

July 7

Isaiah 22, 27, 32-33

Here, in what we read today, is the alternative to the situation described in chapters 30 and 31. "The false counsel depicted reliance upon Egypt as Judah's only hope. Crooked rulers made their plans in secret and sought ways to foist those plans on a public, which would not have acquiesced in them if they had known their true import. Here God, the God who will have delivered them from Assyria, is depicted as the true source of righteous rule.

The thought in the two chapters moves through four stages. The first describes the nature of true leadership and the effects stemming from it (32:1-8). The second explains what the fundamental ingredient is for the kind of leadership that God says ought to exist to really exist: God's Spirit (32:9-20). The third makes this necessity of divine intervention even more explicit, stating that Judah is helpless without Him (33:1-16). Finally, in a more emotional segment, the author envisions the day when Jehovah rules over a serene and quiet land delivered from all of her enemies (33:17-24) (Oswalt, pp. 578-579).

That is an overview of 32 and 33 - in typical Isaiah fashion. However, I want to focus on Isaiah 22 today and these two fun characters who give us lessons in leadership.

Our reading concluded with an excerpt from Isaiah 22. Here we see a comparison of two men, Shebna and Eliakim, who both are proven as poor substitutes to the Lord's leadership. As we learned yesterday and were reminded of today, Isaiah is making the case that it is better to trust in the Lord than in other nations. In this brief prophecy in chapter 22, Isaiah is taking his point from the national level down to the individual's level: It is better to trust in the Lord than in a powerful leader.

Let's look at these two guys. Shebna, a man in charge of the palace, appears to be a little too big for his britches. Did you catch what he was doing with his grave site? Not only did he carve his own tomb but he set it "on the height" meaning, in a lofty place. It's as though Shebna is saying, "Look at me everyone! Check out my cool tomb, I made it myself. I was the king's right hand man. I had beautiful chariots. I may be dead, but don't forget about me." Shebna was all about making a name for himself even after his death. What a train wreck. And how does God respond to him? First, God asks, "Who gave you permission to do this?" In other words, "Shebna, who do you think you are? You aren't fooling anyone." Uh oh folks, God is about to set it off! And then, with language that paints a scene from an animated superhero film, Isaiah warns Shebna of his faint. "Beware, the Lord is about to take firm hold of you and hurl you away, O mighty man. He will roll you up tightly like a ball and throw you in a large country." Can you see that? God Almighty handling this self-proclaimed hero as if he is a wad of scrap paper launched effortlessly into a trash can. Score! And if that wasn't enough, the Lord punctuates Shebna's grim fate with more humiliation. He strips Shebna of his authoritative clothing and gives it to a worthy servant named Eliakim. "I will clothe him with YOUR robe and fasten

YOUR sash around him and hand YOUR authority over to him." Ouch. Talk about having a bad day.

Reading on further we learn that Eliakim is given the key to the house of David. The key symbolized the authority to make binding decisions in the interest of the king. He is also said to be a peg and a seat of honor in the house of his father. Just as tent pegs were used to hold a tent firm in place so was Eliakim supposed to hold the kingdom firm. In addition, the seat of honor could be described as a throne of glory for the house of his father. Eliakim's prophecy sounds good so far doesn't it? However, the bright future for him and his reign doesn't last long. The Lord closes with a picture of the collapse of Eliakim's rule. Symbolically we see that the phrase the "peg gives way" shows an internal weakness on his part coupled with the "shearing off" as an external action from the nation around him. Not only was he proven inadequate, but the people around ended up opposing him. In short, I believe the Lord is driving home the point that no matter how worthy someone is in leadership, he still cannot be trusted more than God himself.

Both men, Shebna and Eliakim, were prophesied to let God's people down. Shebna, being a self-sufficient, self-promoting leader bore the consequences of his pride. Eliakim, a leader deserving of his position, still possessed weakness and could not be depended upon above God.

In closing, this passage offers us some good reminders when it comes to looking at our own character as well as the character of our leaders. First - don't be self-promoting. Don't build a big honking grave for yourself or any other monument. Paul states in Romans 12, "We are not to think of ourselves more highly than we should, but with sober judgment." We need to remember that any earthly success we experience is not of ourselves, nor should we exalt ourselves because of it.

Second, even people of incredible character will fail others and be a disappointment at times. All throughout scripture we are shown that is better to trust in the Lord than in man, in a position or material gain. Even the most Godly leader you know, may let you down. Like Eliakim, they may become a "peg that gives way". God is the only sure foundation, the only rock that we can depend upon. Let's take these lessons from Isaiah and keep God in his rightful place in our hearts.