

THE STEM OF JESSE

When the Lord revealed His glory to Moses, He said to Him:

The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation. (Exodus 34:6, 7)

The Lord revealed both His severity and His mercy. He revealed that He does not tolerate sin, and that He also shows mercy to sinners when they repent. This revelation of the character of the Lord was the foundation of Israel's covenantal relation to Him. It was the basis of the preaching of the prophets. They warned the people of impending judgment, and also of future restoration.

When Saul, the first king of Israel, rebelled against the Lord, the Lord replaced him with David, a man after His own heart. The Lord made a covenant with David in which He promised him an heir, God's own Son, who would reign in righteousness forever. (2 Samuel 7:12-16) After the death of David, Solomon succeeded him, but was not the promised heir, and was not faithful to the Lord. After the death of Solomon, the kingdom was divided between Israel in the north and Judah in the South.

In the days of the divided kingdom, when Ahaz was king in the south, and Pekah was king in the north, the people were wicked, so the Lord sent Isaiah and Micah to prophesy against them. In those days, the people loved neither God nor man. They worshiped idols and treated each other unjustly. The rulers were especially wicked, because they commanded the people to worship idols, and used their power to oppress people. Rather than help widows and orphans, they denied them justice, and stole from them. The judges took bribes, the priests taught for a price, and false prophets prophesied for money. (Isaiah 10; Micah 3:) The two kings were arrogant, and did not submit to the Lord. The people were hypocrites, worshiping idols and mistreating their neighbors, yet offering sacrifices to the Lord in His holy temple. The Lord told them that their sacrifices were repugnant to Him. (Isaiah 1)

Because the people were wicked, the Lord would punish them by sending heathen armies to destroy them. He would send the army of Assyria to conquer the northern kingdom, and carry the people away into exile. They would also attack the city of Jerusalem in the south, but it would not fall to them. Later, the Lord would send the army of Babylonia conquer the southern kingdom, destroying the city of Jerusalem and the temple, and carrying the people away into exile. The Israelites would be as a tree cut down and left as a mere stump, which would then be burned. This is the message of the Lord's severity.

David's dynasty would collapse. Yet, the Lord is merciful and through Isaiah revealed that He would fulfill His covenant with David, and restore the kingdom of Israel, placing a son of David on the throne. This king would be like a branch growing from a charred stump. He would be both the Son of David, and the Son of God. He would be unlike other men, and His reign would be unlike the reign of other men. He would be God incarnate, and His kingdom would be the kingdom of God. The Spirit of the Lord would be upon Him, and He would have wisdom and understanding. He would know the Lord, and obey Him. He would not judge by appearances, but by truth and righteousness. He would judge the poor with righteousness, and the humble with fairness. He would conquer the world, not with military might, but with His powerful words. He would vanquish His enemies, not with a sword of steel, but with the words of His mouth. He would be righteous and faithful. He would bring to the world, not war, but peace; not violence, but kindness. Ancient enemies would

make peace, and all men would be brothers. Men would not contend with each other, but rather cooperate. The world would not be in conflict with the Lord, but reconciled to Him. Men would not rebel against Him, but submit to Him. There would be no need to tell people about the glories of the Lord, for all men would know Him and serve Him.

Of course, this rod to come forth out of the stem of Jesse, the father of David, this branch that would grow out of his roots, is none other than Jesus of Nazareth. He is the son of David, and the Son of God. He is God incarnate. He is the fulfillment of prophecy, the one God promised to inherit the throne of His father David, to reign in righteousness forever. He has established His kingdom, and is by degrees conquering it, not by force of arms; rather, by His Spirit with His Word He is gradually winning men's hearts and minds. Albert Barnes explained how the Gospel of Jesus Christ sets captives free:

The gospel does not at once, and by a mere exertion of power, open prison doors, and restore captives to liberty. But it accomplishes an effect analogous to this: it releases the mind captive under sin; and it will finally open all prison doors, and by preventing crime will prevent the necessity of prisons, and will remove all the sufferings which are now endured in confinement as the consequence of crime. (Albert Barnes, note on Isaiah 61:1)

Church father Justin Martyr said this about universal peace and brotherhood under Christ:

We who hated and destroyed one another, and on account of their different manners would not live with men of a different tribe, now, since the coming of Christ, live familiarly with them, and pray for our enemies, and endeavour to persuade those who hate us unjustly to live conformably to the good precepts of Christ, to the end that they may become partakers with us of the same joyful hope of a reward from God the ruler of all. (Justin Martyr, First Apology, 14)

Let us believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Let us understand that He is the heir to David's throne, and is always expanding His kingdom in the world. Let us faithfully serve Him, our king.

Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory, for ever and ever.

Amen.