

A Study in Isaiah 11:9–16

The Earth Full of the Knowledge of Jehovah — the Root of Jesse — the Second Recovery

We are reading Isaiah chapter 11, beginning at verse 9. We had concluded our previous reading at verse 8.

"They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea."

"And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the peoples; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious."

"And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea."

"And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth. The envy also of Ephraim shall depart, and the adversaries of Judah shall be cut off: Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim."

"But they shall fly upon the shoulders of the Philistines toward the west; they shall spoil them of the east together: they shall lay their hand upon Edom and Moab; and the children of Ammon shall obey them."

"And the LORD shall utterly destroy the tongue of the Egyptian sea; and with his mighty wind shall he shake his hand over the river, and shall smite it in the seven streams, and make men go over dry shod. And there shall be an highway for the remnant of his people, which shall be left from Assyria; like as it was to Israel in the day that he came up out of the land of Egypt."

They Shall Not Hurt Nor Destroy — The Fullness of the Millennium (v. 9)

There is an English proverb: you cannot make an omelet without breaking eggs. It means that any great project will involve some harm to some interests along the way. The net result may be good, but someone is going to suffer loss. That is the normal calculation of men when any sweeping change takes

place. And yet verse 9 opens with these words: they shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain. That is the most beautiful expression. Sometimes men hurt one another. Then the hurt tends toward destruction. That tendency will be gone entirely in the millennial kingdom. No omelet-making at the expense of the eggs.

The reason is given in the second half of the verse: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea. Think of a vessel that is full. When it is full, there is no room in it for anything else at the same time. That is a lovely thought in connection with the Millennial Kingdom. There are many kinds of wickedness with which men fill their lives today, and there will be no room for them when the earth is full of the knowledge of Jehovah. It has never been full since the world was populated. This will be the first time. And it is a necessary thing, as 1 Corinthians 15 says: he must reign. There is an absolute necessity to his reigning, just as there is an absolute necessity of the new birth to have any relationship with God. Man has failed in the government committed to him. Christ must take it up and discharge it perfectly.

Darby's translation offers the land as an alternative rendering. If the focus is on the land of Palestine, there is still no reduction of the earth-wide blessing, because Jerusalem will be the center from which the knowledge of the Lord shines in every direction. The nations will send representatives to Jerusalem periodically, as Zechariah 14 describes. The center radiates out to the circumference. But there is good reason to understand this as earth-wide: the latter half of Zechariah 14, and many other prophetic scriptures, speaks of Christ as king over the whole earth. And in Romans 1, the fact that men did not like to retain God in their knowledge and were given over to a reprobate mind shows what a great reversal this will be.

The Root of Jesse — Both Root and Offspring (v. 10)

In that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the peoples; to it shall the Gentiles seek; and his rest shall be glorious. The distinction between the root of Jesse and the shoot out of the stem of Jesse in verse 1 is instructive. A root comes before; a shoot comes after. The root of Jesse is one who comes before Jesse. The rod out of the stem of Jesse is one who springs forth from Jesse. There is only one person who is both before Jesse and who comes forth from him: the Lord Jesus Christ.

Revelation 22:16 makes the same distinction explicitly: I am the root and the offspring of David — one who comes before David and one who comes after. He raises the question Himself in the Gospels: how can the Messiah be both David's Lord (Psalm 110:1) and David's son? The answer is His divine and human natures. He comes before Jesse as to His deity; He springs forth from Jesse as to His humanity.

As to why it says Jesse rather than David — a question worth considering. Jesse was David's father, a man of no particular account in Israel. He was not one of the great personages. Joseph and Mary were likewise of no account by worldly reckoning — they offered two turtle doves at the temple, the lowest of the burnt offerings permitted. Yet from that lowly stock came the Lord Jesus. And one of the few notable things Jesse ever did was to send his son David to see how his brethren were doing when Goliath was challenging Israel. The father sent his son to his brethren. There may be in that picture at least an echo of God the Father sending His Son into this world. Moreover, 1 Corinthians 15 teaches that after the kingdom, the Son will deliver it up to the Father. It is the Father's pleasure and good will that His Son should be exalted. There may be, in the use of Jesse rather than David, an occasion to remember that it is the Father who sent the Son and whose good pleasure it is that the Son be glorified.

His rest shall be glorious. Noah means rest — named in anticipatory faith by his father Lamech, who had received communication from God. The millennium is a kind of new earth after the great judgments have swept away what was corrupt. Noah entered a new world after the flood; Christ enters His millennial rest after the judgments of the great tribulation. And in Zechariah 6:13, he shall be a priest upon his throne: David and Solomon together set forth the coming and reign of the Lord Jesus. David as the man of war — the coming in judgment. Solomon as the prince of peace — the rest of the kingdom, the sessional judgments, the wisdom and order of the settled reign. Both figures are needed. And here, verse 4 of our chapter has the Davidic character — he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth; verse 10 brings in the Solomon character — his rest shall be glorious.

To It Shall the Gentiles Seek

To it shall the Gentiles seek — to the root of Jesse, to this ensign standing for the peoples. There will be a desire after Him in the millennium. The nations will seek Him. This will be a tremendous blessing to the Gentiles, but of an earthly character, an earthly order. It differs from what the church has — a heavenly relationship with the Lord Jesus, the relationship of a bride to her bridegroom rather than of subjects to a king.

It is important not to confuse the two. The apostles quoted certain Old Testament passages about Gentile blessing — not as fulfillment, but for the principle of Gentile blessing, showing that God had always had Gentile blessing in mind and that the present blessing of Gentiles in the church was not inconsistent with the Old Testament. The fulfillment of those scriptures about a great earth-wide Gentile blessing is still to come, in the millennium. What the church enjoys now is above and beyond that — a heavenly portion, a heavenly people, a heavenly hope.

What will make heaven heaven for us is not merely the absence of disease and death, or even the glories of a perfected world. It is the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ — nothing to hinder perfect

communion with Him. Even if heaven were imagined to be like the millennial kingdom, that would still be a lowering of what our hope is. The millennium is for the nations, an earthly blessing. Our hope is to be where He is, to behold His glory, the relationship of the bride to the Bridegroom.

The Second Recovery — Not the Return Under Ezra (vv. 11–12)

Those who would deny a future literal regathering of Israel argue that these prophecies were fulfilled in the return under Zerubbabel and Ezra. But verse 11 shuts that argument with a single phrase: the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people. The word second time is definitive. If the return under Zerubbabel and Ezra was one of the two recoveries, then the second — the greater and final one — is still future. The theory that the prophetic scriptures about regathering were all exhausted in the days of Ezra cannot stand before this verse.

There is also a significant omission in verse 11. The places from which the remnant will be recovered are listed: Assyria, Egypt, Pathros, Cush, Elam, Shinar, Hamath, and the islands of the sea. But Babylon is not listed. And in Isaiah 13:19–20, it says of Babylon: it shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation. If this second recovery were the return from Babylon under Zerubbabel and Ezra, how could the prophet possibly list the places from which the remnant comes and omit Babylon? The return from Babylon was the defining geographical fact of that captivity. Its omission here is precisely because Babylon, having been utterly destroyed and never again inhabited, will not be a source from which the remnant returns in the latter day. There have been attempts to rebuild Babylon in modern times, but the word of the Lord remains. That city will be as Sodom and Gomorrah.

The Healing of Divisions and the Highway (vv. 13–16)

Verse 13 describes the healing of the long division between Ephraim and Judah. From the time of Jeroboam, the ten northern tribes and the two southern tribes had been in tension, envy, and conflict. Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim. This is a sign of genuine national restoration: not just a physical return to the land, but the healing of the ancient wounds.

Verses 15–16 close with a picture of God drying up the tongue of the Egyptian sea and smiting the river in seven streams so that men may go over dry shod. Then there shall be an highway for the remnant of his people like as it was to Israel in the day that he came up out of the land of Egypt. The great redemption — the Exodus — will have its counterpart in the final and greater regathering. God will do again what He did then. The very obstacles of nature will be removed. The parallel is drawn explicitly: like as it was to Israel in the day that he came up out of the land of Egypt.

Those who would understand verses 7–9 of our chapter (the wolf lying with the lamb, the leopard with the kid, the child playing at the asp's hole) as only figurative must then also take verse 10 and these closing verses as figurative — and then they lose the person of the Lord Jesus Christ from the passage, which is the very center of it. It is the person of the root of Jesse, standing as a banner, that the nations seek, and it is His rest that is glorious. A figurative kingdom without the literal presence and reign of the Lord Jesus is not worth having. What will make the millennium blessed is not merely an idealized social order — it is the knowledge of Jehovah filling the earth as the waters cover the sea, with the Son of God, the root and offspring of Jesse, seated upon His throne.

They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain — for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of Jehovah, as the waters cover the sea.