

Behold, a King Will Reign in Righteousness (Isaiah 31–32)

The Only Hope in a Hopeless World

On the morning of September 11, 2001, Todd Beamer, an account manager for Oracle, boarded an 8:00am United Airlines flight from Newark to San Francisco, where he was due to meet with representatives of Sony. The flight was delayed for forty-two minutes due to runway traffic before finally taking off. Four minutes later, American Airlines Flight 11 crashed into the North Tower of the World Trade Center. Seventeen minutes after that, United Airlines Flight 175 crashed into the South Tower. Twenty-two minutes later, the pilots of United 93 received an alert on their computer screen: “Beware of cockpit intrusion.” Three minutes later, air traffic controllers in Cleveland, whom the pilots had radioed to inquire about the strange alert, heard screams coming from the cockpit’s open microphone. Lebanese terrorist Ziad Jarrah then took over the controls, disengaged the autopilot, and set a course for Washington, D. C. It was later revealed that the intended target was either the White House or the U S. Capitol Building.

After being herded to the back of the plane by the three other terrorists on board, the passengers began to place calls to loved ones using the phones in the seat backs, by which they learned about the two planes that had crashed into the World Trade Center. Todd Beamer attempted to place a call, but was rerouted to customer service representative Lisa Jefferson, with several FBI agents listening in. Beamer told them their plane had been hijacked, that one passenger was dead, that two hijackers had knives, and that one appeared to have a bomb strapped around his waist. Beamer and three other men formed a plan to storm the cockpit and attempt to retake the plane, flying it into the ground, if need be. Beamer, who was a Christian, a graduate of Wheaton College and member of the Princeton Alliance Church in Township, NJ, then recited the Lord’s Prayer and Psalm 23 with Jefferson, who was still on the line. He then said to her, “If I don’t make it, please call my family and let them know how much I love them.” Then Jefferson heard Beamer say, “Are you guys ready? Okay. Let’s roll.”

At 9:57am, the men attempted to breach the cockpit, apparently subduing one hijacker who was standing guard. In response, Jarrah pitched the plane violently, attempting to knock the attackers off their feet. At 10:00am, the men used the food cart as a battering ram in an attempt to force open the cockpit door. It appears they were successful, because at 10:02am, the plane’s

voice recorder recorded what many have interpreted as a struggle for the yoke, or control wheel. At 10:03am, United Flight 93 crashed upside down at a speed of 563 mph into a field outside Stonycreek, PA, just twenty minutes away from the nation's capital.¹

A week later, a memorial service for the victims of United Flight 93 was held in the Pennsylvania field. Todd Beamer's widow, five months' pregnant with their third child, was in attendance. Listen to Lisa Beamer's description of the event:

I couldn't help but compare this service to the one in Cranbury the day before. Todd's memorial service had been so uplifting, so inspiring, because the emphasis had been on hope in the midst of crisis. On Monday, as I listened to the well-intentioned speakers, who were doing their best to comfort but with little if any direct reference to the power of God to sustain us, I felt I was sliding helplessly down a high mountain into a deep crevasse. As much as I appreciated the kindness of the wonderful people who tried to encourage us, that afternoon was actually one of the lowest points in my grieving. It wasn't the people, or even the place. Instead, it struck me how hopeless the world is when God is factored out of the equation.²

I tried to find a record of who spoke and what was said at this memorial service, but came up empty. However, if it is anything like the kind of sentiments often expressed at such events, it was a hodgepodge of meaningless clichés and generic platitudes.³ But trying to find hope in such godless inanities when you are drowning in grief or confronted with an unspeakable outburst of evil is like trying to grasp hold of a mist. That is not what Lisa Beamer needed after her husband and the father of her three children was suddenly ripped away from her by terrorists. She needed solid hope, a rock on which to stand. She needed to hear again what she had evidently heard at her husband's funeral the day before, when she was surrounded by her church and (I would suspect) her pastor preached sound words of solid hope.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Todd_Beamer; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Airlines_Flight_93. The sources for much of this information come from Evenson, Bruce, "Beamer, Todd Morgan," American National Biography, 2009; McKinnon, Jim, "The Phone Line from Flight 93 Was Still Open When a GTE Operator Heard Todd Beamer say: 'Are You Guys Ready? Let's Roll,'" September 16, 2001, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*.

² "Let's Roll," *World*, August 17, 2002; quoted in Raymond C. Ortlund, Jr., *Isaiah: God Saves Sinners, Preach the Word* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2005), 179.

³ "Sincere clichés are not enough. We need God. If we factor him out of the equation, we strip ourselves bare before the blast of life's cruelties"; Ortlund, 179.

When darkness veils His lovely face,
I rest on His unchanging grace;
In every high and stormy gale,
My anchor holds within the veil.
On Christ the solid Rock I stand,
All other ground is sinking sand.

In describing her husband, Lisa used this imagery of a solid rock in the midst of life's storms.

What made Todd different from many other men who are merely religious was not the fact that he was willing to die for his faith; the terrorists did that! No, Todd was willing to live for his faith. . . . Todd built his life on a firm foundation so that when the storm came on September 11 he didn't have to check the blueprints to see if everything he had built his life on was going to stand. He knew.⁴

Do you have solid hope on which to stand in a world gone mad? In the midst of personal turmoil and tragedy, do you have a hope that cannot be shaken? In a country being pulled apart at the seams, do you have a Rock on which to stand? Isaiah's day was not all that different than ours. He, too, faced a national crisis with personal consequences. He, too, had to contend with corrupt leadership. He, too, lived in the midst of a faithless people. In the midst of the storm, Isaiah held forth before the people of God a solid hope: a gospel that saves, a king who reigns in righteousness, and a Spirit who transforms all of creation. This morning, I urge you to fix your gaze upon the hope of the gospel so that you will be able to endure whatever crisis—personal, historical, or eschatological—comes upon you.

The Content of the Gospel (31:1–5)

Let's begin in Isaiah 31, which continues the theme of Isaiah 30—do not look to false saviors like Egypt (vv. 1–3), for the LORD will save those who trust Him (vv. 4–5).

⁴ Lisa Beamer, *Let's Roll! Ordinary People, Extraordinary Courage* (Carol Stream: Tyndale House, 2002); quoted in Jen Underwood, "Remembering Todd Beamer '87," <https://wheatonacademy.org/remembering-beamer/>.

*Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help
 and rely on horses,
 who trust in chariots because they are many
 and in horsemen because they are very strong,
 but do not look to the Holy One of Israel
 or consult the LORD!
 And yet he is wise and brings disaster;
 he does not call back his words,
 but will arise against the house of the evildoers
 and against the helpers of those who work iniquity.
 The Egyptians are man, and not God,
 and their horses are flesh, and not spirit.
 When the LORD stretches out his hand,
 the helper will stumble, and he who is helped will fall,
 and they will all perish together. (31:1–3)*

The kingdom of Judah was in trouble. The Assyrian army was gathering at the borders, preparing to invade. The leaders of Judah knew they could not resist Assyria's force. Their military could not repel the Assyrian invasion; the walls of Jerusalem could not withstand the Assyrian siege. Therefore, they did what seemed wise in their own eyes—they emptied their treasury and tried to purchase the protection of Egypt. For this, Isaiah pronounces woe upon them. Why?

- Because they trusted in the strength of horses and chariots rather than the strength of their God (v. 1).
- Because they failed to recognize that the Assyrian invasion was merely the instrument of God's judgment upon them for their sins and idolatries and faithlessness to the covenant (v. 2—"He . . . brings disaster; . . . [He] will arise against the house of evildoers").⁵ In other words, Judah's ultimate problem was not Assyria; Judah's

⁵ "The 'house of evildoers' refers to the house of Judah; the 'helpers of those who work iniquity' refers to the Egyptians"; Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, Volume 2, Chapters 19–39 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 375. See also Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah 1-39*, NAC 15A (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2007), 532.

ultimate problem was God. And as J. Alec Motyer, the great Anglican commentator on Isaiah, reminds us, “The only way to flee from God is to flee to him.”⁶

- Because they failed to recognize the absurdity of their plan. Will the Egyptians prevail against God (v. 3)? All God needs to do is stretch forth His hand, and both the helper (Egypt) and the helped (Judah) will stumble, fall, and perish together.

But the ultimate reason trusting in Egypt for salvation is such folly is that the LORD had promised to deliver Judah... if they would call upon His name.

*For thus the LORD said to me,
“As a lion or a young lion growls over his prey,
and when a band of shepherds is called out against him
he is not terrified by their shouting
or daunted at their noise,
so the LORD of hosts will come down
to fight on Mount Zion and on its hill.
Like birds hovering, so the LORD of hosts
will protect Jerusalem;
he will protect and deliver it;
he will spare and rescue it.” (31:4–5)*

If the LORD chose to fight on Judah’s behalf, the Assyrian army would be as helpless before Him as a band of shepherds is helpless to frighten away a lion who has killed one of their sheep (v. 4).⁷ The LORD promises to protect Jerusalem like an eagle protecting its nest (v. 5).

I’m not going to belabor the point this morning, because this was the topic of last week’s sermon from Isaiah 30, but the apostle Paul helps us to read this section of Isaiah like Christians. When Paul read Isaiah 28–39, he saw in it the fundamental question facing every man and every

⁶ J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1993), 235.

⁷ Motyer thinks the shepherds “are the ineffectual aid of Egypt”; Motyer, 255. Fyall comments, “There is some dispute about the shepherds, who may represent the ineffective help of Egypt—but it is never wise to press every detail in an illustration too far. The main point is that Yahweh will defend his people and no one will prevent him”; Bob Fyall, *Isaiah*, in *ESV Expository Commentary, Volume 6: Isaiah-Ezekiel*, ed. Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton, Jr., and Jay Sklar (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), 192.

woman in every age and every place—as you contemplate the just judgment of God coming upon you for your sins, an imminent judgment bearing down upon you like an invading army, will you trust God to save you by the working of His own power, or will you attempt to secure your own salvation through your own efforts? Judah attempted to save themselves from the judgment of God (in the form of the Assyrians) by trying to purchase salvation from Egypt. Meanwhile, God implored the people to trust His promise. I return to Romans 9:30–33 because it is the key that unlocks the meaning of Isaiah 31 and its relevance to us today. The hinge on which this entire section of Isaiah (Isaiah 28–39) turns is Isaiah 28:16:

*Therefore thus says the Lord GOD,
“Behold, I am the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion,
a stone, a tested stone,
a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation:
‘Whoever believes will not be in haste.’” (28:16)*

When Paul read Isaiah 28:16 (in the context of Isaiah 28–39), he saw the gospel of Christ foreshadowed. Jesus is the precious cornerstone which God has laid as a foundation in Zion. Jesus is the cornerstone of God’s new temple. Those who believe in Him—those who build their life and rest their hope upon His blood and righteousness, which alone can atone for sin and justify us in the sight of God—they become like living stones in the new temple (Eph 2:19–22; 1 Pt 2:4–6). That is exactly what many Gentiles to whom Paul preached had done—they had believed upon Christ for salvation from the judgment to come. The Gentiles *received* by *faith* the righteousness of *Christ* that alone justifies a sinner in the sight of God. The Jews, on the other hand, rejected Christ, instead, attempting to *achieve* by *works* their *own* righteousness by which they sought to justify themselves in the sight of God. Paul writes in Romans 9:30–33:

What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, as it is written,

*“Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense;
and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.” (Rom 9:30–33)*

Isaiah 31:1–5 may appear at first glance to be an oracle of judgment upon the 7th century BC kingdom of Judah for relying upon Egypt to save them from the Assyrian threat rather than relying upon their God. But read in context, with the apostle Paul’s inspired help, in light of the redeeming work of Christ, Isaiah 31:1–5 is another restatement of the gospel.

The Call of the Gospel (31:6–9)

Having restated the *content* of the gospel, Isaiah next addresses the people of Judah directly with the *call* of the gospel.

Turn to him from whom people have deeply revolted, O children of Israel. For in that day everyone shall cast away his idols of silver and his idols of gold, which your hands have sinfully made for you. (31:6–7)

“Turn to him” (שובו) from whom you have “deeply revolted” (העמיקו סרה). The people of Israel had committed apostasy—*deep* apostasy—from God. They had utterly violated the covenant. But this was still a day of mercy, a day of grace. They could still cast away their idols of silver and their idols of gold which their hands had sinfully made, and God would forgive them and heal them and save them. It was not too late. But it soon would be.⁸ “For” (כי) the day would come when everyone would cast away their idols, not in repentance, but because they had proven worthless to save.⁹

The call of the gospel likewise comes to you this morning. Turn to God from whom you have deeply revolted. Upon the creation of man, God made a covenant whereby He promised eternal life and blessing to those who would worship Him in the obedience of faith, and threatened the curse of eternal condemnation to those who revolted from Him to worship, trust, and obey themselves, or idols, or anything but God. From the first man on down through the

⁸ “[Isaiah] 29:9–10 suggests Isaiah’s awareness that the days leading up to the Assyrian invasion would constitute the spiritual point of no return of which he was warned at the time of his call (see on 6:9f)”; Motyer, 256.

⁹ “Therefore, since *that day* will (too late!) cause people to reject in disgust what they have so long cultivated, the time for decisive action is now”; Motyer, 256.

ages, every person has deeply revolted against their Creator. You are both an heir of and a willing participant in that revolt. And there is coming a day when God will judge the earth and bring man's revolt to a decisive end. On that day every man and every woman will cast aside their idols, the works of their hands, everything in which they trusted. They will cast them away, not in repentance, but in a final, devastating recognition of their futility and worthlessness. And they will bow the knee before God's divine sovereignty and acknowledge with their mouth His divine glory, before being cast away into eternal condemnation (Phil 2:10–11).

But... there is another covenant, a covenant of redemption, a covenant of grace, a new covenant. In mercy, God promised to send a Redeemer into the world, through the human race, to do on behalf of sinners what they were helpless to do for themselves—namely, to represent them perfectly in covenant with God. This promised Redeemer is the Lord Jesus Christ, conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary, the eternal Son of God incarnate as the Son of Man. He lived in perfect righteousness before God—He worshiped God with all of His heart, soul, and strength in the obedience of faith. He died upon the cross as a substitute for sinners, providing full and final atonement for the unrighteousness of all those whom He represents. He rose from the dead in power and glory, and ascended into heaven to take His seat at the right hand of the Father. And He will return with glory to judge the living and the dead. It is to Him, to the Lord Jesus Christ, that you must turn if you would be saved from the power and penalty of your deep revolt against God. Cast away all of your idols of silver and gold, all of the works of your hands, all of the self-righteousness to which you cling, and come empty-handed to Christ. Lay hold by faith upon His blood as the only sufficient atonement for your sin. Lay hold by faith upon His righteousness as the only plea for your justification before God.

Nothing in my hand I bring;
Simply to Thy cross I cling.
Naked, come to Thee for dress;
Helpless, look to Thee for grace;
Foul, I to Thy fountain fly;
Wash me, Savior, or I die.

You do not want to face the judgment of God under the first covenant, which you have broken, from which you have revolted, under which you must die. You want to come to God under the new covenant in Christ, washed in His blood and clothed in His righteousness, an heir of everlasting life. Cast aside your idols and your self-righteousness in repentance now, or you will cast them aside later in regret. Today is a day of grace. Turn to Christ, and be saved.

In vv. 8–9, Isaiah turns to the destruction of God’s enemies—historically, the Assyrians; eschatologically, the nations.

*“And the Assyrian shall fall by a sword, not of man;
and a sword, not of man, shall devour him;
and he shall flee from the sword,
and his young men shall be put to forced labor.
His rock shall pass away in terror,
and his officers desert the standard in panic,”
declares the LORD, whose fire is in Zion,
and whose furnace is in Jerusalem.” (31:8–9)*

We will see the historical outworking of this prophecy in Isaiah 37, where God will slay 185,000 Assyrians in a single night without a single citizen of Jerusalem firing an arrow or brandishing a sword (v. 8). “His rock” is the king of Assyria, an intended contrast to the “Rock of Israel” (30:29), the King who will reign in righteousness (32:1). Along with his officers, he will flee in terror and desert the troops in panic.¹⁰ Eschatologically, of course, these verses find their fulfillment when the ruler of the nations and the kings of the earth are defeated, and cast into the lake of fire (Rv 19:19–21; 20:9–10). The LORD’s point is clear—the revolt against God will not succeed. So lay down your arms, and surrender to Christ, the King who reigns in righteousness.

¹⁰ Motyer, 256. Motyer also makes the connection between Zion’s “fire” and Jerusalem’s “furnace” and the “Ariel” (altar hearth) reference in 29:1–2. He writes, “Zion itself cannot escape the threat of its own privileges: it lives, indwelt by the God of fiery holiness. But when the Assyrians attacked Zion they brought themselves within the ambit of that same holy fire”; Motyer, 256–57.

The Coming of the King (32:1–8)

Which brings us to Isaiah 32. Before we jump in, however, let's take a moment and talk about how to interpret this chapter. There are five important notes to make:

- First, there is no textual break between 31:9 and 32:1. Isaiah 31–32 forms one continuous prophetic unit. When the “rock” (the king of Assyria) passes away in terror (31:9), the king of righteousness will reign over a righteous society (32:1).
- Second, this does not refer to Hezekiah, king of Judah, for the fall of the king of Assyria and the destruction of the Assyrian army did not usher in a reign of righteousness or a righteous society. In fact, the latter days of Hezekiah's reign were worse than the first, and gave way to the reign of the wickedest king in Judah's history, Manasseh.¹¹
- Third, the king who reigns in righteousness, therefore, is the king Isaiah has been promising since chapter seven. It is Immanuel (7:14), the one whose name shall be called “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace,” who will rule on the throne of David and over his kingdom with justice and righteousness forevermore (9:6–7; 11:1–9). Thus, Isaiah 32 looks ahead to the reign of Christ over the kingdom of God.
- Fourth, Christ's reign and kingdom must be interpreted in an already/not yet fashion. For at His first coming, Christ inaugurated His kingdom and established His reign in heaven (1 Cor 15:25; Eph 1:20–21); and at His second coming, Christ will consummate His kingdom and establish His reign upon the earth (Revelation 21–22).
- Fifth, yet even Christ's present, heavenly reign is visible in this age in the church, which is the firstfruits of the new, righteous society that He will create. The church functions in this age like an embassy of the kingdom upon the earth, and its members are citizens of the kingdom, even though they live on foreign soil, so to speak.

All of this means that Isaiah 32 is descriptive of the church in this present age, as well as the everlasting kingdom that Christ will establish upon the earth in the new creation. And how does

¹¹ Motyer comments on the eschatological nature of Isaiah 32: “In the final three ‘woes’ of the sixfold series eschatology is ever more plainly interwoven with history. Just as the call to prepare for the interim day of the Lord, the Assyrian threat (31:8–9), was preceded by a reminder of the real day of the Lord (31:7), so the passing of the earthly king (31:8–9) now merges into the reign of the true king (*cf.* 9:1<8:23>; 11:1). It is part of the purpose of biblical eschatology to allow the ultimate vision to brighten the intermediate dark days”; Motyer, 257.

that fit within the overarching theme of this sermon? Well, when you feel overwhelmed by evil, when you are discouraged by an evil world ruled by evil leaders and populated by evil people, look to the king who reigns in righteousness and to the kingdom that He is forming, a kingdom that was inaugurated at His first coming, a kingdom that will be consummated at His second coming, and a kingdom that is already being realized in and through His church.

Isaiah 32:1–8, then, looks ahead to the coming of the king and the establishment of His kingdom, now present and visible in the church. Isaiah points out three characteristics that are already true of the church (imperfectly) and will be true (perfectly) of the everlasting kingdom.

First, the kingdom will be ruled in righteousness.

*Behold, a king will reign in righteousness,
and princes will rule in justice.*

*Each will be like a hiding place from the wind,
a shelter from the storm,*

*like streams of water in a dry place,
like the shade of a great rock in a weary land. (32:1–2)*

There is only one king of this kingdom, and that is Christ, the head of the church. Who, then, are the princes who rule in justice? “Princes” (שרים), or better “rulers,” refers to those ministers who exercise the king’s authority and execute the king’s will. I think a fair application of the word in the context of the church would be to pastors/elders. In other words, not only will Christ the chief Shepherd (1 Pt 5:4) reign in righteousness, but His undershepherds will lead with justice as well. They will provide the people with shelter and nourishment, provision and protection for their souls (v. 2).¹² In this age, every “prince” inevitably falls short of the righteousness of the King; tragically, some even rule in unrighteousness and injustice. But generally speaking, if you are looking for hope in a hopeless world, if you are looking for righteous and just and faithful leadership in a world ruled by unrighteous and unjust and faithless leaders, you can find that in the church. And if your church does not have righteous leaders, leaders with rock-like qualities

¹² “Each” (אִישׁ), with which v. 2 begins, is literally “a man.” It is understood by Motyer and Young to refer to the king (Christ) rather than to the princes; Motyer, 257; Young, 386. Smith, 540, thinks it refers to each prince.

that reflect *the* Rock, leaders on whom you can lean for provision and protection in an evil world, then you need to find a new church.

Second, the kingdom receives the word of God.

*Then the eyes of those who see will not be closed,
and the ears of those who hear will give attention.
The heart of the hasty will understand and know,
and the tongue of the stammerers will hasten to speak distinctly. (32:3–4)*

Throughout the previous chapters, Isaiah has condemned Judah for refusing to receive—to hear and heed—the word of God (28:7–13; 29:9–12). Not so in the church; not so in the coming kingdom of God. In the kingdom of God there will be no one blind to the word, deaf to the word, ignorant of the word, or unable to speak the word. Why? Because it is only by receiving the word that one enters the kingdom. Again, every church and every Christian in this age attains to only an imperfect relationship to the word of God; and tragically, some pretended churches and some pretended Christians refuse to hear and heed the word of God. But if you are looking for hope in a hopeless world, if you are looking for truth in a world drowning in relativism, if you are looking for a people who know what they believe and why they believe it, you can find that in the church. And if your church does not teach or receive the word of God, then you need to find a new church.

Third, the kingdom recognizes and rejects evil men.

*The fool will no more be called noble,
nor the scoundrel said to be honorable.
For the fool speaks folly,
and his heart is busy with iniquity,
to practice ungodliness,
to utter error concerning the LORD,
to leave the craving of the hungry unsatisfied,
and to deprive the thirsty of drink.
As for the scoundrel—his devices are evil;*

*he plans wicked schemes
to ruin the poor with lying words,
even when the plea of the needy is right.
But he who is noble plans noble things,
and on noble things he stands. (32:5–8)*

“An imperfect society imperfectly accords honours,” writes Motyer.¹³ They promote to positions of leadership fools and scoundrels. The “fool” (נבל) is one “who lives without acknowledgment of moral or spiritual obligations.”¹⁴ The “scoundrel” (כלי) refers to who employs “deception, devious working for self-advantage and the hurt of others.”¹⁵ The citizens of the kingdom of God do not honor fools; they do not promote scoundrels. They recognize that honor and leadership, both in the church and in the world, requires virtue. Therefore, when looking for leadership, they do not look for charisma; they look for character, competency, and conviction. In other words, they look for a “noble” (נדיב) man who plans noble things and stands upon noble principles. In a world that calls evil “good” and good “evil,” that willingly exchanges truth for power, where can you look for hope? You can look to the church, which recognizes and rejects evil men, which accords honor and power to men of noble character rather than to fools and scoundrels. And if your church does not do this, then you need to find a new church.

The church is the firstfruits of the kingdom of God, where righteousness has already begun to reign. So when you feel helpless and hopeless, living in a world overcome by evil, look to the church and take heart. Jesus is reigning in righteousness. He is creating a righteous people. And take that as evidence that He will one day defeat all evil and establish His righteous kingdom which will endure forever and ever.

The Centuries of Waiting (32:9–14)

Following this vision of the coming kingdom and the righteous reign of the coming King, Isaiah returns to the immediate context of Jerusalem, providing a glimpse of what the next seven centuries will hold for them. First, he calls the daughters of Jerusalem (cf. 3:16) to awaken from

¹³ Motyer, 258.

¹⁴ Motyer, 258.

¹⁵ Moyter, 258. “The fool is amoral; the scoundrel is unscrupulous”; Ibid.

their complacency and take note of this prophecy of destruction, followed by a promise of deliverance.

*Rise up, you women who are at ease, hear my voice;
you complacent daughters, give ear to my speech. (32:9)*

The next five verses are bounded by two crucial time markers that provide us with the key to understanding this section. It begins with “in little more than a year” (v. 10a), and ends with “until the Spirit is poured upon us from on high” (v. 15a). “In little more than a year” means a little more than a year from when Isaiah declared this prophecy (703/2 BC). And as we will see in a moment, the Spirit was poured out upon God’s people from on high at Pentecost in AD 30 (Acts 1–2). Hence, vv. 10–14 is a description of the situation in Israel for the seven centuries between Isaiah and Christ.

Those seven centuries would be marked by judgment upon the nation, during which the faithful remnant awaited the arrival of the coming King.

*In little more than a year
you will shudder, you complacent women;
for the grape harvest fails,
the fruit harvest will not come.
Tremble, you women who are at ease,
shudder, you complacent ones;
strip, and make yourselves bare,
and tie sackcloth around your waist.
Beat your breasts for the pleasant fields,
for the fruitful vine,
for the soil of my people
growing up in thorns and briers,
yes, for all the joyous houses
in the exultant city.
For the palace is forsaken*

*the populous city deserted;
the hill and the watchtower
will become dens forever;
a joy of wild donkeys,
a pasture of flocks; (32:10–14)*

As Isaiah looks ahead through the centuries, he sees first the devastation wrought by the Assyrians as they marched through Judah to the gates of Jerusalem, destroying everything in their path, including vineyards and fields (vv. 12–13). Then Isaiah appears to look ahead to the Babylonian invasion, after which the people of Jerusalem were carried off into exile, leaving a forsaken palace and a deserted city, overrun by untended flocks and herds (v. 14). And this heavy hand of discipline will continue “until the Spirit is poured out from on high.”

While the complacent daughters of Jerusalem were weeping over the loss of their wine, what do you suppose the faithful remnant was doing? They were waiting. Waiting for what? Waiting for the fulfillment of the promise. Waiting for the coming of the King. Waiting for the outpouring of the Spirit. Waiting for the establishment of the kingdom of God. We get a picture of this waiting remnant in the songs of Mary (Lk 1:46–55), Zechariah (Lk 1:68–79), and Simeon (Lk 2:29–32). The faithful remnant endured the long centuries of judgment by faith in the promise. And that is where you must find your hope as well. This is an age of waiting, not so different than Isaiah’s day. The difference is that the King has come, and we enjoy the firstfruits of His kingdom and reign. But it is still an age of groaning as we await the eternal age of glory (Rom 8:18–25). Knowing this is an important element of maintaining hope.

For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. (Rom 8:22–25)

The Cascade of the Spirit (32:15–20)

But the centuries of waiting will come to an end when the Spirit is poured out from on high, thus inaugurating the new creation of which we who are born of Spirit are already partakers, though we do not yet experience anything like its fullness.

*... until the Spirit is poured upon us from on high,
and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field,
and the fruitful field is deemed a forest.
Then justice will dwell in the wilderness,
and righteousness abide in the fruitful field.
And the effect of righteousness will be peace,
and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever.
My people will abide in a peaceful habitation,
in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places. (32:15–18)*

Three notes on this passage, and we'll be done.

First, when will the Spirit be poured out from on high? This is again a promise that must be interpreted in light of the two comings of Christ and the already/not yet nature of the Day of the LORD. It is clear that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that inaugurated the new creation occurred at Pentecost. For just prior to His ascension, Jesus told His disciples, using the very same language as Isaiah 32:15,

And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high. (Lk 24:49)

Then, in Acts 1 Jesus told His disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the promise of the Father, “which, he said, you heard from me;”

for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now. . . . But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and

you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:5, 8)

Then, ten days later,

When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit... (Acts 2:1–3a)

So clearly Isaiah 30:15 was fulfilled at Pentecost. But is that it? Is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit over and done with? No, it continues throughout this age, for the apostle Paul picks up that language of being “baptized with the Spirit” and applies it to every believer:

For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and were all made to drink of one Spirit. (1 Cor 12:13)

So the outpouring of the Holy Spirit *began* at Pentecost, *continues* through this present age, and will be *completed* on the day of resurrection when the whole creation is renewed and glorified, for plainly what is promised will attend the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is not yet fully realized.

Second, on whom is the Spirit poured out from on high? The answer in Isaiah must be, the believing remnant. The answer in Acts is the same:

And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:38)

Only those who repent and rest upon Christ (Is 30:15) will receive the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and will enjoy the Spirit’s blessings.

Third, what happens when the Spirit is poured out from on high? There is exceeding fruitfulness (v. 15). There is pervasive justice and righteousness (v. 16). There is peace,

quietness, and trust (v. 17). There is confidence, security, and rest (v. 18). This will be true in an absolute sense in the new creation, but it is true even now in the believer, who has become a new creation in Christ (2 Cor 5:17).

Isaiah concludes this oracle as he so often does, with a stark contrast that highlights the stark choice confronting us.¹⁶ Will you fall with the world under the judgment of God (v. 19), or will you rise to everlasting blessing in the enjoyment of God (v. 20)?

*And it will hail when the forest falls down,
and the city will be utterly laid low.
Happy [blessed] are you who sow beside all waters,
who let the feet of the ox and the donkey range free. (32:19–20)*

My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less

Isaiah 31–32 gives us solid ground on which we may rest our hope in the midst of a hopeless world in which we feel helpless before the power of evil and the ravages of the curse. This hope was sufficient to sustain a tiny yet faithful remnant through the dark days of the Assyrian invasion. How much more is this hope sufficient to sustain you in the present crisis? For now, the promised King has come; the promised kingdom is inaugurated; the promised Spirit has been poured out. What Isaiah saw as only a future hope is now *both* a present reality *and* a future hope. It is true that the full reality of these promises has not yet appeared; but the firstfruits of these promises are available now, and they are rich and sweet. This morning, receive and rest upon the hope offered to you in Christ.

¹⁶ “That is the power of this concluding reiteration of the theme: both judgment and glory lie ahead and now is the time to choose”; Motyer, 261.