

## The Divided Kingdom (930-725 BCE)

### *The Prophecies of Isaiah*

**Readings: *Isaiah* 5:24-30; 1:18-20, 27-31; 2:1-5, 19-3:7; 4:2-6; 2 *Kings* 15:6-7, 19-28, 32-35; 2 *Chronicles* 26:22-23; 27:1-2, 8**

### ***Reflections:***

- In these early passages of Isaiah all of the themes continue to be developed. Rather than the outpouring of blessing like the water of rain or a flowing river, the consuming fire of God's judgment is announced. Nations are summoned as the instruments of God's judgment. Neither idols nor men can rescue Israel. But none of this is without hope. Again we see the promise of the nations of the world one day experiencing God's salvation through this small, failing nation of Israel.
- Isaiah 2:22-3:7 gives us some good insights into the various leadership roles within Israel at this time: warrior, judge, prophet, soothsayer, elder, captain in the army, counselor, skilled craftsman and clever enchanter. We see in this mix of leadership a variety of roles as well as a blending of God ordained roles with pagan cult roles. This reminds us that we must be careful to ask the self-reflective questions of whether the leaders we follow are truly those that God has established. It also reminds us that God prefers a diversity of leaders who share the responsibility of pointing people to him as their only true King. In the New Testament we will see five primary leadership roles emerge in the Church: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors (shepherds) and teachers.
- Isaiah 4:2-6 introduces the vision of a "Branch of the Lord." In this context it apparently refers to a remnant that will remain within Israel. Yet, Isaiah 11:1 and following will make it clear that the Branch of the Lord is the coming Messiah. With this understanding we can see what the Branch will accomplish. He will be beautiful, glorious and bear wonderful fruit. He will bring cleansing to the people, restoring to them to purity. Somehow at the time of this Branch, God will create a refuge and hiding place.
- This promised salvation falls in line with the promises of Isaiah 2:1-5 as the prophet declares that, "the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and all nations will stream to it." The following verses are key to understand the coming work of the Messiah:

“Many peoples will come and say, ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.’ The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. Come, O house of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the Lord.”

- First, we see that the purposes of God are to bring salvation to the entire world, not just to Israel or to a select group of religious people. Second, we see that his desire is to see peoples’ lives transformed so that they can actually walk in God’s ways. Third, we see that God desires to establish reconciliation and peace on the earth. The vision of the Messiah is to bring lasting peace where people no longer train for war but rather walk in the light of the Lord. Consider this verse from John 8:12, “When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.’” As we will see throughout Isaiah, his prophecies will more closely align with the life and teaching of Jesus than any other prophet.
- As we return again to the political scene of this time, we see in Israel an invasion, corrupt leaders, an assassination, and ongoing evil. In Judah, we read of Uzziah’s death from leprosy and his son’s succession to the throne. His son, Jotham displays a more fully righteous character than his father but the people continue their corrupt and evil ways.
- It is now after Uzziah dies that God reveals his authority (“the train of his robe filled the temple”), his holiness, his cleansing power, and his calling on Isaiah to carry his message to Israel. The purification of Isaiah’s lips indicates that he is now ready to speak for God and is set apart for this purpose. The idea of the people of God having “unclean lips” indicates that the people are not speaking out the word of God but rather are speaking destructive words. As Jesus will one day declare, “From the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks.” (Luke 6:45)
- The declaration that God gives to Isaiah to proclaim could be read as God being mean-spirited in causing people to not understand what he is trying to communicate to them so that God can punish them. This is not how it should be understood. This is a descriptive statement of what is happening. The people hear God speak but they never understand. They see God at work but they don’t perceive. Their hearts have been made calloused and hard through their relentless pursuit of self-centered living. If they were able to understand and respond to God they could be healed, but because they are hardened and oblivious, they will suffer judgment. Yet again, the judgment is not without hope. The nation will be cut down as a tree is cut down and killed and yet, the “holy seed” will be in the stump. In other words, even as the one is dying, in its death, the seed for the new is already present. What a wonderful image of the coming of Jesus. Even as Israel experiences death of temple, the priesthood, the sacrificial system, their

land as a place of promise and security, at that same time the Messiah and reveals a whole new vision of a kingdom. This kingdom will be completely relational with a community of people serving as a living temple and a holy priesthood to the nations. The final sacrifice will be fulfilled in his death and all nations will be welcomed into a new covenant relationship with God. Again, praise God for Jesus!