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| The Messiah’s Kingdom |
| **Pastor Steve Schell**Questions1) Here are six passages from Isaiah: Isaiah 1:1-23; 2:2-4; 44:28-45:5; 63:1-6; 66:22, 23. Try to identify which “chapter” of human history each is talking about.2) How does Isaiah’s picture of the future change the way you see yourself? What qualities is God working into your character now that you will need during the Millennium? |
| **Isaiah 60:1-22** |
| Over the years when I read Isaiah and other Old Testament prophets I often found myself wondering, “Which of these promises actually belongs to me?” Most seemed to be speaking directly to the people of Israel, and since I am personally Gentile I usually felt a bit presumptuous claiming those promises for myself. Oh, I know I’ve been adopted into the family by placing my faith in Jesus Christ, but even with that in mind I still can’t quite see where I fit. There are beautiful descriptions of God regathering the Jews to the promised land, and of abundant blessings being poured out especially on the city of Jerusalem. And there are passages where Gentiles gladly help Jews return to their land and are welcomed there and taught God’s ways, but I’m a New Testament Christian and this picture of Gentiles doesn’t seem to apply to me. Am I there during these events, or am I in heaven? As a born-again believer do I have a part to play when the Messiah conquers His enemies and sets up His kingdom on earth?Today we’ll try to see where Isaiah’s prophecies fit into God’s plan for the human race, and as we do we’ll be amazed to discover our place in that picture. The fact is many of his prophecies aren’t talking about us, but God has other promises that do, and when we put the pieces of this puzzle together our place in Isaiah’s prophecies becomes clear. To say the least, we have not been forgotten!The Five Chapters of Human HistoryFrom God’s point of view human history past, present and future can be divided into five distinct chapters or seasons. To understand Isaiah’s prophecies we need to see where we are now and then as we are reading recognize which “chapter” of history is being described.Chapter One: The unbroken fellowship with God which Adam and Eve experienced before they sinned.Chapter Two: This is the period between the Garden of Eden and the resurrection of Christ. Human effort to obey God fails and a family is prepared for the Messiah (Abraham, Judah, David, Mary).Chapter Three: God’s house is filled with many children (Lk 14:21-23). The atonement releases kingdom blessings, there is an overlapping of ages (old and new). This is the period between Jesus’ first coming (Lamb) and His second coming (Lion), including Armageddon.Chapter Four: This is the 1000-year period between the return of Christ and the final judgment. God’s kingdom comes to the earth and resurrected saints will minister and govern the large population of unbelievers that survives the events of the “last days.” Salvation and death will still be taking place.Chapter Five: God will destroy the old universe and create a new one which like our resurrected bodies will be immortal. Sin, sorrow and death will no longer afflict the children of God. They will have unbroken fellowship with Him. The final number of people saved is complete.The revelations given to Isaiah vary. At different times he describes events that take place in four of these “chapters” (2-5).Keys to UnderstandingHere are some important truths we must understand to properly interpret Isaiah:1) IsraelWhen we talk today about the Church we all recognize that there are people who call themselves “Christians” but whom God would not call Christians because they are not born-again. The same is true when Isaiah talks about “Israel.” There are those who are physical descendants of Abraham and there are those who are his spiritual descendants because they have in them the same faith as he. Isaiah often appeals to the physical descendants to repent and become spiritual descendants (Isa 1:2-4; Ro 9:6-8).2) Assyria, Babylon and PersiaGod showed Isaiah the future with stunning clarity. At times he warned both the northern and southern kingdoms to repent because the Assyrian empire would soon devastate them without God’s protection (Isa 1:1-23). Assyria invaded during Isaiah’s lifetime destroying the northern kingdom (Israel) and all but Jerusalem in the southern kingdom (Judah, 721 B.C.). Yet, in other passages Isaiah looked 150 years into the future to describe the Babylonian empire attacking Judah and destroying Jerusalem (586 B.C.). Then he even named the Persian king, “Cyrus,” and said he would conquer Babylon and allow the Jewish exiles to return home (538 B.C.) (chapters 41-48).3) Messianic Kingdom (Millennium)Over and over throughout the entire book Isaiah describes an era of time which is mentioned in the New Testament, but not extensively. This has led many Christians to assume that the final judgment and the new heavens and earth occur immediately after Jesus’ return. But the Book of Revelation clearly states that between Armageddon (Rev 19:11-21) and the final judgment (Rev 20:10-15) there will be a 1000-year period of time (Rev 20:1-9). John doesn’t describe what takes place during those years except to say that resurrected believers will reign with Christ (Rev 20:4, 6). Who they will rule and why is not said but Jesus does (Mt 19:27-30; 25:19-23, 29) and so does Paul (1Co 6:2, 3).Actually, unless this period we often call the “Millennium “ literally takes place an enormous portion of Old Testament prophecy will go unfulfilled. The events Isaiah and other prophets describe can’t be spiritualized away. They picture specific events and buildings (Ezk 40-46) and wars and blessings. So, one key to Isaiah is to recognize when he is describing events that will take place in “chapter four” of human history (see above).4) Resurrected BelieversDuring this 1000-year period:a) Unbelievers who survived the “seals, trumpets and bowls” including the devastation at Armageddon (Rev 6-18) will still be living on the planet when Jesus returns. b) Those who became believers before Christ’s return will be resurrected and return to earth with Him. Those who are alive the moment He returns will be raptured even as they are resurrected and will also return with Him. All these resurrected believers will be immortal, in solid recognizable bodies. We will rule and minister as Christ’s deputies, assigned to specific cities and areas of the earth.c) During these 1000 years the population of mortal humans will continue to expand rapidly because justice and righteousness will be enforced (Isa 65:19-25), and the presence of the Spirit will be strong. Also, the devil will be bound during these years (Rev 20:1-3). Even so, many people will still refuse to surrender to Christ (Rev 20:8) proving that though the devil is a tempter he cannot be blamed for our rebellion against God.d) Jesus will be physically present in Jerusalem. Many Gentiles will travel to meet Him and will believe in Him. Jews who had been dispersed all over the world will return to Israel and many will accept Him as their crucified and resurrected Messiah (Zec 12:10). All who accept Christ during this time will still die a normal death. They will not be resurrected until the second resurrection (Rev 20:4-6; Isa 65:20-23).ConclusionMuch of the Book of Isaiah is not about New Testament believers. The principles we hear him speak are wonderfully applicable to believers in every generation, and his description of the suffering Messiah (Isa 52:13-53:12) is the gospel that brought us salvation. But many of the pictures he saw of the distant future are about Jews and Gentiles who will be living on earth during the Messiah’s kingdom. And Jesus will be the Messiah who’s reigning in Jerusalem, but Isaiah doesn’t mention who will be governing with Him. And in case that leaves you feeling overlooked, just stop and remember you’re in that picture alright. You’re just not where he placed his focus. You’ll be very busy, resurrected and ruling with Jesus for the entire 1000 years. And if that’s not enough, wait till God turns the page to “chapter five.”ApplicationRead Romans 11:1, 5, 11, 12, 17-29Questions1) Here are six passages from Isaiah: Isaiah 1:1-23; 2:2-4; 44:28-45:5; 63:1-6; 66:22, 23. Try to identify which “chapter” of human history each is talking about.2) How does Isaiah’s picture of the future change the way you see yourself? What qualities is God working into your character now that you will need during the Millennium?  |