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Day 194 - July 13

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## Judah after Israel's Fall (725-585 BCE)

### *Isaiah's Prophecies about Restoration and the Messiah*

Readings: *Isaiah 41:11-29; 42:1-25; 43:1-7*

#### ***Reflections:***

- These verses of promise must have been difficult to believe for those held in captivity. The promises were staggering: 1) You won't be able to find your enemies; 2) You will be made into a miraculously powerful threshing sledge that will level every obstacle; 3) Every need of yours will be met with abundant provisions. We humans cry out for God to speak when we are broken and needy. When he speaks we then have a really big challenge to believe him. These words of comfort and affirmation were all true but they stood in sharp contrast to all of the visuals that surrounded them. We must remind ourselves that we only know what God will do when he speaks. We can not assume anything until we have waited on him and heard his voice. Our own minds and hearts have preset convictions about how things should go and what is the best and what we think God wants. Only he knows though what truly is best, what plans he has and what purposes he is completing. Our role is simply to listen and trust.
- One of the strong images of God's salvation for Israel is the restoration of creation. The transformation of the desert back into a "garden of Eden" vision for creation reminds us that God's concern and therefore salvation is holistic and not simply isolated to our own individual lives.
- The idols, as well as the religious leaders and prophets of the religions Israel had turned to, are all exposed as completely false and worthless. Although we are more sophisticated today, this challenges us to reflect on what we may be tempted to rely on rather than trusting completely in God. Religious approaches to God are great escapes from the more difficult work of trusting God. Religion offers us simple clear cut answers and solutions that are practical and straight forward. Do this and everything will be fine. A relationship with God is much more difficult. He makes us face our fears as we learn to trust in him. He calls us to embrace all our weaknesses as we discover his power. He invites us to humble ourselves as we wait for him to lift us up.
- The prophecies about the coming king, the Messiah are striking. Isaiah's clarity is truly astounding. (Again we must remember that Isaiah is saying all of this when Israel is in

the midst of the very worst and most difficult situation.) What do we learn about the Messiah?

- He will come in the power of the Spirit: “I will put my Spirit on him” and he will bring justice to the nations.”
  - His work is to establish true justice: “And he will bring justice to the nations.”
  - He will be humble: “He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets.”
  - He will be gracious to the broken: “A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.”
  - He will bring salvation to all people: “I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, to open the eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.”
- What clear and precise words about the coming Messiah. No doubt this was surprising and shocking to the readers. A merciful king? A humble leader? A savior for all the nations, even their enemies? One can imagine that Isaiah’s hearers would have tried to rationalize how this could be possible.
  - God clearly announces that this coming Messiah will be something completely new. “See the former things have taken place (suggests being complete), and new things I declare; before they spring into being I announce them to you. Sing to the Lord a new song....” God reveals his sovereign power by telling us ahead of time what he is going to do. One of the ways God calls his people to respond to this announcement is to write and sing new songs. We must remind ourselves of the truth continually, and as a good cognitive therapist, God gives his people a practical way they can remain fixed on what he has said. Turn his promises for the future into a great new song and then sing them over and over. Singing new songs is a way to help our hearts remain fixed on his promises and renewed in faith even when the visuals don’t line up.
  - Isaiah wraps up this portion with a quick review of the story of Israel thus far. Again we see clearly that the meta-narrative of Israel is the story of “what doesn’t work.” God through the prophet basically says that nothing he has done so far has worked. Israel has been basically blind and deaf. Even the painful consequences of breaking the Law (like being in captivity) has not lead them to take to heart how messed up they are. Law, even glorious Law (the Torah), punishment (clear consequences), strong leadership (the kings and prophets), a secure place to do life (the land) – none of these actually change the human heart. But God’s love for Israel and all people moves him on to the next and most important chapter in the story. In these passages we see how much God truly loves us: “Fear not for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters (the red sea), I will be with you; and when you

pass through the rivers (the Jordan river), they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire (their recent captivity and persecution), you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze....Since you are precious and honored in my sight and because I love you....” “Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth – everyone who is called by name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.” John the apostle would say it this way: “How great a love God has lavished on us that we should be called children of God!” (I John 3:1) God’s grace is amazing!