

SEPTEMBER 25

We have a special day today. We will meet some passages regarding our Lord and His working to reach the world. In Ephesians we are entering the practical half of the letter, and again, some famous verses. You may not feel it, but the Lord is using all of this to strengthen and renew your heart as you follow Christ in the harvest.

Isaiah 45:11-48:11

By now you are noticing again and again how often God repeats that He is the Creator, and the One who declares things from long ago. This is set in contrast to idols and those who make them and depend on them. Over and over again God declares Himself to be the only Savior for mankind and the gracious forgiving God of Israel.

Vs. 11-13 This seems to be talking about Cyrus as a representative of the Persian Empire. As a result of Daniel, God moved Cyrus to send the people back to rebuild the temple; but the city wasn't rebuilt until Artaxerxes sent Nehemiah years later. The focus here isn't Cyrus or Persia; it is the Holy One of Israel who stretched out the heavens and moved nations. It mentions that God stirred him up in righteousness. If you look at how God worked with Pharaoh and with Nebuchadnezzar, you see that the only difference was how the two men responded to God. Everything that God did to Nebuchadnezzar became a lesson to the young Persian prince, Cyrus.

V. 14 What a long verse. The blessing here seems to be people coming to Israel to seek God.

Vs. 15-19 It is interesting that it says God hides Himself, yet He is a savior. In v. 19 He says that He didn't speak in secret. The point is that God needs to be sought in a spirit of truth and sincerity. God remains dark to those who really don't want Him. There is so much in these verses.

Vs. 20-25 This looks like a call to the entire earth to come to God for salvation. These are incredible verses. Notice how God mentions again that He has been saying all of this from the beginning. Since the earliest parts of the Bible were written down by Moses, it is safe to say that mankind has had a written record of God's words for most of recorded history. That would mean we are without excuse. The words are there to be read and believed.

V. 23 This is a rather famous verse in the NT. *Every knee shall bow* and every tongue shall confess, regardless of race, language or religion. Because there is only one God, there is no religion other than knowing God through Jesus Christ. These verses in Isaiah are good evidence, if anyone should need it, that there is one God and there is only one way to come to Him.

Isaiah 46

Vs. 1-2 This is judgment on Babylon for their idolatry. Notice the irony of having to have their livestock haul their idols. Their idolatry made Israel sick of its own. Just for trivia, these two names of their gods will come up again. *Bel* we'll see in the renaming of Daniel to *Beltshazzar*. *Nebo* we have already seen in *Nebuchadnezzar*.

Vs. 3-7 God calls Israel to listen to Him regarding the madness of making idols. Notice how tender vs. 3-4 are. God has borne them and promises to keep bearing them.

Vs. 8-11 God tells them to remember the words of prophecy He spoke and how He determined events. Ironically, the people who went into exile would have been reading these very words, over a hundred years later, as the events were happening to them; and they still didn't believe.

Vs. 12-13 God tells them to *listen*, for as surely as all this other stuff has happened, God will put salvation in Zion. This blessing is for the Millennium.

Isaiah 47

Vs. 1-7 Now God pronounces judgment on Babylon for its pride and comfort. Nebuchadnezzar was humbled by God, but the other Babylonian kings had no regard for God.

V. 4 Even though the people were in exile, they still had a strong redeemer who was working for them.

V. 7 You could make a case that Nebuchadnezzar "laid to heart" the position he was in as God's sword to punish Judah and Jerusalem. The kings who followed Nebuchadnezzar did not have this respect for God or Israel. In fact, look at what happens in Daniel 5. The entire judgment on Belshazzar was that he should have known better and should have "laid to heart" what God had done to Nebuchadnezzar.

Vs. 8-11 Notice the alternating between vs. 8 and 10, and 9 and 11. Verses 8 and 10 talk about how indestructible the people felt. Verses 9 and 11 talk about their dependence on sorcery and enchantment.

V. 9 It happened to the city on one day, in a few hours one night. This is Daniel 5.

Vs. 12-15 Being seated in the city of Nimrod, the Babylonians thought they were strong because of spiritual power. In Daniel 2 when Nebuchadnezzar couldn't get the wise men, magicians and enchanters to figure out his dream, he was shaken. He depended on their power. The same would be true of Belshazzar on the night the Babylonian Empire fell. The wise men couldn't help so he had to call Daniel.

Isaiah 48:1-11

Vs. 1-2 God is rebuking Israel for calling themselves by God's name, but not being faithful to follow Him and live for His glory.

Vs. 3-8 Again, God uses prophecy to defeat their idols and their pride.

Vs. 9-11 Yet for His glory and for His name's sake, God will save Israel and obtain glory through them.

It is interesting that in Daniel's prayer in Daniel 9, he pleads with God at the end to answer the prayer for His own name's sake; because the people are called by His name. I wonder if Daniel read this portion of Isaiah.

This morning I read where Jesus said in John 7:18, *The one who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory; but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and in him there is no falsehood.* Jesus was speaking about Himself, living to give glory to His Father. Jesus said that He has given His glory to His followers so that we may be one with our Lord and the Father. Clearly, we are to walk and work in the harvest, reflecting His glory as we reach out and make disciples, who make disciples.

Ephesians 4:1-16

This chapter has the blueprint of church ministry in the harvest.

Vs. 1-3 This is what Paul wanted to say at the beginning of chapter 3. The church can't bring the message of redemption if they can't work together. Living worthy of our calling is the same as living to bring glory to Christ for what He has done for us.

Vs. 4-6 The unity of the church is found in all of these factors.

Vs. 7-10 Once again, the issue of gifts rises. God gives the gifts. We don't choose them. Paul seems to be mentioning gifts, because they caused some disunity here as they did in Corinth. Notice how Paul ties the giving of the gifts to the victory of Christ and our redemption. My observation is that if each person isn't deeply in love with Christ for their salvation, and if the church is not primarily focused on being in their local harvest, either the gifts become irrelevant

in that church, or they become a point of fighting and envy. The church unites in the love of Christ to work in the harvest, and then the tools make sense.

V. 8 Look at Psalm 68:18 from yesterday's reading. Pretty cool, huh?

Vs. 11-16 The gifts of these leaders are to be used to equip the church, making it ready for use, like mending a fishing net, so it can catch stuff.

Mentioned is the equipping *for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ*. In a couple of verses this building will be described as *makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love*. This is both bringing in from the harvest and making disciples, who make disciples. In this entire process the leaders are bringing the group to maturity in Christ. This also has a protective function in the church and in preserving the truth for the next generation. In this maturity and unity in Christ, the church works as a team, each part doing its job without rivalry or envy, working toward the harvest. This is taking the love of Christ to their area, bearing fruit that brings bodily growth and strengthening themselves in the love of Christ.

Notice too that bringing the church to maturity is unity in the faith and knowledge of Jesus. Unified in Jesus we imitate Jesus and follow Him in the harvest. The winds of doctrine and lies keep us from growing in Him, keep us from unity, and make us unable to bear fruit in the harvest. Churches that do not bear fruit, regardless of their reasons, have usually gotten off on some point of doctrine or practice that has neutralized them.

Psalm 68:19-35

I know it says that this was written by David, but it sure has a "post exile" ring to it. During the time of the Judges to David, Israel fell prey to its enemies. It was not a respected nation and people were captured and taken as slaves. That might be a possible explanation for v. 22.

Vs. 19-23 As David was beginning to rescue the nation as their new king, he could assure them of God's help and salvation, because he, himself, had been experiencing that salvation and help every day for the past 10 years.

Vs. 24-27 In David leading the people, he led them to the Lord and led them in worship. Significant here is the mention of Benjamin. This was important because Saul had been from the tribe of Benjamin. When the nation split, Judah and Benjamin remained together as one nation. Also, Zebulun and Naphtali would have been the northernmost tribes. For me it is interesting because this area is where the "Son of David," Jesus, was raised. When he began His ministry, these tribes saw a great light.

Vs. 28-31 It seems that David was looking forward to the day when there would be a *temple at Jerusalem*, where all the nations would come to honor God. In Psalm 27, David refers to the tabernacle as the pavilion, sanctuary and temple.

Vs. 32-35 David, as usual, is giving testimony to the nations and praising God. During David's years people came to Jerusalem to seek God because of the grace poured on David and the people. In the future there will be another call to the nations of the earth to sing praises to God. That will happen someday, and in the meantime, we're working in the harvest until we hear the dinner bell.

Proverbs 24:3-4

It is amazing how many people begin marriage and a life together without having a goal or a plan. God is better than a plan. He is someone who guides us daily in His Word and gives our lives a goal and a purpose bigger than marriage that draws two people together.