

The Theology of Isaiah #4: God as King and Judge

The book of Isaiah is one of the most comprehensive books of the Bible in revealing who God is, who we are, what he expects of us, his relationship with nations, how he works in redeeming a people to himself, and even what shall take place in the distant future. In fact, if the only book we had was Isaiah, our knowledge of God could be quite remarkable.

In the previous lessons we studied God's names in Isaiah (El, Elohim, Adonai, Yahveh, and Yah), then his descriptions as Creator and Maker, descriptions of his unity, solitariness, and glory, and then his titles as "The Holy One of Israel", and "The Mighty One of Israel" (or simply "The Almighty"). Today we will proceed with two more titles – King and Judge. Next time we will see him as Savior and Redeemer.

Isaiah 33:22 gives us four titles of God, all in one verse. "For the LORD is our judge, the LORD is our lawgiver, the LORD is our King; he will save us." He is our Judge, Lawgiver, King, and Savior.

King

All through the Bible, God is shown to be the the King of heaven, the King of all the earth, the King of his people Israel, and the King of kings. In Isaiah we see this stated plainly and often.

6:1, 5 – "... I saw also the LORD sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. ... Then said I, Woe is me! For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts."

9:6-7 (of the Messiah and the future "kingdom of God") – "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this."

41:21 – "Produce your cause, saith the LORD; bring forth your strong reasons, saith the King of Jacob."

43:15 - "I am the LORD, your Holy One, the creator of Israel, your King."

44:6 – "Thus saith the LORD, the King of Israel, and his redeemer, the LORD of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God."

He is King of all the earth because he is the Creator of all. By right of creation, he can, may, and will do as he pleases with it. "And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?" (Dan. 4:35).

6:5 (above) shows that as King, "the LORD of hosts", he leads and directs the heavenly hosts: the cherubim, seraphim, principalities, powers, and all angels. They go on missions throughout the earth, and minister aid to his people, judgments upon his enemies, and leadership of the nations and the flow of history, according to his own will alone.

He is King of Israel because he has chosen them to be a special people unto himself, and as a king, leads and guides them, protects them, teaches them (Isa. 2), and chastens them.

Skeptics dispute his kingship. Heathen kings vainly think that they are personally sovereign, but theirs is a pretty sorry sovereignty. Even his people Israel have often forsaken him and taken pride in their own ways. God's activities as King and as Judge are for the present hidden, so that men vainly think they are "on their own" and ruling according to their own desires. In actuality, he is actively ruling and judging all through history, using angels and men (unwittingly) to bring his will to pass. But in the Millennial and eternal states, his rule and judgments will be open and visible to all. Even now God leads men to do his will, though they are unaware of it. Prov. 21:1 – "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will." Prov. 16:9 – "A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps."

God takes the long view of things, and no matter how proud and "independent" men are in this life, they must in the end bow the knee and acknowledge his Lordship.

Judge

Because he is Creator, he can lay upon his creation whatever requirements he will. Because he is a righteous and just King, he has the right and obligation to judge and punish that creation. Sometimes he brings physical judgment here in this life (e.g., Isa. 37:35-36, against the army of Assyrians threatening Jerusalem), and he will certainly bring terrible and fiery judgment against the wicked in the end of the age (63:1-6 and 66:15-16), but also he will judge righteously through his Messiah Jesus in the millennial and eternal states.

2:4 – “And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.”

11:3-4 – “And he shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears. But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked.”

26:20-21 – “Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast. For, behold, the LORD cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity: the earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain.”

45:21 – “... there is no God else beside me; a just God and a Saviour; there is none beside me.”

The terribleness of his judgments are tempered by the fact that he is a righteous and just judge (11:3-4 and 45:21), not like the tyrannical, cruel, and unfair judges and tyrants of this world. Still, are we really comforted at the thoughts of his judgments being fair, true, and righteous, when we know ourselves to be false, corrupt, sinful, and deserving of his judgments? Remember Isaiah’s response back in 6:5! What we need is not justice, but mercy, and a Saviour – not merely saving us from enemies or unfairness, but from our sins and uncleanness. So we rejoice that God is BOTH a God of justice and a God of mercy. He is just to all, and he is merciful to his elect.

Although we may look in greater detail later in this series concerning his mercy, a few verses in Isaiah will suffice to show that he is not only just, but merciful.

55:7 – “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.”

60:10 – “... for in my wrath I smote thee, but in my favour have I had mercy on thee.”

63:7 (right after the horrible judgments described in verses 1-6) – “I will mention the lovingkindnesses of the LORD, and the praises of the LORD, according to all that the LORD hath bestowed on us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel, which he hath bestowed on them according to his mercies, and according to the multitude of his lovingkindnesses.”

Application

In recognizing that God is our King and Judge, the question arises as to how that should affect us. Kings have relations with at least four groups – those who serve him, his subjects, men of other nations, and his enemies. So what are we to the Great King?

God is the King (and Judge) of all people (even those who do not know him, and those who are his enemies), because he is the Creator, but not all people are in the “Kingdom of God” which is what is proclaimed in the gospel. That kingdom is composed solely of his saints, purchased and redeemed by the blood of Christ.

We need to ask ourselves how we are personally related to this King and Judge. Is he our Creator-King only, or our Savior-Redeemer? Are we serving him, or ignoring him? Unsaved people are outside the kingdom, they are citizens of this world only. All men will face him as King and Judge, and either damned for their sins, or admitted into his heavenly kingdom, having been justified by Christ alone.

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