

## Day 182

### Isaiah Speaks Out to the Nations

Isaiah 34.1 -4; 14.24 – 27; 15.1 – 17.14

34.1-4; Ever since the days of Babel and the attempts of man to put himself in the place of God, the Lord has been constantly seeking to stem the evil tide of national violence and selfishness. Here through Isaiah he calls the nations to account, for their sin and arrogance against Him. They will be brought to nothing, suffering great loss. There is something cataclysmic in the vision of the stars themselves falling and the sky folded up, emphasizing that this is the Creator speaking, who has that right and power.

14.24-27 Isaiah speaks out against Assyria, who, although they are to be the instrument of the Lord's judgement, they are limited by Him in the scope of their oppression. Judah has become a vassal, but there is a promise that the yoke will be taken off them.

15.1-14 Isaiah launches into a long diatribe against Moab, the desert country south-east of the Dead Sea, long-standing adversaries of Israel. Great sorrow is coming upon them, war and exile. Their pride will be turned into brokenness, and her prayers will go unheard. This will be fulfilled, says Isaiah, within three years.

17.1-14 Lastly, a judgement against Damascus, who have attacked Judah with Israel. They can expect the same outcome as the Israelites, who are also going to waste away. However, a few branches will be left on the tree, as it were, and there will be a turning to the Lord, a rejection of Ba'al and Asherah, the idols.

'You have forgotten God your deliverer' says Isaiah, and for this, even the import of plants for harvest will fail.

## Day 183

### Further Judgments Against the Nations; the death of Ahaz of Judah, accession of Hezekiah of Judah. (c725BC)

Isa.21.11-12; 34.5-17; 21.13-17; 23.1-18; 2 Kings 16.7- 18; 2 Chron.28.22-27a; 2 Kings 16.20b;18.1-7a

Isa.21.11-12 **Word to Edom** This is something of a riddle which Isaiah gives here. It says it is an oracle concerning Dumah – the Greek Septuagint translation of this passage has *Idumea*, which represents the territory of Edom. Dumah, (Heb דּוּמָה) which means *silence* is an Ishmaelite tribal area – Dumah was a son of Ishmael – which here stands for the whole land of Esau-Edom.

The oracle itself is a question about when relief is coming, but the reply comes back, that although there is light coming, there will also be another time of darkness following on.

34.5-17 Moving later in Isaiah, the prophet tells of the terrible retribution which is coming on the Edomites for their treatment of Judah – they will be wiped off the map, in violence – ‘with nothing left to call a kingdom.’ This land will be left to the birds of the air, a desert waste. (v.16,17)

21.13 – 17 **Word to Arabia** The Arabs, in spite of their wandering lifestyle of caravans and camps, will be decimated in battle, for their pride and arrogance, ‘the pomp of Kedar’.

23.1-18 **Word to Tyre** The focus changes to Tyre, the coastal port city on the Mediterranean coast, to the north of Israel. Tyre was in fact built on an island, with two major harbours for trade ships. It had existed for thousands of years by the time of Isaiah, and David had established a trade partnership with Hiram.

But Isaiah foretells the destruction of Tyre; in fact, its downfall does not come until Alexander the Great’s time in 332BC, when the Greek conqueror built a causeway out to the island and besieged it, but the Assyrians and the Persians did overcome it as well, and exacted tribute from it.

Isaiah speaks of the ships of Tarshish getting word that they can’t enter the port of Tyre because it has been destroyed. The term ‘ships of Tarshish’ indicates large trading vessels, probably with oars to avoid being becalmed in the Mediterranean. Tarshish is as notoriously difficult location to accurately place, and could refer to Tarsus in Turkey, to southern Spain or even to distant India. However, the term seems to indicate a type of ship rather than belonging to one destination.

Word comes to the ships’ crews from Cyprus, because the Tyrean king is exiled there after the battles.

Those in distant Egypt and further afield will no longer have a trading port to handle their produce. Sidon the next port along is also included in this judgement.

However, there is a promise of recovery for Tyre, and certainly, although the Assyrians attacked, the trade port continued for several centuries after. But the future is full of foreboding as Tyre becomes, like many sea-ports, a place of prostitution and sin. In the end, the Lord will reclaim the earnings, to Tyre’s loss.

### **The Downfall of Syria (732BC)**

2 Kgs. 16. 7 – 18 Ahaz of Judah calls on Tiglath-Pileser the Assyrian King to come to his aid, as a vassal state, by removing Syria from the map. He bribes him with treasure from the temple, and as a result, Syria-Aram is deported and its King Rezin is executed. Ahaz travels to Damascus, the captured capital, to meet his powerful ally.

While he is in Damascus, Ahaz of Judah notices a fancy altar (presumably pagan) which he suggests to Uriah as a pleasing addition to the Temple furniture. Uriah complies, and has it built.

On his return, Ahaz actually goes the same way Uzziah had gone, himself burning offerings on the altar, changing the way things were laid out in the Temple, basically downgrading its significance in the nation’s worship.

He next removed the royal entrance to the Temple, as a mark of submission to Assyria, more or less admitting than Ahaz no longer has the power in the nation he had.

2 Chron.28.22 – 27 (mirrored in 2 Kings 16.19,20a) Things go from bad to worse as Ahaz actually closes the Temple of the Lord in Jerusalem, setting up altars on every street corner in Jerusalem, and in every Judean town, where sacrifices are made to other gods, including the Syrian gods, because they seemed to be powerful enough to help Syria defeat Judah earlier. Unsurprisingly, God the Lord is angry.

### **Accession of Hezekiah of Judah (c725BC)**

2 Kings 16.20b; 18.1-7a (mirrored in 2 Chron 28.27- 29.2) When all looks lost for Judah, Ahaz dies (and is not buried in the tombs of the Kings, presumably because of his apostasy from the Lord) and is succeeded by his son, Hezekiah, who is Godly and immediately gets to work restoring the worship of the Lord and getting rid of his father's stinking legacy from the land.

He takes away the altars on the high places, the Ba'al stones and the Asherah poles. Then there is one fascinating piece of information here which is revealed – the bronze snake which Moses had lifted up in the desert to bring healing from plague to the children of Israel has been kept, and named Nechushtan (Heb נְחֻשְׁתָּן , meaning *made of copper*, but also alludes to the Hebrew word for *snake* and for *unclean* ) and is now being worshipped with incense-burning. Hezekiah has it broken up, removing its influence on its superstitious devotees.

Hezekiah becomes the most God-fearing king of Judah since David, keeping *Torah* as His life-rule, and seeing God's blessing on His reign. It is largely his influence which keeps Judah from the oncoming cataclysm of destruction which northern Israel will shortly face.

### **Day 184**

#### **Isaiah's Warnings to the Philistines and Babylon**

Isa. 14.28 -32; 13.1- 14.23; 21.1-10

14.28-32 **Word Against the Philistines** Judah's neighbours may delight over Judah's downfall, but the Lord warns them that they are in line for retribution also. And while Zion will be re-established, Philistia will be destroyed.

#### **13.1 – 14.23 Word Against Babylon**

Here, for the first time, comes a clear address to the coming super-power, Babylon. (Although Micah has mentioned her in his prophecy, 4.10, as the future destination of Judah's exile.) Situated in modern-day Iraq, south of Baghdad, Babylon was an ancient city already in Isaiah's day. She is also a thorn in the side of the Assyrians, in rebellion against their rule, and will be burned and sacked by Sennacherib of Assyria in 689BC, her rubble being cast into the Arakhtu Lake to the shock of the surrounding region.

Yet Babylon will also rise from its ashes to become powerful again and become an empire with the breaking of the Assyrians' hold over them in 612BC, under the rule of Nabopolassar and Nebuchadnezzar II (who finally oversees the destruction of

Jerusalem in 586BC). They will be in power for decades, until the Babylonians in turn are defeated by the Medes and Persians under Cyrus in 539BC, opening the way for Judah to return in the time of Ezra.

Isaiah's word is warning of the downfall of Babylon through the rise of the Median empire;(13.17) although she will become a jewel, an amazing city of wealth and power, God will actually topple her through the Median and Persian onslaught, and she will not be inhabited again. Today, the ruins of Babylon lie in the desert of Iraq.

Isaiah also speaks in terms again of the 'day of the Lord', (13.9), this awesome day of justice, of *right-wising*, when the poison will be consumed out of the earth, in scenes reminiscent of Sodom and Gomorrah (13.22)

14.1,2 But when this comes to pass, it will signal the repatriation of Israel, with the support and help of other nations, coming to influence and power among the peoples of the region.

14.3 – 23 Isaiah describes the magnitude of the fall of Babylon, when it finally is destroyed, and how it will be for the King of Babylon, who reckoned himself as a god. (see the stories of Nebuchadnezzar's madness in Daniel for more on this.) This one whose title was 'morning star' and 'son of the dawn', who exalted himself as most important, will be thrown down in death, and become the horror of the nations.

*This passage in Isaiah has for long been associated with the fall of satan from heaven, with the name 'Lucifer', the Latin Bible's translation of the name Heylel (Heb לִלְיָל from the root halal meaning to boast or to be shining) attached to the leader of the demonic hosts.*

*This, however, is an eisegetic tradition (something read into the text) and is not found in the context of the Isaianic prophecy. Whether we can employ these words as an analogy of the satanic fall is a matter of debate. The context clearly refers to the King of Babylon in his fall under the power of the invading Medes.*

21.1-10 Babylon is the subject of an ensuing word elsewhere in Isaiah, bearing witness to her coming significance in the middle Eastern region. The word reiterates the future of Babylon to be brought down by the Medes, bringing an end to the reign of terror and oppression of this terrible empire. This is to be an encouragement to the people of God who come through the 'threshing' of the captivity.

## **Day 185**

### **Hezekiah of Judah's Godly Reforms**

2 Chron. 29. 3 – 31.21

29.3-11 With the accession of Hezekiah (Heb יְחִזְקִיָּהוּ *Yechizkiyahu*, meaning 'strengthened by the Lord') there is a sea-change in the spiritual life of Judah. Turning away from his father's apostasy, Hezekiah calls the Levites to cleanse and restore the Temple, whose doors he has re-opened after his father Ahaz's closure of them years before.

Hezekiah makes it clear that he considers that so much of the pain and disaster which has come upon them is a result of their rebellion against the Lord, and gives notice that he will make a new covenant with the Lord, to turn His anger away.

29.12-19 In their ancient clans and by families, the Levite priesthood purge the Temple of the unauthorized rubbish which has been put in alongside the God-ordained equipment. They also restore and re-consecrate everything which Ahaz had wrongly removed from the precincts of the Lord's house.

29.20-36 Hezekiah has the Levites make sin offerings on the Lord's altar, and he also restores the worship duties put in place by David, Gad and Nathan, bringing the sound of praise and music back to the Temple. Using the words of the Psalms, the sacrifices are followed by praise and worship times, with thank offerings.

As the people also bring more offerings, the priests, descendants of Aaron, are not able to keep up with the preparation of the meat, so the Levites help them. In this way, there is a speedy and orderly return to the ongoing worship of the Lord in His house, to the approval of King and people.

30.1-27 **Celebration of Passover** The next step is to reinstate the most important Jewish festival, the Passover. In an unprecedented move, Hezekiah invites people from Israel to come and celebrate with their fellow Jews in Judah. The celebration has to be deferred to the second month, rather than the first month, when it would normally be celebrated, because not enough priests had been consecrated correctly by the earlier date.

Hezekiah's invitation goes throughout the old territories of Israel, urging reconciliation with the Lord, who is gracious and compassionate. Sadly, most of Israel snubs the messengers, although a number from Zebulun, Asher and Manasseh come and join them for this auspicious occasion.

Thus, removing the altars from the street-corners which Ahaz had set up, as well as his copy of the Damascus shrine, and throwing them into the Kidron Valley, they celebrate Passover together for the first time in years.

A gracious exception is made for the northern Israelites who have come to join the Judeans in the feast; they have not been able to properly ceremonially cleanse themselves in time for the fourteenth day celebrations. Hezekiah prays a prayer, asking God's pardon for all those who might eat without being fully cleansed. It is a wonderful request for favour from this compassionate God.

For seven days, the feasting continues, with music from the Levites to accompany. Then, having had such a wonderful time of spiritual holiday, they agree together to do it all again for another week, with the sacrifice of thousands more animals.

The Chronicler says that nothing like this had happened since the days of David and Solomon, and God's heart was gladdened.

31.1 **Idolatry Removed** Following this celebration, the Israelite guests begin to remove the signs of Ba'al and Asherah worship, not only in Judah, but also in Israel's territory. They then returned home.

31.2- 21 As well as assigning the priests their ongoing duties, Hezekiah calls for a great offering for the provisions for the Temple service. The willing Judeans bring in tithes and offerings, more than enough, to supply all the priests and their families.

Because of Hezekiah's reforms, he prospers.

## Day 186

### Isaiah Sees Salvation in the Midst of Suffering for Israel-Judah

Isa 24.1 – 27.1; 32.1-8; 35.1-10

**24.1-23 Devastation on the Land** In Isaiah's words of prophecy there is an ambiguity in the sense that he uses the word in Hebrew *eretz/aretz* (Heb עֵרֶץ) meaning both land and earth, which could mean that he is speaking of the land of Israel, or also of a much wider concept, the whole created order. English translators have opted for the wider concept word, *earth*, and while this is acceptable as a translation, it does not maintain the ambiguity of the Hebrew term, and immediately leads us away from the more localized context which Isaiah is speaking to.

It seems in fact that Isaiah has both the micro and the macro in view; the land of Israel is in line for a mighty upheaval, which will affect everyone, because of the breaking of covenant with the Lord. But later in this chapter, this extends to a much wider scope of the nations beyond, which Isaiah has also been warning of a deluge of blood to come.

In the midst of the suffering however, there are breaks in the clouds – perhaps Isaiah has in mind the reforms of Hezekiah, and the signs of God's presence still with them; so there is singing heard to the theme 'Glory to the Righteous One' (24.14)

However, the wider picture is of storms to come, and on a wide scale, although God will still keep a place of holiness for Himself in Jerusalem on Mount Zion. (24.23)

**25.1-12 A Psalm of Praise** Whilst there is judgement coming, the people of God continue to worship and exalt Him. There is a vision here of Jerusalem becoming a haven, a safe place for the nations – even death itself will be destroyed here. Here (25.7-8) is a clearly messianic reference to the death and resurrection of Christ, as well as to the more metaphorical idea of Judah going into national death and resurrection through exile and return. The Lord will wipe away all tears and disgrace will be removed from the land/earth.

This will be the vindication of the trust of the people of the Lord in His ability to rescue them (25.12)

### 26. 1 – 27.1 Judah's Hope in the Lord

Again, perhaps encouraged by the righteous acts of Hezekiah's reform and restoration of the worship of the Lord, Isaiah sees Jerusalem being the place of salvation (Heb יְשׁוּעָה *Yeshuah* – deliverance and rescue) so that the Lord will keep in wholeness the one who anchors their hope in Him. In famous words from this chapter, Isaiah says

יְצַר סָמוּךְ תִּצֹר שְׁלוֹם שְׁלוֹם כִּי בְדָבָרוֹ

*Yetzer samukh titzor shalom shalom ki bhekha batuach*

Mind dependent you'll maintain whole whole for in you he trusts

Ie. The mind which is depending on you will be kept in wholeness, because he is trusting in You. (The word *shalom* is more than just peace – it is a whole wellbeing.)

There is a yearning expressed for the Lord in later verses, and for his justice to come. Other rulers have ruled over His people, but only the Lord is worthy of honour.

Ruin has caught up with the wicked (26.14-18) and they have gone into oblivion. Even those who sought the Lord have produced nothing, giving birth to wind rather than progeny, not meeting their destiny to be a blessing to the earth.

Yet here is a promise of hope, of resurrection – here is a reference both to the return of the exiles, and to the future hope of life out of death. It would no doubt be words like this upon which Jesus will draw to explain His victory over death in the days of after His resurrection.

32.1-2 There is a right-wising coming, a king who will reign in straight ways, in righteousness. Fools will no longer be in charge, and noble men will stand by their noble deeds (32.8)

35.1-10 There is hope also for nature, for the creation around which has been subjected to famine and drought because of the people's covenant breaking. God will restore beauty and fruitfulness.

This passage rises into a paean of praise of the God who will turn the desert into streams, who will open the ears of the deaf and eyes of the blind, who will make the lame leap and the dumb sing.

And the upshot will be a way of life, a way of holiness, a way clear and separate to walk on, where the days of Eden will be restored, and the people of Zion will come home with songs, crowned with joy. This is the promise of the restoration of Israel, but also of the coming Kingdom of God which still awaits fulfilment. Isaiah's words resonate still in our hearts as we long for the final transformation of the earth at the coming of Jesus Christ to restore the union of heaven, the unseen glory and the creation visible around us.

## **Day 187**

### **Isaiah Warns Against Turning Back**

Isa 28.1 – 15; 29.13; 28.16-29; 22.1-14; 29.1- 8; 33.1; 29.9- 12, 14 – 21

In spite of the apparent revival in Judah, Isaiah knows the waywardness of people's hearts, and warns that judgment is still due to Jerusalem inasmuch as she has resisted God's ways.

**28.1-15 Judgement to Israel-Ephraim** Isaiah first brings a word against the binge-culture of the northern kingdom, here called Ephraim after one of the biggest tribes making it up. It is destined to fall, while the remnant of Israel, Judah, will see the Lord crown them with His presence. There will be a respite, therefore, for the south.

Isaiah paints a terrible picture of a drink-sodden leadership of the nation, and of their inability to lead coherently. Therefore, the Lord will treat them like children, putting them under close discipline and teaching them the ABC again. But the outcome will be their downfall, because they think they have cheated death and will be protected against the coming onslaught from the north.

- 29.13 The key issue is that while people are going through the religious motions, their hearts and lives are far from God, their worship is institutional and empty.
- 28.16-22 But there is a *right-wising* to come, and their talk of cheating death will come to nothing.
- 28.23-29 The Lord points out that there is reason for this pain and suffering which is coming. It is, like bringing the harvest out of the ground, a way of separating the land from the evil within it, and it is high time for such a harvest.
22. 1-14 Despite Isaiah's warnings, Jerusalem continues its partying as though nothing were amiss. Armies will come down against it, and will break through the defences of Zion, but Jerusalem ignores the word and keeps on its shallow merry way.
- 29.1 – 8 The Lord speaks to Jerusalem as *Ariel* (Heb אֲרִיאֵל =Lion of God) warning of the coming attack against her, which God has commissioned for her punishment. God Himself is coming in the hordes to bring retribution for her faithlessness.
- 33.1 But there will also be payback for the oppressor who has not spared God's people, and they will not escape justice themselves.
- 29.9 – 21 The Lord is going to bring to nothing the so-called wisdom of men; they are not listening to the Lord's servants, the prophets and the seers, so their own plans will come to nothing. The Lord will not allow the creature to supplant the Creator, the pot to dictate to the potter. This upside-down world of man's self-exaltation will come to an end. But instead, the Lord will be revealed, and blind eyes will open. There will be a restoration of the Lord's words and ways, and those who mock God will be removed.

## Day 188

### An Awakening is Coming

Isa 29.17 – 24; 27.2-13; 32.12-20; 33.2-24; 22.15-25

- 29.17- 24 Out of the terrible judgment of the earlier passages, hope will emerge, hope that the covenant of God with Israel will be honoured yet and God known among His people. The hard hearts will be softened, and they will come to understand the ways of God.
- 27.2-13 There is return to the theme of the vineyard, reminiscent of Isaiah 5, which God watches over and waters continually. Jacob will again be rooted and fruitful, fruit *which will fill all the earth* . The word Isaiah uses here is not *eretz* (Heb אֶרֶץ), land or earth, but is *tebhel* (Heb תְּבֵלָה) from a root meaning moist, but used in general to refer to the whole mass of the land-space, that is the world. In this, we see God's intention still stands for Israel to be the vehicle of planetary purpose, through them God will touch the world.

A question is asked whether the destruction that Israel has endured means that God is intent on her total destruction (27.7) But in verse 9, it becomes apparent that there will be a reconciliation through this threshing, the evil of Ba'al and Asherah, the chaff will be purged away, and the fruitfulness will be left. Those who were exiled will return and serve the Lord on the holy mountain of Zion.

32.12 – 20 Although mourning will follow the threshing process, and there will be a time of bare earth, when God's Spirit is released upon Israel again, real fruitfulness will return, and justice, God's order restored (Heb מִשְׁפָּט *mishpat*) will return the desert to peace and righteousness.

This theme of fruitfulness and harvest in peace is significant because of the practices of the Ba'alists who link their idolatry to plentiful harvest. The Lord is the Lord of the harvest.

33.2-16 There is a heart-cry here from Isaiah

יְהוָה חַנּוּן לָךְ קוֹיֵנוּ? *Adonai (YHWH) chanenu, lekha kivinu*

Lord, be favourable to us, towards you our expectation

In the midst of the devastation of the land which is coming, the Lord is still to be praised and exalted. The picture of chaff and fruit is taken up again, as the godless are terrified of the nightmare of separation of good from evil. Indeed, who can endure such a 'consuming fire'? The answer comes (33.15), the one who keeps straight, who refuses to be corrupted away from the Lord's paths.

33.17-24 The promise is that such God-fearers will see 'the king in his beauty', talking here about the restoration of the monarchy to Israel, and the full extent of the land promised to them; the foreign officials, the tax-collectors and troops of the foreign invaders will be removed, and Jerusalem will be returned to Godly order under the Kingship of God.

It will be a time of plenty and safety, health and reconciliation, when this comes to pass.

### 22.15 – 25 **The Chancellor to Be Replaced**

Corruption is always close to ungodly government, and here Isaiah delivers a word to Shebna, Hezekiah's steward, or chancellor. (Heb סֹכֵן *sokhen* from a root meaning to be familiar, to minister to - Shebna is spoken of also in 2 Kings 18.18) It appears that Shebna has been treating himself to the good life (or perhaps, the monumental in death) by providing himself with a private grave-space in the rock, presumably in Jerusalem. He also has swish transport, as his chariot is mentioned – which Isaiah says will be useless to him in death. He is to be deposed, and replaced by another, Eliakim Ben Hilkiyah, who will be faithful and effective to the house of David, and Hezekiah in particular. However, it appears that there will be a limited time of effectiveness for Eliakim, who will also be cut off from his position.(22.25)

In the 2 Kings 18.18 reference, and elsewhere, we certainly see Eliakim by then taking the lead, while Shebna is still around, designated a *scribe*, rather than over Hezekiah's minister.