

Day 196

Babylon Will Fall

Isaiah 45.14 – 48.15

45.14 -25 **The Gentiles Will Know God.** Those who have oppressed and held down Judah, including Egypt and Ethiopia, will come in contrition to her. The tables are to be turned when the captivity of Judah comes to an end . But through this, deliverance is not just for the Jews, but for the whole earth . The words of 45.23-24 are echoed later in the declaration of Philippians 2, that ‘every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.’ God’s purpose through Abraham, to touch and embrace all the nations of the earth will be fulfilled.

46.1-13 **Babylonian Idols Powerless.** Bel (meaning ‘Master’ and similar to Canaanite Ba’al, referring specifically to the Babylonian main god Marduk) and Nebo, (son of Marduk, and his attendant), idols of Babylon, are seen as burdensome luggage when set against the incomparable Creator God, who is ordering the events of history to fulfil His planetary purpose, and who is sustaining Judah for the purpose of her deliverance.

47.1-11 **Babylon will Fall** The redemption of the people of God will come at the moment when Babylon, portrayed as a wanton, widowed young woman, is taken from her throne, and her sorcery is shown to be the vain, empty thing it is.

47.12-15 **Fraud of Astrology** Astrology was a common means of divination in the ancient world, the predictive qualities of the constellations peddled by many who held them to be supernaturally imprinted with the course of human history. However, since the stars are creations of the one, true God, they themselves have no power to rescue or deliver, and the predictions of the stargazers will be found to be quackery.

48.1-15 **The Lord Has the Key to the Future** By contrast with the astrologers and false prophets, the Lord will reveal the future in its newness, so that none will be able to claim that ‘it was written in the stars’. He will not give his glory to any other claimant.

The Lord Himself is the maker of all things, and rules them. No idol has ever given insight such as the Lord (YHWH) gives. As an earnest of this revelation, the Lord is foretelling the coming of Cyrus, ‘the Lord’s chosen ally’ to bring Babylon to an end.

Day 197

Exile Will End

Isaiah 48.16 – 50.11

48.16-22 **Redemption Comes in Spite of Hard-Heartedness** If the people of Judah had listened to the Lord sooner, He would not have needed to take them this hard journey. The promise is that they will leave Babylon, with singing, and they will experience the Lord’s love as their *go’el*- Redeemer. They could have gone a way of peace, but, as Isaiah says, crooked ways are not wholesome, safe ways. (v.22).

49.1- 13 **God's Servant Isaiah, Israel, Messiah** Once again, there are several levels to this word from the prophet. First, there is the prophet himself, who is called from his birth to serve the Lord. He almost despairs of seeing God's purpose achieved, but the Lord encourages him and strengthens him, and gives him a commission not only to Israel, but to all nations.

On another level, the word is to Israel as a whole, as the servant of the Lord corporately. She will be released from her bondage and made a prophetic message to the world. On yet a third level, the word refers to the coming messenger of the Lord, the summit of Israel's hopes, the Messiah, who will be anointed to bring release to the captives. (cf Luke 4/Isaiah 61)

14-26 **Exiles will not be forgotten** If God is turning His heart to the world, to the nations, does that mean He is forgetting His people, the descendants of Abraham by race? No way, says the Lord, revealing His utter reliance and compassion for His people. Even if a woman could forget her child, which is unusual and goes against the deepest human bonded love, the Lord cannot forsake His people.

He has 'tattooed them on his palms' (Heb *עַל-כַּפַּיִם חָקַן תִּיךְ Hen, al-kapayim chaqqotikh* – 'Look, on palms I have engraved you.') This is a wonderful image – after all, we are familiar in our own culture with people who want to prove their devotion to their beloved by marking their bodies indelibly with their name ; in the same way, the marks of this covenanted love are borne for us in the flesh of our Redeemer's hands, feet and side. He cannot forget us.

The Lord is determined to bring His people back to their homeland, and to oppose any who would stand against them.

50.1- 11 **The Lord Will Deliver Those Who Trust Him** Far from the Lord not having control of Israel's situation, He intends to repair the damage done to them because of the consequences of their sin. If the servant of the Lord will just be faithful, and even in the face of antagonism and persecution stand firm in God's call, then the Lord will vindicate. However, if there is a persistence in their own ways, there will be continued trouble and pain.

Day 198

Restoration will Come Through the Suffering Servant

Isaiah 51.1 – 54.3

51.1-2 **Recalling Abraham and Sarah** The prophet takes Judah back to the starting point, in Abraham and Sarah, and exhorts them to consider how this started, through faith, and through God's promise to bless the nations through them.

4- 23 **Rescue is Certain** God's rescue of His people is as certain as His conquest of the powers of chaos and darkness. They are not to fear, even if cataclysms come, because the Lord is intent on deliverance. He will take the cup of suffering in the hands of the Jews and transfer it to the oppressors.

52.1- 6 **Exile Distasteful to God** 'You sold yourselves pointlessly, you will be redeemed without cost to you. (9v.3) The Lord sees how His people are oppressed, and

longs for the day when Zion's purity and beauty will be restored. For this, the exiles should prepare themselves, and be ready to move home.

7-15 **The Good News of Redemption** The picture the prophet uses here is of the messenger who brings a report from the battle and reports victory. The word for good news in Hebrew is *Basar* (Heb בָּשָׂר) which is used subsequently for the Gospel of Jesus Christ in Hebrew translation.

But this good news is primarily of the release of the people of the Lord and their return to their homeland – not as from Egypt, in haste and fear, but this will be a return in the full light of day, which of course it will be as they are sent home by royal decree.

Yet, again, the prophet speaks of a greater scope of redemption, of the coming deliverer of all mankind, who, by His sacrifice, by His face 'marred more than anybody's' will sprinkle (Heb נָזַף *nazah* – used especially of blood sprinkled in sacrifice.) the nations, silencing the rulers as they recognise the awesome power of God's redemptive work.

53.1-12 **The Suffering and Rising Servant** Before moving to the wider panorama of universal redemption in Christ which this chapter immediately bespeaks to the Christian reader, it is worth considering what the prophet was thinking of himself. It is hard to look beyond the depiction of Calvary which comes to us, which seems so obvious given the closeness to the events of 33AD.

For the prophet, the suffering servant is the corporate expression of Israel and Judah; they become the one who carries the sin of the world. Yet, through the exile and return, they will be renewed, the king will be restored, and they will have a great fruitfulness from their tears. Through their suffering, the whole world will find redemption.

However, in the context of Christ, these words, being read by the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts, and explained as referring to the crucifixion and resurrection of the one called the Lamb of God, Jesus of Nazareth, are an awesome presaging of the story of the Passion.

Worth noting are words Isaiah uses; in verse 3, the servant is one who is יְדוּעַת לִי *vidua' choli*, known by grief and sickness – intimate with sorrow. This is one who is no stranger to our human sorrow.

But the Lord desired this way of suffering (v.10) and through it will bring redemption to many. This chapter has become a lynchpin in the understanding of atonement for Christian believers because of this.

54.1-3 **Life will Return** Far from being a spent force, and despite seeming to be forsaken and fruitless, the restored Judah will be enlarged and will experience growth where constriction seemed her lot.

Day 199

Israel as God's Spouse and Salvation for the Nations

Isaiah 54.4 – 56.12

Some scholars suggest that a third division of the book of Isaiah is found in chapters 56 to 66, and takes as its theme the rebuilding of the Temple, dating from the in the post-exilic period. This is not conclusive, however.

54.4-17 Israel as God's Spouse, And Her Covenant Security There is a promise here that the one who is truly the 'Ba'al', the consort, the husband or master of the beloved, Israel is the Lord Creator of all things, not a fertility God who goes by that misnomer. He is the *go'el* (Heb לְגֹאֵל), the Kinsman-redeemer of Israel, renewing the covenant with a wife briefly estranged.

The promise in verse 10 is that the *chesed* (Heb חֶסֶד) of the Lord will not fail, will guarantee these promises to Israel, and although enemies may be fashioning arms against her, the promise is that no weapon designed to harm Israel will be successful (v.17)

55.1- 13 The Free Gift of God's Grace The words of Jesus in John 7 echo the call of the prophet at this point – 'Is anyone thirsty?' The Prophet invites all to be satisfied out of the covenanted benefits of the living God. Why struggle to buy what cannot be bought with finance?

The promise to Israel is of a prosperity which others will come and share and receive from as well. The Word of the Lord will multiply and produce the fruit it is designed for. The promise to Abraham will be fulfilled.

56.1-2 Call for Righteousness Key for those following the Lord are that they 'maintain justice' – *right-wising, mishpat* (Heb מִשְׁפָּט) and act righteously, straight , in *tzedaqah* (Heb צְדָקָה). This is also means living with the rhythm, God's rhythm of Sabbath, rather than behaving like unregulated machines, striving to get and have unremittingly. (v.2)

3 – 8 Salvation for the Nations Isaiah's perspective of salvation for those other than Israel is explicitly voiced here, in a rather shocking way. He asserts that even foreign eunuchs who adhere to and call on God's covenant will receive an inheritance in the new Kingdom. This is despite the fact that eunuchs are specifically excluded from God's people under the Rule of Life in *Torah*.

In verse 6, the invitation is extended to the children of foreigners, who can also find salvation in the ambit of Judah's life.

9-12 Spiritual leaders judged However, those who are supposed to be guarding Judah are accused of failing in their tasks of watching the people of the Lord. They will find disaster coming upon them.

Day 200

True Godliness

Isaiah 57.1 – 59.21

The prophet turns his attention to the seemingly perennial problem of Judah's divided loyalties between the Lord, her spouse, and the adulterous worship of idols. The Lord shows her what the true way is, the way of humble penitence and confession, the way of ethical righteousness which is more key than cultic rituals.

57.1 – 2 **The Righteous Perish** The prophet laments over the loss of the righteous (Heb קָדִישׁ *tzaddiq*) and the man of *chesed*, grace-obligation (Heb חֶסֶד) who goes away without any regret, though he will spend his days in wholeness and peace, sleeping well without fear, because of his dependence on God.

3- 21 **The Idolatry of Israel and Its Payback** But the Lord is taking issue with the mass of Judah's returnees who still practice the detestable old ways, the adulterous connivance with false idols who are not gods at all. Worship is still going on at the high places, child sacrifice, that monstrous ritual, is being practiced in hidden places, and behind the doors on which the Scriptures of God are displayed (v.8), prostitution is going on to the fertility gods.

The political process is all part of this, as the king is implicated (v.9), but the Lord wants this irrelevance removed from His people (v.14), for none of it has any benefit. There will be forgiveness for the penitent, (v.15,18) but unfruitful restlessness for those who persist in this way. (v.21)

58.1-14 **Empty Fasting, True Fasting** Here in this chapter, the people present to the Lord their religious rituals; 'we have done what you asked, we have appeased you' they say, 'how have we got it so wrong, when we have fulfilled our cultic obligations to you?' (v2,3)

But the Lord makes a clear call, not for ritual precision, but for moral consistency. The worship of the Lord is not about formulaically doing so many things to please the deity, but about living in accordance with His character and nature. (v.6) Thus, justice is more important to the Lord than fasting. When character outweighs image, then the glory of the Lord will be seen and there will be fruitfulness. Also, the reflection of God's nature will be clearly seen, and acknowledged by others. (v.12).

Living in God's sabbatical rhythm, and loving His Name and His nature, will produce great fruitfulness in the nation. (v.13,14)

Listening to a lecture recently by Miroslav Volff, theology professor at Yale, I noted from his insights that the nature of monotheism is to make an issue of the valuing of all of creation, since it is the one, true God's expression, and therefore, ethical and moral concerns are paramount, while polytheism is much more taken up with procedures and rituals to try and keep the many idols favourable to the world. This chapter is a fine example of that contrast.

59.1-15 **Confession of Sin** Forgiveness cannot be offered, grace cannot be experienced without an inventory of the offences for which forgiveness is needed. Just a general 'sponging clean' of the slate does not take seriously the requirements of

justice. I can only be acquitted when I know the charges against me, and have the penalty paid for me.

Here is a catalogue of Israel's failure – blood-guilt, lies, corruption, violence, injustice and crooked dealings, all are on the charge sheet of the people and their leaders. This has left them in pain and darkness, with no sense of what is right. But there is a confession in the mouth of the prophet, recognizing the treachery and rebellion, and its prevention of justice.

Says the prophet, in verse 15, וַיֵּרָא יְהוָה וַיֵּרַע בְּעֵינָיו כִּי-אֵין מִשְׁפָּט

Va-yar' Adonai (YHWH) va-ye'ar' be'eynayv ki-eyn mishpat

And saw the Lord and spoiled in his eyes for no justice

(The Lord saw it, and it was rotten in his eyes, for there was no justice.)

Far from a concern for correct procedures in worship, what the Lord is most appalled by is the lack of any action in His people to set to rights the Creation which has been so marred by evil and corrupt behaviour in man.

16 – 21 The Lord Achieves Rescue Himself Given this atrocious state of affairs, that no one in Israel seems able to make the changes needed, the Lord steps in and takes action Himself. He rescues and breaks the power of the systemic rot, pushing back the enemy, and delivering vengeance on those who resist. Because of this, the nations will see and know the Lord.

The Spirit comes in like a flood through a broken dam, to break through the barriers of the enemy, allowing the redeemer to reach Zion and to release those who turn from their failures. (v.19.20) As a result, the covenant God will dwell with His people by His Spirit forever. (v21)

Day 201

The New Kingdom

Isaiah 60.1 – 64.12

60.1-22 Zion Fulfils Her Calling Once the Lord has achieved the promised deliverance of the previous chapter, Judah, and in particular Jerusalem, will be the world centre of salvation. The Lord will be seen through the vicarious death and resurrection of the nation, through rejection, exile and return.

Here again is this wide panoramic vision of the Isaianic prophecies of a God whose heart is much wider than just the chosen nation, Israel. Arabia is coming, Europe is coming, foreigners will be part of the restoration of the Temple, Lebanon will bring the wood for the sanctuary. The image is of a flowing of the nations to the Creator of the earth, witnessed to by the redeemed people of the Lord.

The rejection and redemption of Israel are the sign of the power of the Lord to redeem the whole of Creation. This is the hope of a new reality, where God is the glory, the light

itself of the whole earth, and in the fullness of time, God will haste to fulfil this intention. (v.22)

61.1- 11 The Manifesto of the Kingdom In a sense, this passage is the manifesto of the Kingdom. The Lord will set to rights, will *right-wise* what has been upset and turned over in the heart of creation, and the power by which it happens will be His Spirit.

These are the words, of course, with which *the* Anointed one, the Messiah, (Heb מָשִׁיחַ *mashiach*) launches His earthly service. When the *Right-wiser* comes, the oppressed hear good news, the broken are made whole, the captives are freed, prisoners are released and the Lord's favour is available. But it is also the day of reckoning for those who would keep the world bound in its chaos – so it is also a day of vengeance on the forces of disorder and corruption.

In this new order, ashes are exchanged for crowns, perfumed oil moisturizes the dry, cracked skin of tear-stained faces, and those whose clothes are torn in desperation are given party-best to praise in.

But this is not just froth and bubble – there is a rootedness, and a permanence reflected in the oaken-righteous planting of God. (v.3) And this people will transform the broken world around them, not only the Jews, but the nations, the Gentiles, the *goyim*.

Jürgen Moltmann has commented 'ascetic Christianity sees the world as evil and retreats from it; revolutionary Christianity sees the world as evil, and transforms it.'

All this is because the Lord loves *mishpat*, the world set to rights, as it was meant to be, hating corruption. (v.8) In his dependability (Heb אֱמֶת *emet* – truth, faithfulness) God will establish His covenant, to mark out the ones upon whom God's blessing is operative. (v.9)

There is a response of joy from the one who has experienced this turn-around in person; it like being wedded to the Lord, and fruitfulness ensues, with righteousness and praise together being harvested – both worship and right action go hand in hand! (v.10-11)

62.1-5 The Bride's New Name This beautiful new bride of God, His people, will be renamed through this marriage with Him – no longer called Forsaken (Heb עֲזוּבָה *Azubah*) and Desolate (Heb שְׁמוּמָה *Shemomah*), but now called *Hephzibah* (Heb חֶפְצִי-בָה *Chephtzi-bah*, lit. my delight in her) and *Be'ulah* (בְּעוּלָה *Be'ulah* literally, 'Ba'aled', mastered or husbanded, from same root as Ba'al, a repetition of the fact again that Ba'al is no true husband to Israel, but the Lord is.)

62. 6 – 12 Anticipation of Deliverance There is a call to intercession here, for the people of the Lord to engage with Him in seeing this promise fulfilled. They are to pester the Lord until He meets His commitment! (i.e. give him no rest (Heb וְאַל-תִּתְּנוּ דָמִי לוֹ *ve-al tittenu dami lo* – lit. and do not give silence to Him))

There is an expectancy here of the deliverance to come, which will totally change the identity of His people to become 'the Holy People' (Heb אֲמ-הַקֹּדֶשׁ *Am ha-Qodesh*), the Redeemed of the Lord, (Heb גְּאוּלֵי יְהוָה *ge'uley Adonai (YHWH)*), Sought out, desired (Heb דְּרוּשָׁה *Derushah*) and the City Not Deserted (Heb אֵין לָא נְעֻזְבָה *'ir lo ne'ezabhab*) (v.12)

63.1-6 **Deliverance Implies Vengeance** As already alluded to, in notes above on chapter 59, rescue cannot be effected without justice being done, that is, without the forces which are holding the oppressed in disorder being removed and overturned themselves.

Thus, the Lord is seen, spattered with blood, but speaking righteousness (Heb זְדָקָה *tzedakah*) – this is the cost of the redemption, the trampling of evil among the nations, a terrible force for order.

63.7-9 **God's Chesed Grace-Obligation Recounted** There is a reminder of the *chesed* of the Lord here, in verse 7 called, 'many *cheseds*' implying that *chesed* is not just a state, but an action. This is shown in His redemption.

63.10- 14 Despite this *chesed* and love of God, Israel hardened their heart, despite the fact of God's awesome miraculous rescue through the sea and the desert. The Holy Spirit did not give up on this rebellious crew, but has walked with them to this point, to vindicate His Name and His choice.

63.15 – 64.12 **The Prayer of Exiled Israel** In response to all these promises of deliverance, and the call to give the Lord no rest, here is Israel's plaintive cry for the Lord to come and be with them, and save them.

'Even though Abraham disowns us, and Jacob-Israel doesn't recognise us, you Lord, are our Father.' ... These are the words Jesus uses to teach His disciples to pray – 'Our Father', (Heb אֲבִינֵנוּ *Abhinu*) .

The Lord is questioned about His choice to harden Israel against Him, but there is a cry now for Him to return to them.

In 64.1- 6, there is an acknowledgement of the deep stain of sin upon the people of the Lord, but a cry for His fiery purging. The virgin daughter of Israel stands in her soiled garments of menstruation (וּכְבֵּהֶד עֵדִים *u-khe-bheged 'iddim* literally, 'and as garment of periods'), wasting away in her sin.

7 – 12 But again, there is this reminder to the Lord that He is 'Our Father' (Heb אֲבִינֵנוּ *Abhinu*) , the potter with the clay, who has the possibility to remake, to take out the flaws. Jerusalem is a desert, but He has promised it will no longer be deserted. The Temple lies in ruins, but the promise is of restoration. When will this be? (The reference to the Temple in ruins is one indicator to dissenting scholars from a conservative view that this part of Isaiah is from a later date, after the return of Judah to Jerusalem, but before the restoration of the Temple itself.)

Day 202

The Consummation of All Things and Manasseh's Repentance

Isaiah 65.1 – 66.24; 2 Kings 19.37; 2 Chron.33.10 – 17

65.1-7 The Lord's people have refused His revelation, preferring to run after idols, seeing themselves as more religious than God Himself! (Holier than Thou..) (v.5) This is why the consequences of sin are coming upon the nation.

8 – 12 But there will be a remnant, a small band of survivors who will return to the land of Israel and will start over under God, as will be seen in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah to come. However, for the apostates, those who have deserted the covenant, they will end in tragedy and death.

13 – 16 There is a distinction between those who follow the Lord and those who follow the idols. A new start awaits those who align themselves with the Lord's purpose, a hideous end for those who choose the false gods.

65.17-25 Once again, we are looking at several layers of interpretation in Isaiah's words. The initial meaning is the renewal of the land and a new relationship with the Lord, represented by the heavens, seen as His dwelling. Jerusalem will be restored, and a new era of hope and joy will emerge. The promised blessings of Jubilee will be there, and longevity will be a sign of the absence of warfare, as those who formerly fought and devoured one another, represented by the lion and the lamb, will live in peace with one another.

However, there is an eschatological aspect to this passage also, as it expresses the yearning for a renewal of all things in the resurrection of creation when Messiah comes. In that sense the Hebrew word, *eretz* (Heb עֶרֶץ) meaning land also can mean 'earth', for in the beginning God created *ha-shamayim ve- ha'aretz* (Heb שָׁמַיִם וְאֶרֶץ) meaning the whole cosmos. The people of God will be at the heart of that renewal, and eternal peace will be the dividend of the ages.

66. 1 – 2 One of the great fallacies of the era of the Kings was to believe that the Lord could be boxed in a building in Jerusalem, somehow owned and possessed by the state, and appeased by religious ritual.

As the Lord spoke to David back in 2 Sam.7.5-6, the Lord cannot be the possession of a people, cannot be contained in a stone box. He is the Lord of all the nations, something Isaiah makes clear throughout his prophecies, and rules over the whole of heaven and earth. But what He does regard is the sanctuary of the heart, the one whose spirit is broken and humble; this is the real holy of holies that He loves.

3-6 On the other hand, those who serve false idols will be cut off from the Lord's people, while those who have suffered ridicule because they have held to the Lord's rule of life, His *Torah*, (v.5) will be vindicated.

66.7-14 The image of the woman in labour is used as a picture of Judah's coming deliverance. The baby is hidden all through pregnancy, expected yet unseen. This will be a quick birth, says the Lord, things will move swiftly like a woman having a child in a short time. But the outcome will be a happy baby feeding from its mother, the city of Jerusalem.

15-17 The wicked, on the other hand, will go down in flames.

18- 21 In the closing words of the prophecy of Isaiah, there is a quite cosmic vision of all nations and languages being gathered; this is a hope which transcends the ethnic limits of Judah. And because of this, the message of the Lord's love and faithfulness will be taken to foreign nations by His people, they will be the proclaimers of His glory (v.19) in Asia, Africa, Europe and they will bring back the fruit of their labours, some of whom will even be accepted as Levites and priests. (v.21)

The book ends with the vision of a universal worship of the One True God, in a new earth united with the realm of heaven, while the carnage of the godless will be an everlasting memorial to the futility of life without the Lord (YHWH).

Manasseh Rebels then Repents c.681BC

2 Kings 19.37 (mirrored in 2 Chron.32.21c and Isa 37.38) In Nineveh, political intrigue abounds, as the emperor Sennacherib is assassinated by his sons, Adrammelech and Sharezer, presumably believing they could stage a coup and take the throne. However, they are forced to flee to Ararat in today's eastern Turkey, and their brother Esarhaddon takes over the throne.

2 Chron.33.10 – 17 It is in this era that Manasseh, whom we left on day 192, in 2 Kings 21, abandons the Godly ways of his father Hezekiah to reinstate the idols of old. Because of this, under God's judgment, he is captured by the Assyrians and taken to Babylon.

Perhaps it is in remembering the words of Isaiah and the other prophets that Manasseh cries out to the Lord, which moves the Lord's heart towards him, and causes him to be released from prison and returned to Jerusalem.

Because of this, Manasseh makes repairs to the walls of Jerusalem, increasing its security and the rest of Judah's defences, and gets rid of the idol worship he has permitted. The one thing he does not do, however, is to stop the unauthorised sacrifices to the Lord on the high places.