



No answer will come to Israel's problems except by the Holy Spirit

No answer will come to Israel's problems except by the Holy Spirit. Israel is in a terrible plight. Assyrians are threatening them. Egypt is not able to give any help. Actually no human help will ever come to Judah that is long-lasting. Even when Assyria is defeated there will be the Babylonians and the exile to Babylon. When Babylon is defeated there will be the Persians, but Cyrus the Persian will not be Israel's complete Saviour. Then there will be the Greeks, and after that the Romans. In the time of the Lord Jesus Christ the Romans were ruling over Israel. Its problems never would (and never will!) end, until the Holy Spirit is poured out upon them.

False security will be shattered

False security will be shattered. There were women around in Isaiah's time who were very complacent.

*⁹You women who are so complacent,
rise up and listen to me;
you daughters who feel secure,
hear what I have to say!
¹⁰In little more than a year
you who feel secure will tremble;
the grape harvest will fail,
and the ingathering will come to nothing.*

The women's complacency will be shattered when Judah is devastated

It is good to feel secure, but one must have a good foundation to one's security. In the case of the women of Judah it was security in the feeling that an easy life will go on for ever. But in fact their complacency will be shattered when Judah is devastated.

*¹¹Tremble, you complacent women;
shudder, you daughters who feel secure!
Strip and go bare,
put sackcloth around your waists,
¹²grieving for the pleasant fields,
for the fruitful vines,
¹³for the land of my people,
where thorn-briers will spring up.
Yes, grieve for all the joyful houses of merriment
and for this city of revelry.
¹⁴For the palace will be abandoned,
the bustle of the city deserted;
Ophel and the Watchtower will become a wasteland,
the delight of donkeys, a pasture for flocks . . .*

• Devastation will continue until the Holy Spirit is poured out on Israel

Ophel and 'the Watchtower' were places in Jerusalem. The land will go on being devastated until a day when the Holy Spirit will be poured out on Israel. True prosperity is not just a matter of life going on smoothly without mishap. It is not just a matter of grape harvest and revelry.

Restoration comes by the Holy Spirit!

Restoration comes by the Holy Spirit! The chaos in Israel will continue, says Isaiah. The palace will be abandoned . . .

*¹⁵until the Spirit is poured upon us from on high,
and the open country becomes a garden-land,
and the garden-land becomes like a forest.*

Our first question must be: what is this outpouring of the Holy Spirit? It is a word we especially associate with the Day of Pentecost and the level at which the Holy Spirit was received after the ascension of Jesus. Four main points

It is:

(i) Further and higher than the pre-Pentecostal experience of the Spirit

(ii) Experiential

(iii) Associated with power, liberty, joy, prayerfulness and boldness

• Fulfilment will be at the end of history, but we will have foretastes

The Holy Spirit gives:

• Immense fertility

• Great peace

need to be kept in mind. (i) It is something that is further and higher than the experience of the Spirit known before the Day of Pentecost. It is higher than an Old Testament level of receiving the Spirit. It is higher than the pre-Pentecostal experience of the Spirit known by the disciples. It is greater than new birth. (ii) It is strongly experiential. An abundant 'outpouring' of the Spirit is a matter of conscious experience. (iii) In the New Testament (which cannot totally control our interpretation here, but may make a contribution) it is associated with power, giftedness, liberty-of-action, liberty, joy, prayerfulness, boldness.

A second question will be: how precisely do we take such a passage as this to ourselves? I answer: it is partly a matter of the distant future when the very physical universe will be glorified by the Holy Spirit. Yet we must remember that Old Testament prophecy is panoramic and futuristic. It looks to everything that will happen and it takes in the final accomplishment of God's purposes. But along the way we have foretastes of the glory that is to come. Although the fulfilment of Isaiah 32 must arrive finally in the very end of history, yet we may expect fore-tastes along the way. The physical miracles will picture spiritual experience.

When the Holy Spirit is poured out there will be immense fertility. The open country becomes a garden-land; the garden-land becomes like a forest.

¹⁶Justice will dwell in the open country and righteousness live in the garden-land.

There will be great peace. The fertility will follow righteousness. Peace will follow righteousness.

¹⁷The fruit of righteousness will be peace; the effect of righteousness will be restfulness and confidence for ever.

Then Isaiah puts to us a picture of fertility.

*¹⁸My people will live in peaceful dwelling places, in secure homes, in undisturbed places of rest.
¹⁹Though hail flattens the forest and the city is levelled completely,
²⁰how blessed you will be, sowing your seed by every stream, and letting your cattle and donkeys range free.*

• Abundant blessings follow righteousness

• A peaceful dwelling-place in Jesus

• Eventually we shall find ourselves in a glorified world

The picture is one where abundant blessings follow righteousness. When men and women are righteous in the eyes of God, the Spirit may be given to them. The result will be the blessings of the Holy Spirit pictured here as material prosperity. In the Lord Jesus Christ we shall find a peaceful dwelling-place for our conscience. In the knowledge of God's salvation we shall find God's restfulness. Despite what calamities may strike our planet God's blessings follow his people. We shall enjoy knowing that God is pleased with us. We shall have a sense of fulfilment. We will have a good conscience. 'Sowing seed by every stream' puts to us a picture of immense opportunity plus abundance of 'seed' with which to take every opportunity.

Yet there is no need to take the passage exclusively as a spiritual picture. One day it will be quite literal. We have flashes of glory along the way by the Holy Spirit. But eventually we shall find ourselves in a glorified world.

Dr Michael Eaton (1942-2017) was highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. Born in the UK, he lived for many years in Kenya where he became a citizen. He was one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship in Nairobi. His Preaching through the Bible books are highly popular worldwide, written in a clear and down-to-earth style but underpinned by rigorous scholarship. Some of these books have been reformatted as individual sheets for personal and group study and preaching. The New Testament volumes have been re-edited and combined in the Branch Commentary. The Old Testament, including previously unpublished material will follow. More details: www.slices.org.uk.