Account in Genesis 1:1-3,” *BibSac*, 35.

⁴ John L. McKenzie, S.J., “A Note on Psalm 73 (74): 13-15,” *Theological Studies* 2 (1950): 281-82 cited in Waltke, “The Creation Account in Genesis 1:1-3,” *BibSac*, 35.

blessed (v. 6 cf. Gen 12:3). Israel will no longer be a wild vine (cf. Psa 80), but she will be very productive spiritually in “that day.” The future restored nation of Israel during the Messianic Kingdom will be a blessing to the whole world (Psa 67; 68; 102:15; Acts 15:17; Rom 11:15).

The “vineyard” figure ends in **verse 6** and Isaiah turns to describe God’s method of dealing with Israel in **verses 7-11**. The Lord has a greater and more objective purpose in human history that almost paradoxically transcends, but doesn’t minimize God’s care and concern for His own.

Comment and observation of note: It is difficult for the human mind to grasp and reconcile God’s objective purpose in *corporate* human history with His loving care and concern for the *individual* believer. That is why it is almost a paradox because sometimes God’s objective purpose in human history allows and sometimes causes certain things to occur that seem to be at odds with what appears to be beneficial to a single individual’s well being. For instance, believer’s experience suffering by association, but God’s purpose in human history must allow the volition of all mankind to run its course even if it causes God’s own to suffer. At times in the Age of Israel, the Lord had to discipline His own people and nation in order to insure that His greater purpose in human history would be accomplished through a surviving remnant. That surviving remnant will only exist in the future because of the Lord’s judgments upon their distant ancestors in the past. This is the larger backdrop for verses 7-11.

So, the Lord acts in human history in ways so as to insure that His purpose is accomplished. That purpose includes a care and concern for His own future “remnant” who will “endure to the end” of the Tribulation and be “saved” (delivered) into the kingdom age (Matt 24:13). It is this care and concern for that remnant that is consistent with His overall objective in human history that is described by Isaiah in these verses. Because the Lord cares for that future remnant, He will judge for the purpose of purification His own people in Isaiah’s day. That generation would not be judged as harshly as God had dealt with Israel’s enemies and oppressors (v. 7).

Verse 8 almost makes no sense in the NKJV. However, the NASV provides more clarity. “*Thou didst contend with them by banishing them, by driving them away. With His fierce wind, He has expelled them on the day of the east wind.*” In this verse, Isaiah is indicating that the Lord had scattered His people when they needed punishment, but He had not destroyed them in the interest of preserving a remnant. His punishment included placing them in exile using two nations from the east – first Assyria (the Northern Kingdom in 722 B.C.), then Babylon (the Southern Kingdom in 586 B.C.).

Payment had to be made for the nation’s sinful violation of their covenant relationship with Yahweh (v. 9). The nation had to be driven out of the land because of her disobedience to God’s covenantal Law. The evidence that the nation had repented would be the destruction of all of the altar stones of the altars on which sacrifice to false gods was made and the destruction of the Asherah poles, wooden symbols of the Canaanite goddess of fertility.

In this judgment, the city would be destroyed and the people would be removed. The land would be made desolate as cows would graze off of tree bark (v. 10) in the city and of the few people who were left to inhabit the land, the women would cut branches off of the trees for firewood (v. 11). Jerusalem was sacked and destroyed in similar fashion in 586 B.C. during the Babylonian captivity.

The Gathering of Jewish and Gentile Believers (27:12-13) – At the 2nd Advent when the Messiah King is establishing His kingdom on earth, He will assemble the remnant that has been preserved through such protective acts of judgment as Isaiah predicted would occur in his

generation. A trumpet blast⁵ will be used to summon all the redeemed from the distant parts of the earth, although Isaiah only alludes to the area of Mesopotamia (e.g. the “River” – Euphrates) to Egypt (cf. Zech 9:14; Matt 24:31). (Isaiah probably only mentions Egypt and Mesopotamia because they were Judah’s (and Israel’s) then present enemies.

These verses provide a fitting climax to chs. 24—27 with their emphasis upon God’s sovereignty over the nations and his intention to restore his people from the nations. In this respect this is the second of three such passages. The others are 11:12-16 and 35:1-10. Each of these occurs at the end of a major segment. This fact suggests something about the structure of the book. . . . chs. 7—12 make the point that if you trust in the nations, the nations will destroy you. Nonetheless, God will not leave his people in destruction; he intends to deliver them from the nations. But this raises the immediate question: *Can* he deliver them from the nations? Chs. 13—27 answer that question with a resounding affirmative. They do so first in a particularizing way, showing that all nations, including Israel, are under God’s judgment (chs. 13—23). Then chs. 24—27 make the same point in a more generalized way, asserting that God is the main actor in the drama of human history. These things being so, God can deliver his people, and the promise is reaffirmed in these two closing verses.⁶

Other Prophetic Passages in the Remainder of Isaiah 1-39

Our studies to date of Isaiah have provided a good overview of some of the prophetic material in these chapters. Some other passages with eschatological overtones found in the remainder of this section of Isaiah are as follows:

- ✓ 28:16-22 – the Messiah will be a Cornerstone for God’s future kingdom on earth
- ✓ 29:17-24 – In that future “day,” the believing of Israel and Judah will see and understand the Lord and there will be justice restored to the land of promise
- ✓ 30:18-26 – future kingdom blessings upon the Land and future true teachers of God’s people who do not plot in private, but lead people by example
- ✓ 32:1-4 – similar concepts as 30:18-26 with emphasis upon leaders who see clearly and lead wisely (as opposed to the foolish leaders of Isaiah’s day)
- ✓ 33:17-24 – Justice will be restored.
- ✓ 34:1-35:10 – future judgment upon the nations and the future glory of Zion

Next, in this study, we will turn our attention to the remaining one-third to one-half of the book.

⁵ This trumpet blast and the one mentioned in 18:3 are different from the trumpet of 1 Corinthians 15:52 and 1 Thessalonians 4:16.

⁶ John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1-39*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament series (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), 500.