
Day 174 - June 23

The Divided Kingdom (930-725 BCE)

The Prophecies of Isaiah

Readings: *Isaiah 1:1-2:18; 3:8-4:1; 32:9-11; 5:1-5:23*

Reflections:

- Just as Joel, Hosea and Amos will focus on Israel, the prophet Isaiah will serve as a spiritual leader for Judah for 40 years. His themes: Judah's addiction to religion and idolatry, Judah's failure to do justice for the poor, and ultimately their pride. He will announce the coming Messiah with the greatest of clarity and in the midst of terrible sin still offer great hope for the future.
- The opening verses of Isaiah help us to understand that punishment does not ultimately change the human heart. In Isaiah 5:1-7 we see the prophet tell the story of God's people using the analogy of an owner with a vineyard. Here is his summary: "The vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight. And he looked for justice but saw bloodshed; for righteousness but heard cries of distress."
- In Isaiah 1:10ff we see God has no interest in religion, "I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats....Stop bringing meaningless offerings...your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates..." None of the traditions or symbols or expressions captured in the Law means anything ultimately to God. What matters are their hearts and their ability to express God's heart through mercy and justice. "Stop doing wrong, learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow."
- Throughout we will see Isaiah interject glimpses of hope: "I will thoroughly purge away your dross and remove your impurities. I will restore your judges as in days of old, your counselors as at the beginning. Afterward you will be called the City of Righteousness, the Faithful City." We see three things here. First, we see a reference to God removing sin, rather than restoring religion. God will make the people pure and we will see this with the death of Jesus, the final sacrifice and the coming of the Spirit to change us from the inside out. Second, we see the restoration of a flat leadership model for community and removal of the kings. This is important in that Moses was not a king but a sent one, an apostle. Similarly, through Jesus we will see that a community of leaders is what is

restored by God, a company of mutually submitted counselors to shepherd God's people. Lastly, we see that God is still looking for a community of people who will be able to display his righteous character to the world. The New Jerusalem will not be an actual city but a term to describe a community of people who live throughout the world bringing light to their nations.

- Key verse: "The eyes of an arrogant man will be humbled and the pride of men brought low; the Lord alone will be exalted in that day."
- We also see in these early chapters Judah's preoccupation with materialism. From the desire for wealth, possessions and power to women focusing on their outward beauty, we see a people obsessed with externals and appearances. But God's judgment is falling on these people who have abandoned God's heart and have chosen to decide from themselves what is good and evil. "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil...to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight....who acquits the guilty for a bribe but deny justice to the innocent."
- Even in these first chapters we see the consistent messages God has been giving to Israel. In the unfolding story of "what doesn't work," God's messages can not be any clearer. Generation after generation in Israel had the same problem, their complete inability to live the life God wanted for them. Leader after leader reveals the same root problem: the human heart must change or there is no hope for lasting transformation.