The Redemption Of Zion

**Isaiah 1:27** 27 Zion will be redeemed with justice And her repentant ones with righteousness.

As God moves to redeem His people, three transitions occurs both positive and negative. From removing the spiritual harlotry of the people, judging and purifying His people, and pouring out His indignation on the sin of His enemies. God’s redemption will be accomplished through judgment and grace. In many ways Chapter one repeats itself at least thematically. Here again we are told of the covenant treachery of the people (1.2/1.21ff.), the corruption of the people (1.10/1.25), and the certainty of judgment for the impenitent (1.20b/1.28ff.). But what is also expanded is the theme of redemption (1.25-27). God promises to be motivated by His grace and not justice alone. This is the only way that God will redeem His people. This has always been the way that God has redeemed a people leading all the way back to the Garden. When God could have easily left mankind in their sin and misery, He spoke grace to us in the promise of the Redeemer-Seed of the woman. And from then on God has mercifully saved for himself a remnant in every generation (cf. Rom. 9.27-29). Noah was saved when the whole world, the world that then was perished in sin and darkness. God saved a people out of Egypt through the waters of judgment in the Red Sea. God saved 7000 who did not bow the knee to Baal when even the prophet believed all hope was lost. God in the business of accomplishing salvation through judgment. This passage is no different and our lives at the end of the age are no different either. But the question remains, who does God save? Isaiah’s answer is straight forward, God saves, “Zion.” But His answers begs yet another question, who is “Zion?” To understand this, we need to see that Zion presents a multipronged answer. Not only because of the idea of Zion referring at that time to a place and also to a people, but also because Zion in relationship to people, also refers to people in different ways.

*Zion: The Historical Level*

At the historical level, Zion refers to Jerusalem and to the people of Jerusalem (v.26). From a redemptive historical perspective Zion becomes code for the New Jerusalem (Heb. 12.22ff.) and its inhabitants, the citizens of heaven (Phil. 3.20). At the historical level, the earthly Zion, Jerusalem, occupied the place of eschatological typology in the bible. Jerusalem on earth was but a mere shadow of the Jerusalem above which is the mother of the liberated sons of God (Gal. 4.26). in keeping with the feminine description of Zion, not only is Zion to be identified as a mother (1.8) but also a bride, the Bride of the Lord (cf. 54.5-6; 61.10; Ezek. 16.32; Hos. 1.2). This bridal imagery is also assumed by the authors of the NT knowing that the remnant, those who are in Christ, those belonging to the heavenly Jerusalem are the true elect bride of the Lord (cf. Eph. 5.22ff; Rev. 19.7; 22.9; 22.17).

At the historical level, Zion would experience a temporal redemption from temporal captivity that will be devastating and awesome:

**Isaiah 10:20–25** 20 Now in that day the remnant of Israel, and those of the house of Jacob who have escaped, will never again rely on the one who struck them, but will truly rely on the Lord, the Holy One of Israel. 21 A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God. 22 For though your people, O Israel, may be like the sand of the sea, Only a remnant within them will return; A destruction is determined, overflowing with righteousness. 23 For a complete destruction, one that is decreed, the Lord God of hosts will execute in the midst of the whole land. 24 Therefore thus says the Lord God of hosts, “O My people who dwell in Zion, do not fear the Assyrian who strikes you with the rod and lifts up his staff against you, the way Egypt did. 25 “For in a very little while My indignation against you will be spent and My anger will be directed to their destruction.”

But as awesome and terrible as God’s acts of temporal redemption at the historical, ethnic and ‘geo-physical’ level was, it was but a small indication of a greater redemption still. Returning from exile was not the deepest redemptive conception of the prophet’s oracle here. We only get to the deeper conception at the *messianic* level who comes “to remove ungodliness from Jacob” (Is. 59.20; Rom. 11.26). Then Zion’s redemption will truly and fully come into view for what it is and how it will be accomplished in the salvation of a new humanity of both Jews and Gentiles (Eph. 2.14-19).

*Zion: The Messianic Level*

What is prefigured here at the historical level, is the confrontation, sanctification and victory provided for us at the messianic level in Christ.

*Christ Confronts Our Sins*

If Zion is to be redeemed, God must confront their sin. Zion, who was at various points and time (e.g. under David, Solomon, and Jehoshaphat) possessed a general righteousness and justice so that it was “faithful” was now “a harlot” of pagan worship and covenant treason. If Zion is to be redeemed, it must first acknowledge its sin and misery before God. What the people first failed to see was that this confrontation is actually part of God’s grace. How gracious of God to confront our sin so that we might be healed. Like the woman at the well, it is not until she admits her repeated adulteries that she will find the water of life (cf. John 4). Because of sin, the “silver”, the “wine” and the “rulers” have been corrupted. What was valuable has become worthless, the quality of life has been cheapened and the guardians of the city have become extortioners and the lowly have been oppressed.

The corruption of Zion is the background of the ethics of the kingdom. Instead of oppressing the lowly, Paul instructs us to associate with the lowly (Rom. 12.16) and the truth that the meek shall inherit the earth (Mt. 5.5). In other words, the corruption of Judah shows us the need for the gospel. Nothing but a true heart change can affect the condition of the people now. Only by replacing a heart of stone with a heart of flesh will those who steal, steal no longer. This is how Christ confronts our sin; He confronts us in order to change us and redeem us. When Paul teaches us about the nature of union with Christ, he relies on the prophets in order to show the true messianic fulfillment of Zion’s redemption:

**Ephesians 4:25–28** 25 Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. 26 Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, 27 and do not give the devil an opportunity. 28 He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need.

When Paul wants to teach about what life looks like in union with Christ and as it pertains to the sanctification and holiness of the believer, he depends on Zachariah’s teaching on a redeemed Zion (Zech. 8.16), which is the same in Isaiah. In doing so therefore, we learn that Zion’s redemption had its historical fulfillment in the survivors, the physical, ethnic remnant of Israelites but also, at the messianic level, the deeper redemptive level, the virtues that are set forth for the nation are merely typological of life in the Spirit under the new covenant.

*Christ Sanctifies Our Souls*

In confronting our sin, Christ not only seeks to sanctify us definitively, positionally, at repentance at conversion through regeneration, but the work of the Spirit continues on to our ongoing progressive sanctification in Christ (Gal. 5.16ff; Phil. 2.12-13; Col. 3.1-12; 2 Pet. 1.4-11). He aims to make us holy as we are changed from one degree of glory to the next by the Spirit of God:

**2 Corinthians 3:18** 18 But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.

This heart change is then effected by the work of the Spirit of holiness who changes our disposition to love God’s law. Precisely what Judah would no longer do the Spirit of God alone can make us love righteousness and hate evil (1.16-17). This process is compared to a refinery will all impurities are smelted away:

**Isaiah 1:25** 25 “I will also turn My hand against you, And will smelt away your dross as with lye And will remove all your alloy.

This purification process is picked by the authors of the NT and applied directly to our sanctification in the Christian life.

**1 Peter 1:6–7** 6 In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, 7 so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

As with Judah and Jerusalem, God aims to remove our impurities, sins, and vices until we are ultimately unalloyed by our old man; a work which will only truly be complete at the brightness of His coming. Then we shall be as He is (cf. John 15.2; 1 John 3.1-3). Still, during the time envisioned by the prophet, Zion would experience a profound restoration:

**Isaiah 1:26** 26 “Then I will restore your judges as at the first, And your counselors as at the beginning; After that you will be called the city of righteousness, A faithful city.”

This return to the ‘good old days’ in Judah will take place when the people return from exile and the ruined city rebuilt together with a rebuilt temple under Zerubbabel (Hag. 2.1-23; Zech. 4.1-10). But even as the prophets of that period make clear, that redemption was also merely typological of greater leader, a greater king than David or Zerubbabel; they were a “signet” (i.e. seal, indicating the certainty of a greater reality) of the Lord’s true Anointed and the redemption which He would bring to His covenant people (cf. Hag. 2.23). Therefore, this restoration, renewal and redemption will have a near and far fulfillment where only through the redemption of God’s true Israel, the elect remnant of Judah who are chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world will fulfill this prophecy (cf. Amos 9.14; Acts 15.13-18; also, Eph. 1.3-4).

Not only does the theology of Zion imply a multi-level fulfillment of this redemption, but also, a multi-dimensional fulfillment. Our participation in Zion’s redemption ushers us into a certain kind of soteriology (redemption in Christ) and a certain kind of eschatology (consummation in Christ). The first implies the latter. To be in Christ is to be citizen of Zion and a participant in the heavenly, eternal city of God not just a renewed earthly kingdom:

**Hebrews 12:22–24** 22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, 23 to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, 24 and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.

The sanctification that takes place positionally through union with Christ and at regeneration and is then practically and progressively workout in fear in trembling throughout all of life, is also finally consummated in the Spirit who advances us into the age to come where we will be, “the spirits of the righteous made perfect” (Heb. 12.23). Such an amazing eschatological triumphal vision of promise of the redemption however must not be seen as the occasion by which God’s people simply assume some sort of automatic privileged status. Here is where ethic Israel will err again. In thinking that because such prophetic promises were given by Isaiah, their future was guaranteed would be a great mistake. With the promise comes the call to true repentance and faith:

**Isaiah 1:16** 16 “Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Remove the evil of your deeds from My sight. Cease to do evil,

**Isaiah 1:19** 19 “If you consent and obey, You will eat the best of the land;

**Isaiah 1:27** 27 Zion will be redeemed with justice And her repentant ones with righteousness.

In the film *Unpopular*, I attempted to stress the importance of repentance because the Church has forgotten that this word is essential to the Gospel. When repentance is not preached biblically and faithfully, the only thing left is moralism and easy-believism. Isaiah’s call to repentance is a reminder that as Israel is to experience the kind of purification and cleansing power promised by God, they must first repent of their iniquities. Anything else of course would be putting the “cart before the horse.” As with the nature of God’s effectual calling in every believer’s life, the call to repent is the *means* of God’s effectual calling. The call to repent produces a heart of repentance through a new birth, a new creation, or what we call regeneration. Isaiah would say with Peter, only the enduring word, the word of the gospel which includes repentance, can produce in you the purity you so desperately need:

**1 Peter 1:22–23** 22 Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, 23 for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God.

*Christ Triumphs Over Our Enemies*

If repentance for the people of God is the first condition to the realization of Zion’s redemption, the removal of our enemies is the second. Judah, because of its sin has infuriated God resulting in a great purging of His “adversaries” (צַר) (1.24). In the judgment of the nation, the people will cringe when confronted with their sin, the “gardens” (גַּנָּה) they have chosen will only end in shame (1.29). When Babylon destroyed Jerusalem, the architecture, the technology, the homes, the outposts of Judah would be toppled and all the work of their hands, the hands of the “strong” would burn with unquenchable fire (1.31). The arboreal imagery that the prophet uses here is connected to the idolatrous worship of the people because the pagan temples they had erected were often in paradisiacal settings in the midst of trees, rivers, and gardens, like Eden! But of course, this was only further magnifying the total perversion of their spirituality that would leave them empty and dissatisfied in the end, “For you will be like an oak whose leaf fades away Or as a garden that has no water” (1.30). Their land would become a waterless wasteland devoid of true life and sustenance, the very opposite of God’s paradise! (Note the theme of de-creation here).

As God moves to sanctify His people He will purge them of His enemies. The victory over the Assyrians and later Babylonians was but a shadow of God’s final judgment where God will be relieved of all of His enemies at the end of the age in order to secure the people of God forever (cf. 1 Cor. 1.25). Here is the triumph of Christ. Through judgment, Jesus will secure His people, through tribulation God will bring all the penitent ones, those who have trusted in the gospel safely home. This is what it ultimately meant when Isaiah says, “Zion will be redeemed with justice” (צִיּ֖וֹן בְּמִשְׁפָּ֣ט תִּפָּדֶ֑ה) (1.27). That justice is not only found in the condemnation of our enemies but also in the justification of His people; bearing in mind that we were all at one point enemies of God (cf. Rom. 5.6-9). God will either satisfy His justice at the expense of the impenitent- the wicked or, God will satisfy His justice at the expense of His Son (cf. 2 Cor. 5.20-21). This is the justice of the gospel, and the righteousness of justification by faith.

And so, Zion will be populated by a true remnant of the redeemed. At the present, God’s redeemed are called to suffer, called to await tribulation, appointed to see persecution and the great apostasy fueled by the Divinely appointed deluding influence upon the wicked (cf. 2 Th. 2.1-12). But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer, why? Because we see cultural and political change, because we see conservatism on the rise? Because we see the fluctuation of persecution in one generation or another? Or because we see momentary political and historical reprieves? No. But because the repentant ones have been redeemed with the imperishable blood of Jesus Christ who is our life and now, not even the evil one can touch them (cf. 1 John 5.18). Only this will give us the necessary pilgrim mindset that we need today:

**1 Peter 1:17–19** 17 If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one’s work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth; 18 knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, 19 but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.

One final observation about redemption here will also emphasize the work of Christ in our lives. To be “redeemed” literally means, to be *bought*. This is why Peter says, we were not “redeemed” with silver or gold etc. Having been bought therefore reminds us that we belong to another. Our lives are no longer our own:

**1 Corinthians 6:19–20** 19 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? 20 For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

This is what Israel was meant to be, a temple people, a kingdom of priests, and devoted for holy use. God redeems Zion in order to set her apart, to beautify her through good works (cf. Rev. 19.8). The ramification of this is that if we do not learn from the apostasy of Israel we too can fall into similar traps. Traps of taking God’s word for granted, taking church for granted, taking ministry for granted, taking fellowship for granted. This only produces a lack of zeal, lack of faithfulness, and lack of true worship. Redemption produces redeemed living. The nature of the redeemed life is summed up by Micah, the contemporary of the prophet Isaiah:

**Micah 6:8** 8 He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the Lord require of you But to do justice, to love kindness, And to walk humbly with your God?