

Isaiah 31:5-9 + 32:14-18

The Metaphor of the Mother Bird

As the Haftarah of **Deuteronomy 22-23**, this first verse could be seen as a reflection of the commandment in **Deuteronomy 22:6-7** to "not take the dam with the young" from a bird's nest. Here, the image of a bird is applied to God, hovering over and protecting Jerusalem, and this could be the meaning of that mysterious commandment.

... and later in **Deuteronomy 32:11-12** - "As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings: So the LORD alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him.

Jesus expanded on this in a similar picture in **Matthew 23:37** - "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!"

And of course the Holy Spirit is pictured as hovering over the waters in the creation account in Genesis, and alighting like a dove on Jesus at His baptism.

The prophet in this chapter is scolding Israel for turning for protection to an alliance with Egypt to protect them from the Assyrian invasion.

The image is given even more emphasis because Assyria boasted, "My hand reached as into a nest to seize the wealth of the nations. Like one gathering abandoned eggs, I gathered all the earth. No wing fluttered, no beak opened or chirped" (**Isaiah 10:14**).

Isaiah 31:5-6 - "As birds flying, so will the LORD of hosts defend Jerusalem; defending also he will deliver it; and passing over he will preserve it. Turn ye unto him from whom the children of Israel have deeply revolted."

The reference to "passing over" is to remind Israel of their Exodus, and how God "passed over" them to smite the Egyptians, which led to their freedom from bondage.

"passing over" - pasach - the same word used in **Exodus 12:13** - "... when I see the blood, I will pass over you"

Isaiah 31:7 - "For in that day every man shall cast away his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which your own hands have made unto you for a sin."

Repentance always involves casting away our idolatry and relying totally on God.

Isaiah 31:8 - "Then shall the Assyrian fall with the sword, not of a mighty man; and the sword, not of a mean man, shall devour him: but he shall flee from the sword, and his young men shall be discomfited."

i.e. not of a "man" at all, but an angel sent by God will do it, just as the death angel at Passover. (fulfillment, **2 Chronicles 32, 2 Kings 19:35**).

- **2 Kings 19:35** - "And it came to pass that night, that the angel of the LORD went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses."

Actually, as at Passover, God did pass over Jerusalem and destroyed the Assyrian army

Isaiah 31:9 - "And he shall pass over to his strong hold for fear, and his princes shall be afraid of the ensign, saith the LORD, whose fire is in Zion, and his furnace in Jerusalem."

"pass over" = *abar* - not the word used in verse 5 above.
i.e. Sennacherib fled to his stronghold in Ninevah.

"the ensign" = *nec* - a pole or flagstaff on which a banner is lifted up.

From the image in **Numbers 21:8** of the brass serpent raised up on the pole (*nec*) by Moses, this word is an allusion to the Cross.

- **John 3:14-15** - "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in Him may have eternal life"

Targum - "whose lustre is in Zion to them that do the law, and a burning furnace of fire to them that transgress his word"

Some Jews saw the "fire" as the constantly burning altar of sacrifice in the Temple. The Talmud (Babylonian Talmud, Erubim, fol. 19. 1.), however interprets the "fire" as hell, and the "furnace" as the gate of hell.

Isaiah 32 contains a vision of Messiah as the righteous king ruling with justice. But also a warning for Israel to repent with a vision of the destruction of Jerusalem.

Isaiah 32:14 - "Because the palaces shall be forsaken; the multitude of the city shall be left; the forts and towers shall be for dens for ever, a joy of wild asses, a pasture of flocks;"

"forts and towers" - the ramparts of the Temple - "forever" = *olam*. - eternity, endless

Isaiah 32:15 - "Until the spirit be poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness be a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest."

Rashi - Comp. (**Zech. 12:10**) "And I will pour upon the house of David... a spirit of grace." Comp. also (**Joel 3:1**) "I will pour My spirit upon all flesh."

The Targum is, "until refreshing comes to us from the face of him, whose Shechinah, or Majesty, is in the highest heavens"

- **Acts 3:19** - "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord"

Verses 16-18 describe the effects of this outpouring of the Spirit.

(NIV) - "The LORD's justice will dwell in the desert, his righteousness live in the fertile field. The fruit of that righteousness will be peace; its effect will be quietness and confidence forever. My people will live in peaceful dwelling places, in secure homes, in undisturbed places of rest."

- **Hebrews 4:11** - "Let us labor therefore to enter into that rest..."

i.e. knowing we are under the protection of the Lord, tenderly hovering over us like a mother bird.