

S.P.A.C.E. for Advent
Wednesday 2nd December 2020

Advent, a time of coming – coming to exercise judgement

25:⁹ ‘Surely this is our God;

we trusted in him, and he saved us.

This is the LORD, we trusted in him;

let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation.’

¹⁰ The hand of the LORD will rest on this mountain;

but Moab will be trampled in their land

as straw is trampled down in the manure.

¹¹ They will stretch out their hands in it,

as swimmers stretch out their hands to swim.

God will bring down their pride

despite the cleverness of their hands.

¹² He will bring down your high fortified walls

and lay them low;

he will bring them down to the ground,

to the very dust.

26:¹ In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah:

We have a strong city;

God makes salvation

its walls and ramparts.

² Open the gates

that the righteous nation may enter,

the nation that keeps faith.

³ You will keep in perfect peace

those whose minds are steadfast,

because they trust in you.

⁴ Trust in the LORD for ever,

for the LORD, the LORD himself, is the Rock eternal.

⁵ He humbles those who dwell on high,

he lays the lofty city low;

he levels it to the ground

and casts it down to the dust.

⁶ Feet trample it down –

the feet of the oppressed,

the footsteps of the poor.



Tel Megiddo, Israel

Downloaded from History.com

A ruined city is a sad sight - a reminder that even the mightiest works of man are transient. For 5,500 years Megiddo has been the site of many proud cities that have come and gone. It has also seen no fewer than 34 battles, right up to modern times. One of the most famous of these was between Judah and Egypt, and it brought Judah's existence as an independent state to an end. So great was its impact that in its Greek form, Armageddon, it gave its name to absolute, apocalyptic destruction.

In today's passage Isaiah intertwines themes of salvation, peace and joy for the righteous; with judgement, overthrow and humiliation for their proud oppressors. For those who oppose God, Isaiah presents a vision of destruction, akin to the razing of a mighty city. The prophet first directs his attention to Moab, a traditional enemy of Judah and Israel, but here Moab should be seen as a symbol of wickedness rather than in nationalistic terms. Verses 10-12 in chapter 25 are not for the faint-hearted: Isaiah presents us with a chilling picture of how the proud will be brought low. In 26:5 he uses similar imagery:

"he lays the lofty city low; he levels it to the ground and casts it down to the dust."

The idea of judgement does not always sit comfortably with modern sensitivities. Many people today have an ambivalent approach, uncomfortable about being judged yet often ready to pass judgement on others, including those they may know little of personally.

For Christians, Advent is a season when we are forced to face the reality of God's judgement. Unlike the facile judgements of people following a particular social trend, God's judgement is made by one who knows us intimately and cares for us enough to want the best for us.

Isaiah identifies two types of people, those *"who trust in the Lord"* (26:4) and *"those who dwell on high"* (26:5). This distinction forms the basis of God's judgement: are our lives shaped by reliance on God or do we sometimes try to live parts of our life without reference to him?

Those who place themselves above the need for God will receive their comeuppance and it will come from an unlikely quarter. Their "city", the structure they have built for themselves, will be brought down by the weak and seemingly powerless, trampled by

“the feet of the oppressed, the footsteps of the poor.”(26:4)

With God judgement comes with justice: it is not a means of reinforcing the strong and powerful, nor of flattering those who consider themselves righteous but in reality are only self-righteous. It is a judgement that will be welcomed by all who are weak and powerless. As the psalmist writes:

*⁷ Let the sea resound, and everything in it,
the world, and all who live in it.*

*⁸ Let the rivers clap their hands,
let the mountains sing together for joy;*

*⁹ let them sing before the LORD,
for he comes to judge the earth.*

*He will judge the world in righteousness
and the peoples with equity.*

(Psalm 98:7-9)

For prayerful reflection

Have a look at these verses written by David when he recognised he was facing judgement

Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.

² Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.

³ For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is always before me.

⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight;
so you are right in your verdict
and justified when you judge.

⁵ Surely I was sinful at birth,
sinful from the time my mother conceived me.

⁶ Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb;
you taught me wisdom in that secret place.

⁷ Cleanse me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones you have crushed rejoice.

⁹ Hide your face from my sins
and blot out all my iniquity.

¹⁰ Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

¹¹ Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.

¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

The next S.P.A.C.E. reflection will be posted on December 16th