

A Prophecy Against the Nations Yesha'yahu 34:1-17

In my last post, we wrapped up **A Woe Against Those on Whom the King Will Take Vengeance ~ Part 2** in **Yesha'yahu 33:14-24**. In this post, we explore **A Prophecy Against the Nations** in **Yesha'yahu 34:1-17**.

In **Yesha'yahu 34**, we see a picture of the **Great Tribulation**, specifically the battle of **Har-Megiddo**.

¹ Come close, you nations, and listen! Pay close attention, you peoples! Let the earth hear, and everything in it; the world, with all it produces.

The first thing I noticed in this verse was the pluralization of the **nation**. **Adonai** is not just the **God of Israel**. He is the **Adonai** of the whole world, so He calls on all the **nations** to hear Him when He speaks. That includes all of us.

² For Adonai is angry at every nation, furious with all their armies; He has completely destroyed them, handed them over to slaughter. (emphasis added.) ³ Their slain will be thrown out; the stench will rise from their corpses; the mountains will flow with their blood.

Revelation 14:20 tells us that, at the battle of **Har-Megiddo**, the blood will flow as high as a horse's bridle. **Jeremiah 30** calls this the time of **Ya'akov's trouble**, for, in the **Tribulation**, the nation of **Isra'el** and all the earth will be shaken to its core in preparation for the coming of the King.

⁴ The whole host of heaven will decompose, the heavens themselves be rolled up like a scroll; all their array will wither away like a withering grape-leaf that falls from a vine or a withered fig from a fig tree.

Adonai's warring activity has cosmic implications. The ancient nations thought of the stars as representing their gods. This image in **Yesha'yahu** of the whole panorama of the sky being rolled up like a parchment scroll is unique in the Hebrew Bible. In **Revelation 6:14** we read: *"The sky receded like a scroll being rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved from its place."*

⁵ 'For my sword has drunk its fill in heaven; now it descends on Edom to judge them, the people I have doomed to destruction.'

Since verses 1-4 are concerned with **Adonai's** punishment of the **nations**, it may be that the description of **Edom** as a sacrificial victim is simply an example of what will happen to them all. Indeed **Edom** serves in many cases as Israel's prototype "enemy."

⁶ There is a sword that belongs to Adonai. It is filled with blood, gorged with fat, filled with the blood of lambs and goats, gorged with the fat of the kidneys of rams. For Adonai has a sacrifice in Botzrah, a great slaughter in the land of Edom. ⁷ The wild oxen will fall with them, the young bulls with the strong, mature ones. Their land will be drunk with blood, and their dust made greasy with fat.

Botzrah is the capital of ancient **Edom**, present-day **Saudi Arabia**. **Edom** is the area where **Esau** settled. The language of sacrifice is explicit in these verses.

⁸ For Adonai has a day of vengeance, a year of requital for fighting with Tziyon.

Edom had a reputation for taking advantage of **Isra'el** whenever **Isra'el** was weak.

⁹ Its streams will be changed to tar, its dust to sulfur, its land burning tar ¹⁰ that will not be quenched night or day; its smoke will rise forever. In all generations, it will lie waste; no one will pass through it ever again.

Although often mentioned as a sealant material for boats, boiling **tar** appears in Old Babylonian texts as a form of punishment. Coupled with the foul smell of burning sulfur, both elements being available in the region of the Dead Sea, they could easily be associated with **Adonai's** wrath. This punishment is similar to that He had brought against **Sodom** and **Gomorrah**.

For years, Bible scholars wondered how an area could burn forever. Now we know - for if a bomb or some other device ignited the vast oil reserves of Saudi Arabia, they would burn forever. Whether a bomb ignites them or they are ignited supernaturally, they will indeed burn. ¹

¹¹ Horned owl and hawk will possess it, screech owl and raven will live there; he will stretch over it the measuring line of confusion and the plumbline of the empty void.

The symbol for utter destruction here is that birds best known as inhabiting and scavenging desolate places have settled in ruins.

¹² Of its nobles, none will be called to be king, and all its princes will be nothing.

Edom's kingship was ancient, predating that of **Isra'el**, but **Adonai** will bring that institution to an end since He is bringing the nation itself to a close.

¹³ Thorns will overgrow its palaces, nettles, and thistles its fortresses; it will become a lair for jackals, an enclosure for ostriches. ¹⁴ Wildcats and hyenas will meet there, and billy-goats call to each other; Lilit [the night monster] will lurk there and find herself a place to rest. ¹⁵ There the hoot owl will nest, lay her eggs, hatch and gather her young in its shade. There the vultures will assemble, every one with its mate.

The prophecy is that of a city becoming a wilderness. Not only will the public buildings of the nation be overgrown out of neglect, but wild animals - a number of which were considered unclean - will make their homes among the ruins.

¹⁶ Consult the book of Adonai and read it: not one of these will be missing, none will be lacking a mate. For by His own mouth He gave the order, and by His Spirit He brought them together. ¹⁷ It is He who cast the lot for them, His hand measured out their shares. They will possess it forever, and live there through all generations. ~ Isaiah 34:1-17 (CJB)

The meaning of the **book of Adonai** is unknown. It may be a reference to a heavenly scroll, but if so, it is hard to know how the hearer could refer to this document. The appeal to a scroll could be a rhetorical device to emphasize the certainty of **Edom's** destruction and its transformation into a haunt for wild animals.

In my next post, we explore **The Joy of the Redeemed in Yesha'hayu 35:1-10**.

¹ Jon Courson's Application Commentary Old Testament Volume 2.