

The Millennium Forecast

The Book of Isaiah

Text

Isaiah 42:18-25

Topic

God explains to Judah that on account of His fury with them that He would raise-up Babylon as their conqueror & captors.

Title

"I Got A Fury, And The Only Prescription Is More Captivity"

"Inconceivable!"

Or how about this: "I do not mean to pry, but you don't by any chance happen to have six fingers on your right hand?"

So many quotable quotes come from *The Princess Bride*. If you are unfamiliar, "It tells the story of a swashbuckling farmhand named Westley being accompanied by companions befriended along the way who must rescue his true love Princess Buttercup from the odious Prince Humperdinck."

It's a solid story of love fueling a relentless pursuit of the one loved. As Westley said, "Death cannot stop true love. All it can do is delay it for a while."

There is a relentless pursuit of the one loved in our text.

It's dissimilar to Westley's in that the LORD is doing the pursuing of a people whose love for Him had grown cold. 'Frozen' would be a better descriptor. He nevertheless remains undaunted and sacrifices to rekindle their passion.

This isn't the first time the LORD went after the Jews. *And He is doing it right now with Israel regathered in their Promised Land.*

I'll organize my comments around two points: **#1 You See The Lord's Great Love For His Beloved**, and **#2 You See The Lord Going To Great Lengths For His Beloved**.

#1 - You See The Lord's Great Love For His Beloved (v18-22)

Isaiah wrote about events that would occur 150 years in his future. He was announcing a series of events we summarize as the 'Babylonian Captivity.' Babylon was not a world power, but would become one. King Nebuchadnezzar would invade Jerusalem on three separate occasions. The last one would involve the destruction of Solomon's Temple and relocating Jews to Babylon. They would remain there for the next 70 years.

How is that in any way romantic? The Gentile nations of the OT believed that victory or defeat depended upon the strength of their gods:

- In chapter thirty-six when Jerusalem was threatened by the Assyrian army their spokesman said, "Has any one of the **gods** of the nations delivered its land from the hand of the king of Assyria? Where *are* the **gods** of Hamath and Arpad? Where *are* the **gods** of Sepharvaim? Indeed, have they delivered Samaria from my hand? Who among all the **gods** of these lands have delivered their countries from my hand, that the LORD should deliver Jerusalem from my hand?" (v18-20).
- The LORD Himself addressed this in Deuteronomy. We read, "but I [the LORD] dreaded the taunt of the enemy, lest the adversary misunderstand and say, 'Our hand has triumphed; the LORD has not done all this' " (32:27).

God used Gentile nations to redirect His backslidden people. God dreaded that the nations would believe their gods were stronger than He. Only because it would undermine the Gospel and hinder Gentiles from being saved.

Babylon defeating Judah would be interpreted as Marduk defeating Jehovah.

The LORD told the Jews ahead of time that He was going to raise-up Babylon as His tool. Even so, the Jews were surprised when it happened.

Love can inspire you to set aside all thoughts of what it's going to look like if you sacrifice for it.

What did it look like when Jesus died on the Cross because "God so loved the world?" We don't have to guess. "Those who passed by hurled insults at Him, shaking their heads and saying, "You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!" In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked Him. "He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself! He's the king of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, 'I am the Son of God.' " In the same way the rebels who were crucified with Him also heaped insults on Him" (Matthew 27:39-44).

Great love doesn't think about itself.

Jesus "made Himself of no reputation" for you (Philippians 2:7). God the Son was willing to have His reputation ruined, on earth and among spiritual entities, to save **you.**

Do you ever wonder what the holy angels thought? The restraint & obedience necessary for them to witness the Cross is mind-bending.

Isa 42:18 "Hear, you deaf; And look, you blind, that you may see.

The Jews in Judah were spiritually blind & deaf. It was by choice. They chose to worship gods instead of God. Why do God's people do that? Simply put, sin is pleasurable. It says so right in Hebrews 11:25. It goes on to say it is only pleasurable "for a season." We are eternal beings, not seasonal!

The whole time of their backsliding the LORD was commanding them, "Hear, you deaf; And look, you blind, that you may see." They *could* have if they *would* have.

Jesus wept over Jerusalem, saying in Matthew 23:37, "How often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, **and you were not willing.**"

There are blind and deaf church goers in the New Testament. They attended the Church in Laodicea. They merited a letter from the Lord. He told them, "You are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked... Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent" (3:17-19).

Why argue whether they were saved or not? If you want to know, I think that they were mostly unsaved. I say that because even today there are churches whose members are mostly unsaved, but not all. The point is that the Lord pursued them with "rebuke and discipline" for love's sake.

Jesus told them that He was about to vomit on account of their lukewarmness. Nevertheless He was knocking on their door wanting to sup with them. Do you feel like eating when you feel like vomiting? The water the Laodiceans served would make Him sick, but He was intent on dining with them no matter.

BTW: According to the Biblical Archaeology Society,

The church at Laodicea... became the seat of a Christian bishop, and a Christian council was held there in the fourth century AD. Archaeologists have discovered about 20 ancient Christian chapels and churches at the site. The largest church at Laodicea took up an entire city block and dates to the beginning of the fourth century.

In a more recent excavation, they discovered a sign that said (in Greek), *Pareklísi tou Golgothá*. It translates to English as *Calvary Chapel*.

Isa 42:19 Who is blind but My servant, Or deaf as My messenger whom I send? Who is blind as he who is perfect, And blind as the LORD's servant?

In Isaiah God calls the Savior "My Servant," He calls the believing remnant of Israel "My servant," and He calls the nation as a whole "My servant." In our verses, it is the *nation* He is addressing.

Israel's calling was to be the messenger of God to the world. The word "perfect" relates to the message not the messenger.

Individually and collectively believers are to share the Gospel and thereby shine God's light in the kingdom of darkness. The unsaved are blind by birth, dead in their sins. If we choose blindness by disobeying God, who will go to them with the light of the glory of God?

When a believer chooses sin it affects everyone you come into contact with. It hinders the work of the Gospel.

Isa 42:20 Seeing many things, but you do not observe; Opening the ears, but he does not hear."

Judah was at great advantage. God had given the Jews His Law to "observe." As His chosen nation, their ears were opened by God. They chose not to hear it, mostly by going after the other gods.

Every letter Jesus wrote in the Revelation ends with, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." Our ears were opened to hear & receive the Gospel. It is then up to us to listen to the things of God and not the things of the world.

We tend to disparage God's Law. We are quick to argue, "We are not under Law, but grace." Of course. But God said His Law is perfect. No man could keep it perfectly until the God-man did. But Israel & Judah were expected to live by it and share it as something beautiful and to be desired more than pure, fine gold.

Instead of sharing God's Law with Gentiles, they attended orgies with them.

It would be like us never inviting unsaved individuals to church, but accompanying them to unseemly entertainments.

Isa 42:21 The LORD is well pleased for His righteousness' sake; He will exalt the law and make *it* honorable.

The Law reveals God's righteousness. If the Jews failed as His servants to participate, God must intervene to bring them back.

Isa 42:22 But this *is* a people robbed and plundered; All of them are snared in holes, And they are hidden in prison houses; They are for prey, and no one delivers; For plunder, and no one says, "Restore!"

They get a glimpse of life as besieged then conquered by Nebuchadnezzar. Despite God's efforts to reach them, there was no movement to repent and be "restored."

The rise of Babylon and the sacking of Jerusalem should have come as no surprise:

- God had revealed it to an inquisitive Habakkuk. He was so shocked that he retreated to a watchtower to consider how and why God would use a nation more sinful than the Jews to discipline them.
- Jeremiah's ministry was to tell the people to surrender to Babylon because it was God's will.

- Hosea was a contemporary of Isaiah. At God's leading he married an unfaithful woman, then took her back. It was a painful but precious object lesson for unfaithful Jews.

There is a love song I like from the greatest era of music, the 1970s. It opens,

*If the sun refused to shine,
I would still be loving you
When mountains tumble to the sea,
There will still be you and me*

Listen to God's words to Noah as he exited the Ark to give humanity its new start:

*As long as the earth endures,
seedtime and harvest, cold and heat,
summer and winter,
Day and night will never cease*

The world of men had been one Nephilim shy of universal debauchery. God refused to abandon His love for mankind. The cycles and seasons He established in the Garden of Eden would go on, and the LORD would "still be loving you."

#2 - You See The Lord Going To Great Lengths For His Beloved (v23-25)

The moment Judah began to drift, God would call them back:

- In the Law God told them He would withhold blessings and replace them with buffetings. By this they could understand they were not in God's will.
- He sent prophets to plead with the Jews. They mostly killed them.
- He would ultimately send powerful nations to make them servants when they ought to be servants in their Father's house.

It is that last one that is so bothersome. It seems so extreme. If, however, you are dealing with a nation, it makes sense you'd do so in the context of other nations. Severe? Yes. Necessary? Yes.

Their trajectory toward self-destruction must be stopped in order for God's love to break through by the coming of Jesus. No Jews, no Jesus.

Isa 42:23 Who among you will give ear to this? *Who* will listen and hear for the time to come?

Isa 42:24 Who gave Jacob for plunder, and Israel to the robbers? Was it not the LORD, He against whom we have sinned? For they would not walk in His ways, Nor were they obedient to His law.

Today we have an overused expression. We say that someone “owns” doing something. In the case of Babylon, God “owned” what He was going to do. He told Habakkuk, “For indeed I am raising up the [Babylonians] A bitter and hasty nation Which marches through the breadth of the earth, To possess dwelling places *that are* not theirs” (1:6).

Did your dad or mom ever say to you, “This is going to hurt me worse than it hurt you?” It sure didn’t seem so at the time! After you become a parent you understand. You do things that may hurt at the time.

God will ‘hurt’ us if He must.

I’ve told you the story before about one of the times my brother Richard saved my life... [Story]. His intervention was extreme, but effective, and most certainly loving.

How far gone was Judah?

Isa 42:25 Therefore He has poured on him the fury of His anger And the strength of battle; It has set him on fire all around, Yet he did not know; And it burned him, Yet he did not take *it* to heart.

God describes Judah as a man surrounded by the flames of conquest, maybe even on fire, but who didn’t know he was.

Picture a person on fire. You run to his aid, with an appropriate extinguisher. He stops you, saying he doesn’t want the chemicals to ruin his new shirt.

Would you comply? *Hope not!*

God will go to the greatest lengths to save His beloved Jews. If invasion and decades of captivity seem severe, it wasn’t.

May 14, 1948. The headline should have been, *They're Back!* It was the day Israel was recognized as a nation in her homeland.

The Balfour Declaration was a public statement issued by the British government in 1917 during the First World War announcing its support for the establishment of a "national home for the Jewish people."

The document was scheduled to expire. The question over what to do with the tumultuous country was turned over to the United Nations. They would eventually decide to create the 'new' country of Israel, specifically as a promised homeland for Jewish people.

The Bible-backstory is this. Jesus came in fulfillment of a slew of prophecies. He and His cousin, John the Baptist, announced it was time to establish the Kingdom of God. When Jesus came, **God's Kingdom had come.**

The Jewish leaders refused to recognize Jesus as the Anointed One from the pages of their Scriptures. Their rejection led to His crucifixion on a Roman cross.

For some decades afterward, the offer of the Kingdom was still on the table. The Jews continued to reject it. It prompted the apostle Paul to officially announce, "The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your ancestors when He said through Isaiah the prophet: " 'Go to this people and say, "You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving." For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.' "Therefore I want you to know that God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!" (Acts 28:25-28).

Paul additionally said, "I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, and in this way all Israel will be saved. As it is written: "The deliverer will come from Zion; He will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins" (Romans 11:25-27).

Circa 70AD the Romans were victorious in their siege against Jerusalem. It dispersed Jews all over the earth. They were despised and rejected wherever they went, and persecuted. The worst of it was Hitler's "Final Solution," the mass murder of the Jews we must never forget which we call The Holocaust.

The Old Testament book of Ezekiel details the return of the Jews. "Surely I will take the children of Israel from among the nations, wherever they have gone, and will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land" (37:21).

History bears witness of the mass return of Jews to Israel in the years following 1948. It is a miraculous fulfilled prophecy.

The Bible also predicts the rise of anti-Semitism as well as the great instability of the city of Jerusalem. "Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of drunkenness to all the surrounding peoples, when they lay siege against Judah and Jerusalem. And it shall happen in that day that I will make Jerusalem a very heavy stone for all peoples; all who would heave it away will surely be cut in pieces, though all nations of the earth are gathered against it" (Zechariah 12:2-3).

What is it going to take for Jews to recognize their Messiah? A seven-year time of trouble we most commonly call the Great Tribulation. We like to call it the name Jeremiah gave it - "The Time of Jacob's Trouble." It is the time God has set in order to win back His beloved nation.

It will work; all Israel will be saved.

God goes to the greatest lengths on account of His great love:

- If you are not a believer you are blind and deaf being held captive by the devil in a dark cell. When the Word of God is read & heard, God the Holy Spirit can open your blind eyes & deaf ears. He invites you to see the Lord, Jesus Christ, on the Cross and then raised from the dead in resurrection. As the song says, "I have decided to follow Jesus."
- We believers find a lot to apply. Remember that we are not Israel. These verses are about & for them. But to the extent they reveal God as the same yesterday, today & forever we carefully apply them to our walking with Jesus.

Salvation is inconceivable apart from Jesus.