

Day 175

Isaiah speaks of Judgement and Redemption

Isa. 5.24 – 30; 1.27-31; 2.19-3.7; 1.18- 20; 4.2-6; 2.1-5

Isa 5.24 – 30 Anger is a valid emotion, one which in its right place alerts us to disorder and injustice. Many would question whether God's anger is really consistent with His nature as a God of love, but without anger, how would we, as humans, have a sense of outrage at the child abuser or the mass murderer?

God's anger works not to annihilate everything, but to act to restore the divine order. It is ugly, and yet the alternative is a return to the chaos of nothingness.

The Lord will even call invading armies to carry out His purpose, bringing darkness across the land.

1.27-31 Thus, Isaiah can speak of redemption with *mishpat*, with right-wising, setting things back as they ought to be; those who turn around and look for God will be saved through God's straight dealings, His righteousness. But for those who reject the order of God, nothing awaits but loss and emptiness.

In particular, the idolatry and nature worship which has been going on will lead to shame and disgrace for its practitioners.

2.19-3.7 In His anger, the Lord will remove the idols of silver and gold; also, the leadership of the nation will disintegrate, leaving them in the hands of inexperienced and ineffective governance, leading to civil unrest and a looking for anyone to bring order.

1. 18-20 The Lord is giving a chance of change to the people; through obedience to God's order, if they line up with the universal design, they will find wholeness, but if they continue to rebel, they will perish.

4.2- 6 Isaiah does foresee a day of restoration approaching for the survivors of the oncoming terror. There will be a purifying and a hallmarking (sanctification) of the Lord's people, and the Lord will come in His ancient dress of cloud and fire to inhabit Zion again and be the protector of His people.

2.1-5 At that time, Jerusalem will be a focus of world attention, because of the Lord's presence, and a place for nations to come to. Many peoples will come and ask for counsel and conciliation, and Zion will be a centre of peacemaking which shows nations how to resolve conflict without resort to violent military means. This will, of course, be a core facet of the teaching of Jesus Christ.

The Continuing Roll of Israel and Judah's Kings (c 742 – 739BC)

2 Kings 15.19 – 28; 2 Chron.26.22 – 23a; 2 Kgs. 15.7b, 32-33; 2 Chron.27.2 – 6

2 Kings 15.19 – 28 Back in the onward flow of the story of Israel, Assyria turns its attention toward them, and an army led by Pul, also known as Tiglath-Pileser, invades. Scheming King Menachem now raises taxes from the rich of Israel to pay off Pul, to prevent him from breaking up the state. This works, for the time being.

Menachem dies in 742BC, and is succeeded by his son, Pekahiah. He lasts two years on the throne, following in the evil ways of his father, and is assassinated by his general, Pekah and his supporters in Samaria.

Thus, in 741BC, General Pekah becomes King Pekah and survives twenty years on the throne. The only thing of significance about his reign is that it is during his time that Assyria begins to occupy Israel's territory, beginning the eventual collapse of the northern kingdom.

2 Chron.26.22 – 23a (mirrored in 2 Kgs.15.34) Meanwhile, In Judah, Uzziah eventually dies in 739BC, isolated in his pariah state from the people, and buried in a field away from the main burial place of the Kings, because he is perceived as a leper.

2 Kgs. 15.7b, 32-33 (mirrored in 2 Chron. 26.23b, 27.1,8 Uzziah's son, Jotham succeeds him in Judah (Jotham had already taken over as regent when Uzziah's rebellion against God led to his illness.) He is twenty-five years old, and reigns for sixteen years.

2 Chron.27.2 – 6 (mirrored in 2 Kgs.15.34 – 35) Despite Jotham's living in the ways of God, and not repeating his father's presumption of walking into the Temple, Judah generally continues in idolatry alongside the worship of the Lord (YHWH).

Jotham rebuilds and maintains the Temple of Solomon, and restores other Judean cities. He also suppresses the Ammonites, and exacts tribute from them. The Chronicler comments that this blessing comes because of Jotham's intention to walk in the ways of the Lord.

Isaiah's Call 739BC Isaiah 6.1 – 13

In the year of sad King Uzziah's death, 739BC, Isaiah receives a life-changing encounter with the living God in the Temple courts. Whether Isaiah is actually in the Temple physically is unclear, but he envisions the Lord high and on His throne, with the weight of His presence, His glory, filling the Temple, physically changing the atmosphere around Him. The ground shakes, smoke is everywhere. And the beings around God, *seraphim* (Heb שֶׁרָפִים) winged creatures who seem to be like humans and can communicate with Isaiah are calling in wonder to each other

קְדוֹשׁ קְדוֹשׁ קְדוֹשׁ יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת מְלֵא כָּל-הָאָרֶץ כְּבוֹדוֹ

Qadosh, Qadosh, Qadosh Adonai (YHWH) Tzebha'ot; melo' khol-ha-aretz kebhodo

Holy Holy Holy Lord of Armies full all the earth his glory

Isaiah's reaction, as that of so many before who have seen God's appearance, is to be full of fear that he will die because he has seen God. But the Lord sends an angel to cleanse his lips with a burning coal from the altar.

Now, Isaiah hears the Lord calling for a messenger, and he presents himself as a willing servant. It is a terrible message which Isaiah carries, one which seals the destiny of Judah to be devastated, even though God will still seek to woo them with His word. Yet it will be as though they are deaf and blind, while hearing and seeing. Yet, stumps will be left, and the holy seed (Heb זֶרַע קֹדֶשׁ *Zera' qodesh*) will be left to germinate again.

Day 176

Introducing the Prophet Micah

Micah 1.1 – 2.13

The Scriptures speak of a matter being established in the mouth of two or three witnesses. In the case of the prophets, the Lord is saying the same thing through a number of voices. At the same time as Isaiah is delivering his trumpet-calls to the kingdoms of Judah and after Amos has been rejected for his forthright message from the northern kingdom, a man from the Judean town of Moresheth-Gath, near the border with the Philistine lands, named Micah (Heb מִיכָה *Mi-khah*) brings words from the Lord of a similar vein.

The thrust of his word is that religious deeds without moral depth and discipline are empty. He tells of the coming fall of Samaria and Jerusalem, the exile and return, and speaks also of one who will come as the *Right-wiser* above all others, the Messiah, to be born in the city of David, Bethlehem.

The book is often divided into three sections, or discourses.

First Discourse

1.1 Micah is prophesying during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah of Judah. His words are mainly directed to his own people of the southern kingdom.

1.2 – 7 Micah warns of the Lord's rising in awesome power to act to put an end to the sin of Israel, specifically, the abomination of idolatry in the north, in Samaria. The Israeli capital will be reduced to rubble, and the idols destroyed.

1.8-16 But Micah does not let Judah off the hook, which has also been infected with the Israelite shame, even Jerusalem itself. Pain is coming for the towns of Judah, and they are to prepare to leave, they will go into exile.

2.1-2 Micah rounds on the corruption of the Judean criminal set, who defraud people of their property by their evil plots.

2.3-5 There will be an inescapable reckoning against such behaviour, and the perpetrators will end up with no property to pass on, no legacy.

2.6-11 While Micah is prophesying this judgement on the people of Judah, it seems there are others who are prepared to prophesy peace and plenty for the land, saying, in essence, 'a God who is good cannot surely do such terrible things?'

But Micah repeats that the situation is 'ruined beyond remedy' (2.10) and even if lying prophets come and prophesy good times for the people of Judah, this will not distract the Lord from His anger.

Hope Ahead

2.12-13 Yet there is a little hope ahead; God will not leave His people scattered and shepherdless, but will gather them and bring them back under one who makes a way for them, and the Lord will be their leader as they return.

Day 177

Micah – Hope in the Midst of Reckoning

Micah 3.1 – 5.15

Second Discourse

Although there is judgement and exile at hand, particularly for the leaders of Judah and Israel, the Lord intends to continue the story of His rescue through the survivors of the terrible time ahead, and to raise up a Deliverer who will care for the people as they have not previously been cared for.

3.1 – 7 The prophet likens the behaviour of the leaders of Israel in particular to cannibals feeding off their own kind, in very powerful and offensive language. Likewise, the false prophets, who have lived off the benefices of the people, but who deliver only messages of peace and appeasement, are castigated. They will no longer hear any word from God, to their shame.

3.8 In contrast to the false messengers, Micah declares his source to be the Spirit of the Lord with whom he is filled, with justice (Heb מִשְׁפָּט *mishpat* - the quality of right-wising what is disordered) and with power (Heb גְּבוּרָה *gebhurah*) to uncover the failure and chaos in Israel.

3.9 – 12 Micah is addressing the leaders of both kingdoms in this word, uncovering the corruption of civil and religious government – everything is about money, and they are creating false hope among the people.

Because of this falsehood, even Jerusalem itself, and the Temple will be overthrown and destroyed.

4.1 – 13 Yet they are not left without any hope. Despite the destruction of Jerusalem, the Lord still intends to make this a place through which He touches all peoples; it will become a place of pilgrimage for the world, a place of prophetic insight and revelation, of wisdom and reconciliation, with a message of non-violence which will affect nations.

There is a vision too of security and peace, when the people of the Lord ‘walk in the name of the Lord forever’ (4.5) The word ‘walk’ here indicates a way of life, a pattern for living.

The Lord’s long-term intention is to gather back the people, in their brokenness, and be their true King. But first, because of the lack of leadership in the nation, perhaps because of Uzziah’s sin and his being cut off from the people through his ritual uncleanness, the people have to go through pain, like a woman in labour, including their forced removal to Babylon. From there they will be rescued, as they have been before from Egypt.

Now, however, enemies surround Judah, ‘who do not know the plan of the Lord.’ Their eventual destiny will be to bring great honour to the Lord of the earth, but for now, Judah is in great danger.

5.1 – 5 This section of Micah is one most familiar to modern readers, for it forms part of the annual Christmas reading cycle, as a prophetic word which refers to the coming of Jesus Christ as Messiah.

Although Jerusalem is coming under attack, a Deliverer will arise, from Bethlehem Ephrathah, the small Judean township south of the capital. Micah will have in mind, no doubt, the figure of David, and the way that he emerged as a great deliverer from that place in earlier days, thus the origins, the roots of this Deliverer will be in His lineage.

It is significant that in Matthew's Gospel, chapter two, when the wise men come from the east seeking the Messiah in Jerusalem, the chief priests and teachers of the Law advise Herod on where the Messiah will be born, quoting this prophetic word of Micah as the key reference. After all, Messiah will be of the line of David, and David's town Bethlehem. Thus, in the Hebrew mind, even before the Christian era, this prophecy is recognised as Messianic in nature.

Having suffered seeming abandonment, the coming Deliverer-Ruler will gather Israel together and in God's own strength and name, will cause Jerusalem to fulfil her call to bring wholeness in the earth, who will be their wholeness.

5.5 – 9 Even though the Assyrians will attack the land, the Lord will cause Judah to triumph against all the odds.

However, Israel in the north will be scattered, though in that scattering they will become powerful, and a force to be reckoned with, because they are under God's blessing.

5.10-15 The outcome for Israel in the north will be devastating, but in the process, the Lord will see to it that the sorcery and the idolatry which has been going on will be thrown down completely.

Day 178

God is Looking for Authenticity and Right Action

Micah 6.1 – 7.20

Third Discourse

6.1-5 The third section begins with God calling a courtroom together, formed of the creation's heights, the mountains and hills, (where the people claim to worship the Lord.)

God calls them to witness how ungrateful and faithless His people have been, given the love He has shown them in their deliverance from Egypt and their establishment in Israel. He calls Israel to remember their story, the *dramatis personae* of salvation history. In this way, they will recall how the Lord has been true to His word thus far.

6.6-8 The Lord now reveals what the key issue that He is looking for from mankind; it is not to be found in sacrifices void of ethical content, and certainly not in the horrendous child immolation demanded by some pagan gods. In one of the most often-quoted texts of the Old Testament, Micah reveals what God is really looking for;

הִגִּיד לְךָ אָדָם, מַה-טוֹב; וּמַה-יְהוָה דּוֹרֵשׁ מִמֶּךָ

Higgid le-kha, Adam, mah tobh u-mah Adonai (YHWH) doresh mim-kha

He has told you, man, what good and what Lord (YHWH) looks for from you

כִּי אִם-עֲשׂוֹת מִשְׁפָּט וְאַהֲבַת חֶסֶד

Ki-im oseh mishpat ve-ahabhat chesed

Except doing justice and loving grace-obligation (chesed)

וְהִצַּנֵּעַ לְכַת, עִם-אֱלֹהֵיךָ

Ve-hatzne-a' lekhet im Eloheykha

And lowly walking with your God

Here is enshrined the heart of God's call for man – to act with integrity, in line with God's order in *mishpat*, to love the obligation which the covenant brings, and which sustains relationship with the Lord, and as a child with a father, to humbly journey with God in close fellowship.

6.9-16 But Judah is in dange of God's discipline and punishment, because of the corruption in her midst, the fraudulent weights and measures which are used to cheat the poor. As long as Judah behaves without integrity, God cannot give the blessing of provision . Because they have maintained the evil ways of Omri and Ahab, they will be the object of derision by others.

7.1-7 The result of this godless way of life is the lack of fruitfulness in the land. Bringing in the harvest is more like gleaning after it has been gathered, because so little has grown.

In the affairs of men, the covenant-keeper, the *chasid* (Heb חֲסִיד) has disappeared to be replaced with mistrust and corruption throughout the land, even leading to suspicion and strife in families.

7.8- 13 But in spite of this, in spite of the ruinous state of the land, there is hope for renewal – the one in the dust will rise up, God's right-wising ways will prevail, and what has been broken down will be built up. Such is the hope in the God who keeps His covenant.

7.14-20 The third discourse, and the book of Micah ends with a prayer for the Lord to fulfil His promise to re-establish Judah and her reputation as a witness to the Lord.

Finally, God's attribute of forgiveness is praised, for he does not stay angry forever, but acts in line with His *chesed* and 'throws our failures into the depths of the sea' (7.19) – and, as the Christian cliché has it – 'He puts up a 'no-fishing' sign'!

This is in line with His promise of *chesed* faithfulness to our forefather Abraham, and *emet* dependability to Jacob, given long ago and still standing unbroken.

Day 179

The Shadow of Israel's Captivity (c.730BC)

2 Kings 15.29 ; 1 Chron 5.23-26; 2 Kings 15.37, 31,30; 2 Kings 17.1 – 2; 2 Kings 15.36,38;16.1-2a (mirrored in 2 Chron 27.7, 9; 28.1a) ; 2 Chron 28.1b- 4 (mirrored in 2 Kings 16.2b – 4)

2 Kings 15.29; 1 Chron 5.23-26 **The First Deportation**

Pekah is on Israel's throne when Tiglath-Pileser of Assyria, also called Pul, attacks the eastern parts of the land, and deports the population there. This is deliberate practice on the part of the Assyrians, to increase their empire by disorientating people out of their homelands and removing their ability to organize and fight back.

The Assyrians take Gilead, east of the Jordan, and the Galilee, as far west as Naphtali's territory. In the Chronicles account, we read more of who was captured – the tribes of Gad, Reuben and the eastern part of Manasseh as well as Naphtali. The Chronicler makes clear that the reason for this terrible outcome is their unfaithfulness and their toleration of idol worship among them.

The Israelites are exiled to Mesopotamia, the land 'between the rivers' Euphrates and Tigris. There is some debate among scholars about whether the name of the river they settled by is Habor or Gozan – normally Habor has been the name of the river in that region, a tributary of the river Euphrates, but it is certain at least that this was the region of their resettlement, *back in the land where Abraham started off from!* It is as though they have been playing snakes and ladders, and have gone down the snake and right back to the beginning! The tragedy is, according to 1 Chron.5.26, that the tribes are still there at the time of the Chronicler's writing.

2 Kings 15.37 **Syria and Israel in Alliance Against Judah**

Perhaps in an attempt to grab more territory after the Assyrian taking of their lands, Rezin of Syria and Pekah of Israel attack Judah, in an unprecedented alliance of two old enemies. This shows how low Israel has sunk.

2 Kings 15.31,30; 17.1-2 **Pekah of Israel Assassinated, Hoshea Replaces Him**

In a coup in 732BC, Pekah of Israel is assassinated by Hoshea Ben Elah after a conspiracy against him, and Hoshea becomes King of Israel in his place. It is said of him that although he does evil in the Lord's terms, he is not as bad as the kings of Israel before him. More details are not given, however. Hoshea will be marked in history as the King who is on the throne when Israel finally falls to the Assyrians a few years later.

Meanwhile, In Judah...

2 Kings 15.36-38; 16.1,2a; **Death of Jotham, Accession of Ahaz 730BC**

Jotham of Judah dies, and is succeeded by his son, Ahaz, who is bad news for Judah. He follows the Israelite example, and makes idols of the Ba'alim. He also participates in the disgusting rites of child sacrifice to demons such as Molech, and generally throws himself into paganism. However, the Lord has not cut off Judah yet, as will be seen in the return to the story through the book of Isaiah.

Day 180

Hope for Judah Through Isaiah and Sons

Isa.7.1 – 9.21

Isa 7.1-25 This passage from Isaiah is set clearly in an historical context; Ahaz the wicked, of whom we read in 2 Chron 28.1b-4, is misleading Judah during his reign, by bringing in the Ba'alim and allowing child sacrifice.

During his reign, also as we saw in 2 Kings 15.37, Israel and Syria ally against Ahaz of Judah, and attack Jerusalem, which causes great fear among Ahaz and his subjects, although Rezin and Pekah are unable to overcome the city.

Isaiah, in spite of Ahaz's ungodly character, goes with his own son, prophetically named Shear-Jashub (Heb שְׁעָרֵי־יָשׁוּב *She'ar-Yashubh*) to the end of the aqueduct, and meets with the King. The message to him from the Lord is not to fear Syria and Israel, because the Lord is not allowing them victory, since they are both judged and destined to be wiped off the map by Assyria from the north.

Isaiah invites Ahaz to ask for a sign of God's integrity in this, but Ahaz, resisting the Lord's voice, refuses one. He is hard-hearted.

Nevertheless, Isaiah gives him word of a sign, of a unique child which will be born to a young woman (Heb עַלְמָה *Almah*) and the name of the child will be Immanuel (Heb עִמָּנוּאֵל) meaning, God with us. Before this child is of age, Israel and Syria will be gone. Indeed, within five years, the Assyrians had moved in and exiled the two nations.

Ahaz and Judah will not be left unscathed, however, and Judah will suffer loss, but not destruction.

Prophecy often has more than one level, and this oft-quoted prophecy of Immanuel's birth is not restricted in application to the situation of Judah in 730BC. It comes into its own with the birth of the One awaited for so long in Israel, and is recalled in Matthew 1.23 when Mary is found to be pregnant by the Holy Spirit.

8.1-10 In Isaiah's case, the prophecy is fulfilled when he has a son by the prophetess (presumably his wife, though we are not told that.) whom he names Maher-Shalal-Chash-Baz (Heb מָהֵר שָׁלַל חָשׁ בָּז *literally* Quick booty, swift spoil.) Of this child, he says that before he is able to talk, Syria and Damascus will be at an end.

This is because Israel, chiefly, has rejected being with Judah, represented by the gentle spring of Shiloach (Heb שִׁלּוֹחַ) in Jerusalem, and has allied with the pagan Rezin of Syria; they are about to be overwhelmed, therefore, keeping the water theme, by a deluge from the great Euphrates (*the river*) standing for the armies of Assyria.

The overflow of this flood will also affect Immanuel's homeland, Judah. War is coming, and nothing can turn it back.

8.11 – 18 The Lord warns Isaiah personally not to go with the flow of Judah's wishes. They want a treaty, (8.12) they want appeasement (Heb קֶשֶׁר *Qesher*, meaning treasonous alliance.) But God is bringing judgement, and therefore He is the one to be feared, not Syria and Israel.

Even though the Lord is veiling His face from Judah, Isaiah is still called to trust in Him.(v.18)

Isaiah and his children, Shear-Jashub and Maher Shalal Hash Baz, are the prophetic signs of God's word. Once again, the prophet incarnates the message, as with Hosea.

8.19-22 In their looking for a way out, the people of Judah are going to mediums and spiritists (rather as Saul did at Endor). But Isaiah makes it clear where God's voice is to be heard – in the *Torah* rule of life, which they have rejected. Without this, there will be no new dawn, ending only in their cursing God.

9.1 – 7 However, a new dawn is coming. As the people are blindly stumbling in the darkness of mediums and spiritists, a light is arising. The Lord is set to deliver, through a great child, who will be the one to restore David's throne.

The fulfilment of this word, for Isaiah, comes with the later accession and reforms of Hezekiah, who will completely renew the faith of the people of Judah in the Lord. But of course, there is the level of the Messianic fulfilment of these words in the birth of Him who is the Lord incarnate, Jesus Christ, who will sit on the throne of David forever. His name is wonderful, (Heb פֶּלֵא *Pele'*) counsellor (Heb יוֹעֵץ *Yo-etz*), mighty God, (Heb אֵל גִּבּוֹר *El Gibbor*) everlasting Father (Heb אָבִי־עַד *Avi-ad*, literally, Father-until, ongoing) and prince of peace (Heb שָׁר־שָׁלוֹם *Sar-shalom*)

9.8-21 Israel thinks it can rise again if Assyria attacks, but the Lord is warning this will be a flood, opening up the land to other attackers, both Arameans and Philistines who will ride in on the back of the destruction.

The evil leadership will be swept away, the false prophets of Israel and the corrupt. But it is not the Lord who is the cause, but the wickedness of the nation which 'burns like fire'. They will be reduced to the old inter-tribal feuding days, with Ephraim and Manasseh at each others throats, finally attacking Judah together.

It is important with the Old Testament prophets, while we see their words as long-range forecasts of the coming Messiah, that we also understand their application to the situations into which the prophets are speaking, and which they were addressing. We can not therefore impose our 'meanings' on the Prophets, and make them say things which fit our theology; on the other hand, all the Old Testament is to be seen now through the lens of the earth-shaking event of the incarnation, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, to which all previous revelation points and which it foreshadows.

Day 181

Captivity and Judgement in Isaiah; Judah Falls to Israel-Syria

Isa 10.1 – 12.6; 2 Chron. 28.5 – 21

10.1 – 4 The Lord pinpoints the issue through Isaiah for Judah – the corruption and injustice against the poor and defenceless. Because of this disaster is coming.

10.5 – 23 The Lord is bringing Assyria as his instrument of discipline against Samaria and Jerusalem, but there will be a retribution against Assyria for this violence and their imperialist ambitions.

However, the promise is for a remnant to return, liberated from the coming captivity.

10.24-34 The Lord encourages Judah that although Assyria will be harsh on them, Assyria themselves will be defeated (by the Medes and Persians).

11.1-9 In Isaiah's understanding, the shoot which will come from the stump of Jesse is the leader of the remnant of Israel, and in the new order the Kingdom of God will be restored as at Eden, with nature being at peace, and no more violence.

This is again one of the passages of Isaiah which is also seen as a direct signpost towards the coming of the Messiah, the anointed One, upon whom the Spirit of the Lord will rest.

11.10-16 The leader of the remnant will gather the exiles together from their diaspora, and they will retake their ancient lands from those who have occupied them.

12.1 – 6 There will be a song on that day of return, a song of joy in the deliverance and rescue of God, when His anger is abated. And the outcome will be a proclamation among the nations of the Lord's ability to save His people from their captors.

Judah Defeated by Syria and Israel

2 Chron.28.5-8 (mirrored in 2 Kgs 16.5,6) In a stinging defeat, with one hundred and twenty thousand killed, Judah falls to the combined might of Pekah of Israel and Rezin of Syria-Aram. Many women are taken captive, two hundred thousand of them, and led to Samaria.

2 Chron.28.9-15 But in a move of great courage, a prophet of the Lord, Oded, meets Pekah and his army returning from Judah, and he lets them know how angry the Lord is that they have treated their brother Jews in such a treacherous way. Because of this, some of the Ephraimite leaders, a major Israelite tribe, complain that they are going to be under the Lord's judgement if they keep these people as prisoner.

In a turn-around, the Israelites clothe the naked captives, minister to their wounds, feed them and send them back south, on donkeys if necessary, accompanying them to Jericho. Judah has escaped by a hair's breadth.

28.16-21. Now, the King of Ahaz makes a really mistaken turn; with the Philistines and Edomites attacking on all sides, Ahaz asks Tiglath-Pileser of Assyria, of all

people, for help against them. The Scriptures make it clear – ‘Tiglath-Pileser came and gave them trouble instead of help..’, even though Ahaz plies the powerful tyrant with treasures from the Lord’s Temple.

Things were not looking good...