
Day 182 - July 1

The Divided Kingdom (930-725 BCE)

Isaiah Prophecies against Nations

Readings: *Isaiah 34:1-4, 14:24-27; 15:1-9; 16:1-14; 17:1-14*

Reflections:

- This collection of prophecies against the nations spoken by Isaiah reminds us again of God's anger and judgment against proud and abusive nations. It may seem harsh but we must remember that these ancient nations practiced widespread horrors and atrocities of slavery, human sacrifice, and abuse of children and women.
- God's power and changing purposes are clearly expressed: "Surely, as I have planned, so it will be, and as I have purposed, so it will stand.... For the Lord Almighty has purposed and who can thwart him? His hand is stretched out and who can turn it back?" These words remind the reader of the power and unchanging purposes of God. Even when everything looks hopeless, when God has declared his purposes nothing can stop him, whether for judgment or mercy. When God decides on a course of action, no one and nothing can stand in the way of him. As Paul would write to the Roman Christ-followers: "What then shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us." (Romans 8:31)
- As with other prophecies, here imbedded within a prophecy against Moab, we read again of a promise concerning the coming rescuer: "The oppressor will come to an end, and destruction will cease, the aggressor will vanish from the land. In love a throne will be established; in faithfulness a man will sit on it – one from the house of David – one who in judging seeks justice and speeds the cause of righteousness." (Isaiah 16:4,5). This prophecy finds parallel with the promise given to Adam and Eve on the coming seed who would crush the head of the serpent (Genesis 3:15).
- In Isaiah 17:7-8 and the prophecy against Damascus we find echoes again of hope being promised within the context of judgment. Isaiah refers to the remnant and the day when there will be those who turn to God and seek true relationship with him. "In that day men will look to their Maker and turn their eyes to the Holy One of Israel. They will not look to the altars, the works of their hands and they will have no regard for the Asherah poles and the incense altars their fingers have made." This reminds us of a number of things.

- First, even in the midst of the story of “what doesn’t work” God was preparing the way to reveal the story of “what does work” to change the human heart. God gives his people hope even when in the development of the plotline we are seeing over and over again warnings and examples of nothing working.
- Second, the heart change God is looking for is not just one where we turn towards him but one where we also turn away from all other distractions and loyalties. God does not want to be the first of many loves, but the only love of our hearts.
- Last, this reminds us that religions we substitute for a true submissive relationship to God are the religions we create and manage. The idols we choose are idols of our own making who are made in our own image. They are not gods but mere externalized forms of our own wants and desires and attempts to save ourselves. Like the Wizard of Oz, there is no great power behind the deities we create for ourselves. These false gods are the creation of our own hands so that we might secretly remain in control of our lives. We are like the man hiding behind the curtain pulling the levers and shouting the demands. All of this we must turn away from if we are to humbly accept an intimate, trust-based friendship with God.
- As we have seen many times now, the great change of heart that all humans need is two-fold: 1) To be rescued from our own self-centeredness that leads us into destructive self-indulgence; and 2) To be rescued from our own self-centeredness that leads us to attempt to be our own saviors and rescuers. The worship of Baal and Asherah were a potent combination and so represented the perfect contrast to what it meant to live in relationship with God. It was the human religion that promised salvation that at the same time offered endless self-indulgence. Yet as powerful a grip as this religion and other future religions would have on people, it would be no match for the coming rescuer. Praise God for Jesus.