God makes things right for his people! Isaiah 11: 1-16, 12:1-6

The book of Isaiah is a spectacular vision or book about God and His purposes for His people. Chapters 11 & 12 conclude the introduction of the vision that Isaiah began in chapter one. Remember that chapters 1-12 introduce his readers to the main message and key themes of the entire book of sixty six chapters. We as a class have read and begun to appreciate Isaiah’s themes in the first ten chapters. Now in these two closing chapters to his introduction, Isaiah masterfully brings a sense of conclusion to the message concerning God and his purposes for Israel. Specifically a close and careful look at these concluding chapters should function in the following ways: 1) Reiteration. These chapters reiterate several of Isaiah’s key themes once again. 2) Integration. The chapters help bring previously independent themes from earlier chapters together in a more unified vision. 3) Intensification. Previously stated themes are given additional details so as to expand our appreciation of them further. 4) Application. Amazingly, these two chapters even supply the anticipated result that should follow among God’s people: Trust, Thanksgiving, and Praise. Briefly stated, these two concluding chapters deal with the following main ideas. 1) The promise of a Branch. The hope of a coming King and Savior out of the root of Jesse. 11:1-9. 2) This coming King will gather the remnant of Israel and even call the nations to Himself. 11: 10-16. 3) This great work of salvation is recognized as due to God being at work among his people. God is faithful! He keeps his promises. He alone deserves the praise and thanksgiving.

I. The Promise of a Branch. (1-9) The first verse of chapter eleven seems to come out of nowhere. But upon careful reading, this text is closely tied to ideas that Isaiah has already mentioned to us before concerning Israel’s future, a promise of a future king, and the “the Branch of the LORD”. Not only is this text closely tied to those themes, but the image of God as a great forester\(^1\) cutting, pruning, and felling trees and even a whole forest with his mighty ax which is the main theme that brings chapter ten to a strong ending. Indeed, I see the fact that God has decreed the complete destruction of both kingdoms as the dominant theme lingering over this chapter. Both kingdoms, Israel and Judah, are compared to trees, trees that will be cut down or destroyed. Only stumps will remain. (Is. 6:13). This is the background needed for us to appreciate this promise of a branch coming forth from the stump. The tree is dead, but there is still life left in the stump. The focus of the first nine verses of this chapter is focused upon the hope of a Branch coming from God. But what is Isaiah talking about regarding the Branch? Is the Branch a reference again to a restored Israel, as we have seen in chapter four? Or is the promise of a Branch instead a reference to the promise of a coming royal anointed King?

A. The Branch coming out of the stump is not Israel, but a future glorious King. Recall David’s earlier exposition of chapter four concerning his understanding of the Branch there. David maintained that the Branch referred to Israel-the people of God – the remnant. The remnant will be the new Israel; God will make them holy and will bring about the good fruit that the LORD expects from his people. (Is.4:2-4). On the other hand, though the Branch portrayed there is a reference to a collective group, in this chapter the reference is not to Israel but instead to one individual – a king. This point is made in the first two verses. “A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the LORD will rest upon him...” The Branch is a single individual, not a collective term for the remnant of Israel, as Isaiah had earlier used this figure to refer to. This first verse also alerts us again to the origins of this king. Recall Isaiah strongly contended that the coming king would rule over David’s kingdom.\(^2\)

\(^1\) God is portrayed as the great forester, the one deciding which trees are to grow and which trees are to be cut down. I am indebted to Watts, who sees this image behind the associated images of stumps, roots, and branches. Watts, *Isaiah 1-33*, Word Commentary 1985 p.163.

\(^2\) Isaiah 9:7
David has not been replaced. God’s promise to David, that his house would last forever, still stands. But why did not Isaiah just say ‘from the stump of David?’ Instead, Isaiah reaches back to a point in time earlier than David, saying that the king would come from the stump of Jesse. Is this a denial of the promise that the royal lineage of the future coming king would be through David? It may seem that way. But Goldingay argues that the coming king would still be viewed as coming through David, but there is an implied criticism of David himself, whose life was not perfect. Moreover, recall the promise of a coming king who would rule on David’s throne and over his kingdom that is clearly made in Is. 9:7 “He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom”. Isaiah wants us to see that the person that he is describing here in these first nine verses of this chapter is the same person that he described in chapter 9: 1-7. Everything that was said about him there must be kept in mind as we look at a more expanded portrait of the one that God is raising up out of the stump of Jesse.

B. The Coming King will be anointed and equipped for his role by God. How is this conveyed? The Spirit of Yahweh is said to have come upon him or will rest upon him. This is key! This conveys two important points concerning this future king. Explicitly, this discloses to us first that God acts and speaks acts through this king. Implicitly, this is telling us secondly that this king is the Messiah – the anointed one of God, just like David and Saul. Both Saul and David were anointed and thus empowered by God for the role and the tasks that he – the Lord – called them to do. It is illuminating to study the accounts of Saul and David, whereby God set them apart from others to be king. In both cases oil was poured upon their heads and this act was accompanied by “the Spirit of the Lord” coming down upon both Saul and David “in power” In both cases the anointing (pouring oil on a person’s head) was an outward sign of the greater reality of God’s Spirit coming in power upon both men and thus equipping them for the task that God called them to. This promised future king will not only have the Spirit of the Lord resting upon him, but God would give this king specific qualities or attributes necessary for him to complete his responsibility. Let us take a quick look at them. 1) wisdom and understanding. 2) counsel and power. 3) knowledge and fear of the Lord.

1) First quality pair: wisdom and understanding. Watts remarks that these two qualities were fundamentally required of any king in order to rule. These are qualities that are necessary to have in order to make good judgments.

2) Second quality pair: counsel and power. Watts remarks that these two qualities are appropriate for a king as well. Watts defines counsel as the quality that enables a king to formulate good strategies in battle and helping him to formulate policy decisions. Watts interestingly cites Is. 36:5, where the Assyrian commander taunts Hezekiah, saying with these very same words, “you say that you have strategy and power” which the NIV appropriately translates as you “you say that you have strategy and military strength” This is a fantastic insight, for it brings illumination to the qualities that God will give this future king. David certainly had these two qualities; his coming descendent will too.

3) Third quality pair: knowledge and fear of the Lord. Not only will this future king possess wisdom understanding and power to rule, just as the king of Assyria boasted that he possessed, qualities that enabled him to remove the boundaries of nations and plunder their treasuries. This coming king will have additional qualities that set him apart from the king of Assyria, and even from Israel’s kings. Watts again has some fine comments to make on this unusual pair of qualities or attributes that God will endow

---

3 So Goldingay, Isaiah, The New International Biblical Commentary, Hendrickson, Pub. 2001 p. 84
4 See 1 Sam. 10:1-6, 1 Sam. 12:13, and 1 Sam. 16:13
5 Watts, Isaiah 1-33, Word Commentary 1985 p. 171
6 Watts, p. 171, commenting upon text and citing 2 Sam. 14:17
7 Is. 10:12-13
this future king with: **Knowledge and fear of Yahweh.** Fear and knowledge are basic (even essential) terms that characterize having faith in Yahweh.\(^8\) Fear is basic to the king’s relationship to Yahweh, for it indicates a respectful attitude toward God. Specifically, the king possesses awe and submission to God. Knowledge of God, which is also granted to this king, refers to the king possessing a true understanding of God and his ways.\(^9\) Oswalt, in his comments on knowledge, points out that this knowledge is experiential as well. This coming king has “an experiential acquaintance with God”\(^10\). In previous chapters, Isaiah condemns Israel for lacking both these qualities. The people and their leaders will go into exile because they lack understanding of God and because they “have no regard for the deeds of the LORD.” (Is.5:12-13) But this king is different. This king knows God. This king fears God. This king knows what pleases God. Thus, Isaiah can conclude this list of qualities by saying about this king “will delight in the fear of the LORD.” (vs. 4) Isaiah is saying that the basic instinct and passion of this future king is to honor and serve with delight the one who will set him apart as king. It is this basic instinct or quality of having awe and reverence for God that both equips and controls his dominion and rule. How so? The fear of Yahweh is the root motivation for this king ruling, making righteous decisions, and bringing an end to evil in this world. Isaiah’s fundamental description of the actions of the king ruling is simply: **this king rules righteously.** Let us take another brief look at how Isaiah makes this point in verses 3b-5.

C. **The future king will rule righteously.** (3-5) Recall that righteousness and justice are the two fundamental qualities that Isaiah attributed to the future coming of a Davidic king.\(^11\) Isaiah focused on this King being the one who would establish and uphold his kingdom in righteousness and justice. These two qualities go hand in hand. Oswalt, in his commentary, defines righteousness as “the capacity for doing the right thing in all circumstances.”\(^12\) This king will always do what is fair, right, true, honest, and good on behalf his people. The decisions that he makes will be right. He cannot be bribed and will not make decisions for selfish gain, as some of Israel’s leaders. This text strongly declares that his decisions in making judgments will be fair and just, based upon what is right. The reference to this king “striking the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked” is a reference to the king executing a judgment against those who persist in doing wrong. My interpretation that this execution of judgment is also an expression of the king’s passion for righteousness, in that just like God, he will someday put an end to evil and wickedness. In the end, evil cannot triumph. Finally, this coming king will rule righteously because he is at the core of his being righteous and true. Isaiah says this indirectly by concluding this section by saying that he straps the qualities of being righteous and faithful about him like wearing a belt around his waist. Point: This coming king is righteous and faithful, just as it is said of the One in the book of Revelation, coming at the end leading the armies of heaven. He is called “Faithful and True.” (Rev.19:11)

D. **An Idyllic picture of the world that emerges from the king’s righteous rule** (6-9) Beginning with verse 6, Isaiah paints a verbal picture of the joyous, peaceful, secure state of life that will prevail on earth as a result the righteous rule of this king. Isaiah previously had referred to this period as a time of peace in chapter 9, since he declared there that “of the increase of his government and peace there would be no end.” Peace is not only the absence of strife but suggests wellbeing as well. This is what Isaiah declares again in these four verses. Let us take a closer look.

---

\(^8\) Watts p. 172  
\(^9\) Ibid. p. 172  
\(^11\) Chapter 9:7  
\(^12\) Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1-39* 1986 p. 282
Overall Isaiah makes the point that the normal natural hostilities that exist in nature will no longer be present in the “Messiah’s kingdom,” for the wolf will live with the lamb, the calf and the lion will live together, even declaring that a small child will lead and perhaps play with them. Why? The former threatening hostility that existed between them, particularly the one sided predator – being preyed upon relationships has ended. Even a child will play by the hole of a cobra and not be harmed. Why? This kind of destructive, harmful behavior will not exist, according to Isaiah, who in verse 9 declares God’s (or the king’s) mandate of “they will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain.” Why? Things have changed. How so? “The lion will eat straw like an ox.” Now this could be hyperbole, or it could be a figurative way of suggesting how this king will make the world be a very secure and safe place to live in as a result of his righteous rule.

II. In that future day God will call his people home. (10-16) This is the focus of these final seven verses. God will rescue and restore his people. Isaiah has clearly proclaimed that God in his righteousness will punish and bring destruction to both the land and the people. The people will be exiled. But that is not God’s final word for his people. God will forgive them. He will bring them back from being banished and scattered to the four corners of the earth. He will bring them back to both Judah and Ephraim. They will no longer be exiled from home. God will renew the remnant in their own land. This is the overall thrust of these verses. Isaiah has said this before and will say it again: A remnant will return. Let us take a look at what Isaiah informs us concerning this remnant in the following verses.

A. God in his faithfulness will call his people back home. This is the major point of the entire section. Four times in this section Isaiah announces that God-the Lord will call and reach out his hand to bring his people – the remnant of his people – back to Israel. “In that day the Lord will reach out his hand a second time to reclaim the remnant that is left of his people from” the surrounding countries where they have been exiled. (vs.11). Isaiah says this again in so many words in verse 12, “He (the Lord) will raise a banner which means send a signal or sign or to call someone to do something. He will bring back the exiles of both Judah and Israel. Exiles of both kingdoms will return home from “the four corners of the earth.” Surely the concluding images of God – Yahweh – drying up the Egyptian sea is a allusion to what God did during the first Exodus, where God dried up the Sea of Reeds in Egypt. The point of verses 15-16 is that God will do this again, drying up the Euphrates River, and will make a highway for his people to come back from both Egypt and even Assyria.

B. God in his faithfulness will restore Israel to a state of wholeness, even greatness, once again. God not only brings his people home to their land, but restores them to being a united country once again. The hostility and jealousy that has existed for hundreds of years between Judah and Ephraim will be ended. Why? God will reunite them once again into one people in one united country under one king. Land that was plundered by the Philistines, by Edom and Moab, will be returned. Indeed, using the this figurative language of war, Isaiah even goes so far as to say, “Israel will plunder the people of the east,” and make the Ammonites subject to them. I see this as figurative language, stressing the idea that Israel in the future will become so prosperous and strong that she once again, just as she was under David, will become the most powerful and dominant of countries in that area once again. This is indirectly hinted at by the obscure statement in the introductory verse to this section stating: “and his place of rest will be glorious.” The full meaning of this cryptic statement will now be examined.

13 God called Isaiah’s son Shear-Jashub, which means a remnant will return Is.7:3. In Is. 10:20-23 five times Isaiah declares this again.

14 See Isaiah 13:1 ‘Raise a banner on a bare hilltop, shout to them, beckon to them to’ …do something.
C. This Restoration of Israel will be achieved by the **Coming of the future anointed King** promised by Isaiah in the first nine verses of this chapter. Who will accomplish this great new deliverance and restoration of God’s people? The one upon whom God pours out his Spirit in abundance. Isaiah explicitly wants us to make this connection right from the beginning of this section. Let us take a closer look. Isaiah transitions us to see this by saying in verse 10, “**In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner** for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious.” A close look at what Isaiah is telling us in this verse combined with seeing this verse in its proper context helps us to appreciate overall the unity of the entire chapter and a greater appreciation concerning how God will accomplish his saving purposes for both Israel and all humanity. The key to the entire chapter is the statement that God will call or summon or signal both Jews and nations to come to Him, through the Root or Stump of Jesse. For Isaiah in this verse tells us that God, through this Royal Savior, will call or summon people through the banner that this king signals to the nations to come to him. Isaiah further declares that the nations will favorably respond or rally to him. Finally, Isaiah informs us that his place of rest or dwelling place will be glorious. I think this is a reference back to Isaiah’s earlier comments concerning Zion and God’s temple would be established as preeminent and that the nations would come to the LORD to be taught his ways.

**III. The people of God must recognize and sing about God’s Involvement (Salvation) Is.12:1-6**

This is a Song of Praise. It is so simple. It is so short. It deceptively seems so familiar to us that we are tempted to skip over this chapter and move on to the good stuff coming after this chapter. But I would argue that this chapter is valuable as a perennial call for us to stop, remember and recognize what God has done, and give thanks to him for his involvement in our lives.

**A. It is a call to remember fundamentally what God has done for us.** Giving thanks to God “I will give thanks to you... (vs.1) “In that day you will say ‘Give thanks to the LORD...’” The call or summons to give thanks to God – which is an aspect of giving him praise – is prompted by the recognition, the acknowledgment **that he has done something for us.** This is why Isaiah prefaces his call to give thanks to the LORD by saying in both verse one and four explicitly “In that day you will say.” Point: Isaiah uses this expression “in that day” which we have seen before as being a reference to a future day that is coming, as the occasion when God’s people should give thanks to the LORD in response to see God’s acts of judgment and salvation. Oswalt comments that this song is the appropriate conclusion to be drawn sometime in the future when they see that these events have been fulfilled.15 I would add that it is sung by those who have personally experienced God saving involvement in their lives, because it is meant to be a personal recognition of God’s gracious activity.

**B. Giving thanks to the LORD is a means of honoring him.** Giving the LORD credit for his saving action is not only a means of recognizing what God has done for us; it is also a means by which we honor God. “Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name; make known to others what he has done, and proclaim that his name is exalted.” (vs. 4) I understand this verse to mean that when we make known to others God’s saving deeds, this is a means by which give credit to God for his help. It is also a means by which the Lord is exalted or made great in the eyes of others. This same idea is expressed in the final verse, when Isaiah calls the people of Zion who have experienced his salvation to **sing for joy** and shout aloud, implicitly what he has done in saving them, so that they and others can recognize and exalt the LORD for his deeds, but ultimately exalt the LORD for who he is, for **“great is the Holy One of Israel among you.”**

---

15 Oswalt p.291