

The Wilderness of the Sea and the Valley of Vision – Isaiah 21-22

Introduction – There are many passages, favorite passages, where we see Christ in the words of Isaiah. But there are far more than we might have ever imagined. And the message always is “trust in Christ, only in Christ, always in Christ.” Look and find Him in these chapters as well.

Overview – In Chapter 21, Isaiah preaches a burden against Babylon (the Wilderness of the Sea), even mentioning the judgment from the future Median/Persian empire (vv1-20). This coming doom sickens Isaiah (vv3-4) who sets up a watchman to declare what he sees (vv5-8). The watchman confirms Babylon’s doom (vv9-10) as well as two surrounding areas (vv11-17). In Chapter 22, Isaiah preaches a burden against Jerusalem (the Valley of Vision); they will be caught unaware and unprepared (vv2-4). They were totally perplexed (vv5-7). They thought they had the protection of Judah (which would be God Himself) and yet placed their trust in their own preparations (vv8-11). When God called for weeping and repenting, they held a self-congratulatory party instead (vv12-13) and their end came upon them (v14). Finally, Isaiah tells the story of the removal of an arrogant servant, Shebna, and the placing of a faithful, strong and glorious servant, Eliakim (vv15-25).

Wilderness of the Sea – As the eighth century BC drew to a close, Babylon became another prospective ally against Assyria (see Hezekiah’s warm reception in 39:1-4). But, like Egypt, Babylon is doomed, along with all who would align themselves with her. Before that happened, she would be the “sea” of Gentiles that one day would take Judah into captivity where they would “wander” for 70 years. But why is Isaiah so heartbroken over the fall of Babylon (vv3-4)?

Fallen, Fallen is Babylon – Centuries later, Babylon did fall, while eating and drinking (v5, Dan 5), to Darius and the Medes. In addition, Isaiah 21:9 is quoted by John in Rev 14:8 (and 18:2). We covered this earlier in Isaiah 13-14, but it bears repeating here. Revelation declares the fall of Babylon, the city “*drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of the martyrs of Jesus*” (Rev 17:6). She is that “*great city...where our Lord was crucified*” (Rev 11:8). “Babylon” is the city of man, the city of rebellion, of pride and arrogance, and the city of perversions unleashed. Old Jerusalem was *that* Babylon. This is why Isaiah would now turn to that city.

Valley of Vision – Jerusalem is the city of divine revelation and a city set up high like a mountain. But in her valley of rebellion she cannot see straight. Isaiah is struck by Jerusalem’s joyful noise (v2) because he sees valleys full of chariots (v7). When they are struck, they shore up their defenses and their water supply, but they refuse to *look to their Maker* (vv9-11), partying in their blindness rather than mourning before God (vv12-13).

The “Uncovering” of Jerusalem – Like Isaiah in chapter 20, Jerusalem is “uncovered” (v8) from her protection. Refusing to repent, the LORD pronounces that there will be no atonement for her (v14). And of course, when Jerusalem turned against Christ, her only hope of atonement, there was no sacrifice for sin left for that city (Heb 10:26-31).

Eliakim and the Key of the House of David (22:15-25) – Shebna is a real person, but also a personification of the arrogance of Old Jerusalem. The establishment of Eliakim (his name means “God raises up”) as the new servant, reveals many “types” of Christ. Jesus will use this passage to speak of Himself in Rev 3:7. He has the key of David and He alone has the authority to open and close the Door into the New Temple sanctuary. Therefore, we are invited to see Christ in Eliakim (and note: v25 gives a final word against Shebna’s ruin, not Eliakim’s).

Shebna vs Eliakim – First we should notice the contrast of these two. Shebna tries to build a shrine for himself to be remembered in his death. He isn’t serving the LORD’s house; he is trying to use his position for his own glory. Eliakim is appointed and becomes a father to future generations through his service. Shebna is thrown away like a ball; Eliakim is set like a sure peg for the tent of the tabernacle.

The Tent Peg – Christ is that tent peg. He sits at God’s right hand on the throne, but He is also the throne upon which we sit and rule with Him.

The Cup Peg – Metaphors abound, swirling and changing. Eliakim/Christ is the new father of new generations, He is the new house-servant, and He is the new reigning King. The peg kept the house in a secure place (v23), but now it has become the thing upon which the glory of the father’s house hangs (v24). The glory of the house is “*the offspring and the posterity*” which are the generations that He brings in. They are then referred to as the “*all the vessels of small quantity, from the cups to all the pitchers.*”

Only Jesus – If Christ is Eliakim, what is Isaiah declaring and what is God promising? A new Servant has come for His people, and the old administration has been thrown out. Christ’s reign is secure and sure and He is the only Way in which we may come into this New Jerusalem. It doesn’t matter how long you have been in the house, how prominent you have become (cup or pitcher), all “hang” in utter dependence upon the “Peg” to hold them up. If we are of Shebna, then we should hear the words of James, “*God resists the proud, but He gives grace to the humble*” (James 4:3). If we are of Eliakim, then we have heeded the words of Proverbs, “*Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct your paths*” (Prov 3:5-6).