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A Biblical Theological Analysis

of

Isaiah 11:1-10

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Introduction

Fear, unrest, and hopelessness were just some of the emotions that marked those living in Judah during the time that Isaiah was writing. Following the realization of the reality that Judah is to be destroyed, Isaiah was motivated to give prophetic words of encouragement to the people. He wrote to shed light on the great plan God had for His people and the ultimate righteousness, hope, and peace that He promises His people. For many today the emotions of fear, restlessness, and desolation are everyday occurrences as people wrestle with hopelessness amidst a world that seems to be falling apart. At first glance Isaiah may not be the initial place in the Bible that Christians look to for comfort amidst hardship, however, upon further investigation it is clear to see the promises given by the Lord in Isaiah 11:1-10. This paper will take a deep dive into the first ten verses of the eleventh chapter of Isaiah, examining the words of Isaiah for the people in Judah. Then, it will move into how Isaiah connects to the overarching themes present in the Bible that bring us back to the heart of God, these themes include seeing the Messianic promise, Kingdom of Christ, and reconciliation in God.

Context

Isaiah 11:1-10 was written during the time of King Ahaz, who reigned over Judah from roughly 735-715 B.C (Goldingay, *The Theology of the Book of Isaiah*, 107). During this period Judah, the southern kingdom, was feeling immense pressure from the surrounding nations. Specifically, King Ahaz had to decide whether or not to side with Assyria, or Israel and Aram. Ultimately, King Ahaz adopted a pro-Assyrian policy. Assyria, especially under leaders Shalmaneser V, Sargon II, and Sennacherib, were all too powerful to form alliances with as they besieged Samaria and much of the surrounding territory. The king following Ahaz, Hezekiah, did not join a coalition against the Philistines and shortly felt the power and wrath of the Assyrian empire under Sennacherib (Baker, *Isaiah*, 4-5). This is important to note as it reveals the state of

the nation to which Isaiah was writing. The Israelites were in shambles and unstable as foreign nations continued to apply pressure to their already weak kingdom. There was a strong presence of fear and doubt as Judah's power was beginning to slip away. Understanding that fear and unrest were two of the governing emotions of the Israelites receiving the word of Isaiah is crucial as it enables us to see this verse as bringing hope to the nation as it reveals the greater covenant and plan that God must usher in His Kingdom.

Exposition of Isaiah 11:1-10

Context of Isaiah Eleven

Chapter eleven of the book of Isaiah is predicated with chapters concerning both the downfall of Judah and notions of a promise of deliverance from the Lord. Specifically, chapter ten highlights both, as verses 20-34 gives promise to Assyria's eventual destruction. However, the prophet previously had noted that Judah was to also be reduced in this time as well. The difference then is that Judah had hope that the remnant was a sign of hope as it was one that would return (Bruce, *Zondervan Bible Commentary*, 741). Then, at the end of chapter ten, Isaiah gives a prophetic word depicting an enemy that will come up against Judah. In this time, Isaiah paints a picture of the Lord Almighty cutting down the tall trees, "the tall ones will be brought low" (v.33). Many commentators acknowledge these last two verses as a threat against Judah, however some note that it is the Assyrian army that is being depicted advancing upon Judah like a mighty forest. It is then the Lord Almighty who is to cut down the Assyrians and make way for the restoration of Judah (Barker and Kohlenberger, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 1063). In either context, the metaphor used by Isaiah highlights the coming destruction of the nation of Judah. Specifically, the imagery of a forest lays a foundation for the imagery that will be used in the first verse of chapter eleven.

Verses 11:1-3a

Chapter eleven of Isaiah follows the end of chapter ten as it continues the prophetic imagery of a stump. The Lord, as prophesized in chapter ten, is to bring the downfall of both Judah and Assyria. However, chapter eleven begins to bring hope as it sheds light on the restoration plan of the Lord for His people. The reference to the stump of Jesse comes from 2 Samuel 7, where the Davidic covenant is given as Jesse is the father of David (Barker and Kohlenberger, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 1064). Verse one's reference to the line of David being brought low so that it could rise again though the imagery of "a shoot that will come up from the stump of Jesse" (v.1), refers back to themes of righteousness and peace that are first brought up in Isaiah 9:6 as Isaiah discusses the great light that is to come from the line of David. Chapter eleven takes what is being said in chapter nine and illuminates God's promise to His people further by giving imagery of the branch that bears much fruit (Bruce, *Zondervan Bible Commentary*, 739). It is evident to see the clear connection to the Davidic promise and the coming messianic promise, specifically by using the name Jesse, who was never actually a king rather than David who was, Isaiah is highlighting that there will be total absence of royalty in the house of David when the Messiah eventually comes (Barker and Kohlenberger, *The Expositors Commentary*, 1064).

Isaiah then continues to describe the root of the one that will come up from the line of David by ascribing the attributes of the Spirit that will be given to Him. Verse two of Isaiah repeats the different spirits that will rest on this root: the Spirit of "wisdom and of understanding, counsel and of might, and the knowledge and fear of the Lord". Initially many believed that it was Solomon who was to be the fulfillment of the Davidic covenant, yet he fell short of such divine glory due to his lack of fear of the Lord (Deuteronomy 17:14-20, 1 Kings 11:1-13). In the

same way, verse two contrasts the boastful king of Assyria who delighted in his own power and wisdom (Isaiah 10:8-14), with the coming divine King who was to be equipped with the Spirit of the Lord (v.2). The endowment of the Spirit of the Lord is reflective of the role of God's selection for Israel's kings. As the Akkadian texts reveal, the spirit often given by God to empower kings is what is known as *melammu* or radiance. The same radiance that gods possessed was at times granted to the kings. It is often related to or equated with the Hebrew word *kabod*, which means "glory", specifically for Israel's God (Baker, *Isaiah*, 62). Similarly, the repetition of "The Spirit of the Lord" followed by three pairs of attributes of the Spirit reflects the symbolic number seven. This symbolic seven would then mean that the Messiah was to be perfectly endowed by the Spirit, with everything necessary for His kingly task, as echoed in Revelation 5:6 (Barker and Kohlenberger, *The Expositors' Bible Commentary*, 1065).

Verses 3b-5

Isaiah then shifts to describing the actions of the one coming, and more specifically the way in which He is to judge the Earth. Verse 3b states, "He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes or decide by what he hears with his ears", which highlights the dichotomy between previous understanding of judgment and the divine judgment that is to come. The theme of righteousness is brought up once again as Isaiah ascribes righteousness to the one who is to come. Likewise, the word "judge" used in this passage is synonymous with salvation as it is used considering those who are poor (Barker and Kohlenberger, *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 1064). God's perfect and righteous judgment is reiterated here as Isaiah refers to the Psalms, where God is seen as a righteous judge rather than a corrupt one and prominent in the earthly courts (Psalms 72:2, 82:2-4). Similarly, Isaiah uses the phrase "earth" (v.4) rather than land,

signifying that this righteous judgement will be for Israel as well as the whole world, which is reiterated in verse ten of chapter eleven.

Verse five then describes this righteousness as being his belt. According to Barker and Kohlenberger III, in the Near Eastern dress customs, many viewed the belt as being the piece of clothing that brought stability. It also signified that they were preparing themselves for work (Barker and Kohlenberger, *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 1064). Therefore, it can be concluded that the Messiah who is to come would come in an attitude of righteous judgement, ready for his work of judgement on behalf of the needy for all nations.

Verses 6-9

This section of chapter eleven highlights and connects readers with the second overarching theme of peace after highlighting righteousness in the previous verses. Isaiah describes the peace that is to be restored between man and creation. He begins in verse six by stating that in this reconciliation process it is a child that is leading them. This juxtaposes who is normally in control as the Israelites and many Near Eastern peoples would think of their gods and kings holding the power and leading. The character of a child who is leading them contrasts the narrative that has been given for years, as seen in many Ancient Near Eastern artifacts, such as Pharaoh's stele, which depicts the god Amun-Re speaking to Thutmose III saying, "I have placed you on the Horus-throne for millions of years, that you may lead the living forever" (Baker, *Isaiah*, 63-64). The position of a child in power would shake the cultural norm and reiterate once again that the promise of one coming from the stump of Jesse is not through a royal and powerful reign but could potentially be through the least of these.

The emphasis on the restoration of created beings points readers to the creation narrative and the fall of creation. No longer is Adam to be viewed as the king of the world, but rather this

new Messianic ruler who is to usher in true peace and harmony between all created things. There is a reconciliation that is restoring the effects of the fall as unity is restored between animal life, as well as humanity (Genesis 3:17-18). The peace between both the predatory animals and the prey conveys a lack of fear that is to be ushered in by the Messiah. Specifically, verse seven refers to Genesis 1:30 as the adaptation of the ecosystem conveys the restoration of the world; also highlighted in Isaiah 65:25. In verse eight, Isaiah notes how “the infant will play near the cobra’s den”. This verse directly relates to Genesis three which depicts a serpent being the one that tempts Eve and Adam. Therefore, the child being safe near a serpent, and the serpent not feeling a need to attack bring back the restoration narrative and highlights the peace and harmony that is to come with the Messiah (Barker and Kohlenberger, *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 1065).

Verse nine then ushers in a more wholistic perspective as Isaiah refers to Mount Sinai. Verse nine states, “They will neither harm nor destroy on my holy mountain”, alluding to Mount Sinai which was known as a holy place (Exodus 20, Deuteronomy 5). The taming of nature will result in Mount Sinai also being in perfect peace and security. This then reminds readers of the promises in Isaiah 4:5-6 and the breadth of the coming reign of the Messiah. The peace and blessing that is to come to Jerusalem will only be a small picture of the greater harmonious relationship that is to be restored across the world.

Verse 10

The final verse in this section begins moving the scope of Isaiah’s prophetic word from Judah to the entire world. Verse nine sets up verse ten as it views creation restoration in light of the entire world. In the same way, the coming King is to establish a kingdom over the entire world. Isaiah describes him as “a banner for the peoples” (v.10). People of all nations are to look

to Him, even Assyria (as seen later in verse 16). According to Eiselen, the restoration will attract nations of the whole Earth and the north and south will be united (Eiselen, *Prophecy and the Prophets*, 89). Verse ten begins with the phrase, “In that day” which is an eschatological phrase that connects this messianic promise to the end times. Isaiah connects this event to the exodus from Egypt yet contrasts them as those in Egypt were dispersed and how God will bring back together His people from all nations and restore them to Him.

Promise Fulfillment

Isaiah 11:1-10 begins with a prophetic word given by Isaiah to the people concerning the branch that will come from Jesse. As previously noted, this is a direct reference to the Davidic covenant given in 2 Samuel 7. At this point disaster has already been prophesied over the nation of Judah, however as verses 2-3 highlight, there will be one that comes from the line of David who will have the Spirit of the Lord resting upon Him. Specifically, verse two speaks on the Spirit of the Lord which empowered David himself, as seen in 1 Samuel 16:13 (Bruce, *Zondervan Bible Commentary*, 741). This prophetic word given to Isaiah foretells the life still to come from the house of David, life that has not been set aside (Ezekiel 21:27). Similarly, verses 2-5 include the repetition of words and phrases such as, “fear of the Lord”, “righteousness”, and “judge” that prelude the justice that is to be ushered in with the Messiah. No longer will it be the responsibility of the people to maintain justice or judge what is around them, rather it will be the Messiah that comes with the utmost fear of the Lord that will bring perfect justice and righteousness. In the midst of injustices against the Israelites who were considered “needy” and “poor of the earth”, Isaiah is reminding them of God’s promise to His people through the Davidic covenant that there will be one who comes in righteousness to bring true justice. This, in light of the total depravity and lack of hope in the face of their oppressors, gives hope for the restoration

that will come. Similarly, verse four states, “he will slay the wicked” giving hope to a nation that is being oppressed and has seen such destruction, once again redirecting the hope of the Israelites back to the promise made in the Davidic covenant that there will be one who comes to rule over the earth. This is then fulfilled through the life of Jesus.

The use of the word “stump of Jesse” (v.1) is intentional as it reduces the Davidic dynasty to a mere stump mirroring the condition in which Christ will be born into. While still in existence, the Davidic dynasty was not in power for nearly six hundred years, and, as previously states, the reference to Jesse rather than David highlights that when the Messiah comes, as seen through Jesus, there will be an absence of royal dignity in the House of David (Barker and Kohlenberger, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 1064). This is then fulfilled in the ministry of Jesus as seen that in Matthew 1:18-36, Jesus was born to mere man, in fact a carpenter, not to a king (NKJV). Luke 1:31-33 goes on to further clarify that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Davidic covenant as He came to rule eternally. Similarly, Jesus, as the messianic promise, is seen in connection to Isaiah 11:1-10 as He brings justice with Him. Matthew 5 and the Beatitudes highlight that justice and love that is given and expressed to the meek, and the way that Jesus ushers in the fulfillment of the promise that the needy will prosper, and the wicked will be served justice (Isaiah 11:4). Ultimately, Isaiah 11:1-10 highlights themes of the Messianic promise and fulfillment of the Davidic covenant through Jesus. It begins to mirror the ultimate hope in covenant with God that is restored through the life of Jesus.

Kingdom of God

One overarching theological theme that is highlighted in Isaiah is the coming of the Kingdom of God. Most obviously, the Davidic covenant that is connotated through the mention of Jesse would have been considered a royal covenant. It was primarily translated as the promise

by God to bring a king that would help ensure Jerusalem's rule over all. However, as verses 1-3 highlight, this coming kingdom would be one ruled by the supreme king. Jesus then was the fulfillment of this covenant as He was the king, perfectly endowed by the Spirit (Barker and Kohlenberger, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 1064). So then, if Jesus was king, it was His kingdom that Isaiah was referencing throughout verses 1-10 of the eleventh chapter. Jesus not only fulfilled the Davidic covenant but similarly came with the same attributes of the Spirit of the Lord and administered the same righteous judgement highlighted in verses 3-5. As noted in Matthew 25:40, Jesus gives a parable concerning the importance of treating the least of these, or the poor with respect, revealing his righteous judgment. The New Testament has a plethora of stories given by Jesus that similarly judge the earth and give graciously to the needy.

In the same light, the kingdom of God is expanded both in Isaiah and in the life of Christ as Isaiah's prophetic words pointed to the ushering in of the kingdom of God in the counter-cultural lifestyle of Jesus. In Matthew 19:14, Jesus states, "Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to Me; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these". Jesus' empowering of the children correlates to Isaiah 11:6 where Isaiah states that it will be the child that is leading during the coming era of peace. While not a direct correlation, it is evident that Isaiah was acknowledging the counter-cultural kingdom of God that was to prophesized to come with the Messiah. A picture of a just kingdom, in which the least of these are considered the leaders and given authority. This is then fulfilled in the heart of Jesus, as he cares deeply for the children.

The final verse of this section in Isaiah eleven precludes to the ultimate blessings for all people through the Messianic promise. As previously noted, verse ten highlights the restoration that is to come for all people. Isaiah highlights that the knowledge of the Lord is to be known by

all as He calls the nations back to Himself. This promise and global perspective is both fulfilled and expanded in the life of Jesus. Isaiah 11:10 gives imagery of the messianic figure being a banner for all peoples, a place in which peoples from all nations can come to and rest upon. This heart for all nations is seen in the ministry of Jesus. First, the great commission in Matthew 28:19 includes discipling and baptizing all nations, expanding access to the Father from the nation of Israel to the ends of the Earth and administering the true reign of the kingdom of God that is meant for all peoples. Jesus' ministry itself highlighted the broader scope of the kingdom of the Messiah written in Isaiah 10 as Jesus healed and spoke to Gentiles from a myriad of cultural backgrounds such as the Samaritan woman (John 4:5-42), the Roman centurion (Matthew 8:8), and the healing of a Gadarene (Matthew 8:28-34). The kingdom of God is demonstrated through the expansion of the promise of peace to all nations, which is then further expanded and accomplished through the life and death of Jesus.

Reconciliation and the Faithfulness of God

Isaiah eleven, beginning in verse six through nine speaks to a restoration of creation. As previously noted, Isaiah describes a world in which there is no strife between predator and prey, one with no fear and perfect peace and harmony. However, it is clear to see that this is not an accurate description of the world today. This then conveys that there is still a "not yet" in the prophetic words of Isaiah. Throughout Jesus' time on Earth he was in the business of healing and bringing restoration to the physical world, as seen in Matthew 8:14-17 (Goldingay, *The Theology of the Book of Isaiah*, 32-33). However, Jesus discusses that there will be an all-encompassing healing that is still to come. Healing is one way in which Jesus's restorative nature was demonstrated in His earthly ministry. Therefore, when Jesus empowered His disciples through access to the Spirit, they were able to see a glimpse of creation restored (Luke 10:9). This

similarly highlights the access to the kingdom of God previously discussed as the kingdom of God came with Jesus but will be brought back in fullness when He returns (Acts 3:21). Isaiah eleven highlights the aspect of the reconciliation that is promised through the Messiah in the restoration of relationships between animals and humankind (Bruce, *Zondervan Bible Commentary*, 741). In the same light, Jesus' ministry brought about physical healing and illustrated His care for the natural world. Isaiah was the beginning of the unfolding narrative of restoration and reconciliation throughout the Bible. Jesus then continued this narrative by illustrating His care for the restoration of the physical world. However, the ultimate restoration of creation will not be fulfilled until the return of Christ, as written in Revelation 21:1-5.

Relevance for Christian Living

The words of the prophet Isaiah, in the first ten verses of chapter eleven, can often be difficult to link to the modern world. These words were initially given to a nation threatened by a neighboring nation who were more powerful and more violent than them. These were words given to a nation who was in a downward spiral as they had failed to see the goodness of God amidst their earthly struggles. Upon initial evaluation these words from Isaiah may seem to be no more than a future messianic promise that Christians can see and evaluate to be the life of Christ. However, upon further investigation it is evident that these words should encourage believers and spur on a spirit of hope. The initial prophetic word given by Isaiah, that there would be a branch from the root of Jesse was fulfilled through the life of Jesus (v.1). He came to fulfill the Davidic covenant and in his ministry it is evident to see the righteous judgment and peace that was administered, as prophesized by Isaiah. Jesus was the fulfillment of Isaiah's words but there is still reconciliation to come. As noted, ultimate reconciliation in creation and in humankind has not yet been reached. Therefore, Christians can be encouraged by this passage that although there

is still animosity in this world, there will be an ultimate restoration for all nations (v.10) that will be fulfilled when Christ comes again.

Isaiah 11:1-10 similarly has several practical applications for Christians today. In hope, Christians must be active in continuing to invite the kingdom of God into this world. As seen through the ministry of Jesus, His followers have access to the same Spirit that was given to Him. The Spirit of “wisdom and of understanding, counsel and might, and the knowledge and fear of the Lord” (v. 2). With this Spirit, believers must be proactive in their faith, looking at the example Jesus set and the way in which He fulfilled the words of Isaiah and work to replicate them. In the same way Jesus comes in righteousness (v. 5), Christians are called to live lives that are righteous and honoring to others (Matthew 6:33). We also must live in accordance with the righteousness predicated in Isaiah as it is written in Revelation 22:11-12 that the righteous will be made holy. In the same way, Christians must actively look to bring the kingdom of God to Earth in their restoration of peace. In the same way Isaiah prophesies an era of peace in verse 6-9, Christians must proactively look to administer peace on Earth. The fruits that Jesus bore (v. 1) are the same we must bear, including the fruit of peace (Galatians 5:22). John 14:27 further highlights this promise of peace for believers, reflecting the peace in creation noted by Isaiah. Believers must be bold in claiming authority in peace and reflecting the character of Jesus as He fulfilled what was written in Isaiah. In doing so, believers are stepping closer to the heart of God as He promised all peoples this restorative peace first in Isaiah, then expanded the promise in Jesus, and continues to fulfill it in the life of believers today.

Conclusion

Believers can look towards the promise given in Isaiah to receive hope and a reassurance of peace amidst the harsh realities of life and be motivated to continue in the work of Jesus to

usher in the era of peace Isaiah promises in the here and now. The promise Isaiah gave to Judah was first fulfilled in Christ, and expanded as He actively brought the kingdom of God. Yet, there is still restoration to come. Therefore, it is imperative that believers look to the prophetic words of Isaiah not only for personal encouragement but strive to reflect the ministry and life of Jesus as he fulfilled the prophetic words.

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