

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

Isaiah's Prophecies about Restoration and the Messiah

Readings: *Isaiah 48:16-22; 49:1-26; 50:1-11*

Reflections:

- This section opens with a continued focus on understanding the importance of listening to God. "I am the Lord your God, who teaches you what is best for you, who directs you in the way you should go." Isaiah goes on to explain what good fruit comes from listening to, trusting in and obeying God. "Your peace would have been like a river" – A constant flow of peace. "Your righteousness like the waves of the sea" – Again an image of constancy. "Your children like its numberless grains (of sand)" – a promise of incredible fruitfulness and legacy. "Your name would never be cut off" – again an image of legacy and blessing. Peace and righteousness give us confidence in the core of who we are and in our standing before God. Many children and a good name give us confidence in community. In the history of Israel, there are many stories where what God asks people to do appears at first to be complete insanity (Noah and the arc, Abraham sacrificing Isaac, Moses confronting Pharaoh single-handedly, David and Goliath - to name just a few) but in the end we see that their obedience to God resulted in peace, righteousness, fruitfulness and affirmation of their name. The key is to know the mind of God and then learn to trust him even when it seems crazy.
- God goes on to remind them of two important truths: 1) when your forefathers passed through the desert, God took care of their needs; 2) there is no peace for the wicked. When our lives are in a bad place and those who reject God are living the good life, we need to remember that this is just a short term reality. God will prove faithful and the way of the wicked will lead to disaster.
- Israel (and likely Isaiah) is described as one who speaks God's word that is as sharp as a sword or as pointed as a polished arrow. When we know God's word and speak it out, it does cut to the heart. It has a way of exposing and rightly dividing our hearts before God. This image will be used throughout Scripture. Paul writes in Ephesians 6: 17, "and the sword of the Spirit which is the (God-breathed) word of God. Pray in the Spirit..." Here Paul is challenging us to see the power of God's word working through our prayers. As God speaks through us in prayer, the spiritual battle of our lives is won. In both

speaking his word to one another (including ourselves) as well as speaking it out in prayer, God's word equips us to move forward in seeing his will accomplished.

- Isaiah 49:6 is a key verse: "I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth." Isaiah goes on to write, "Kings will see you and rise up (stand to honor), princes will see and bow down (bow to humbly honor), because of the Lord, who is faithful...who has chosen you." Here we see the promise of the Messiah is not just to bring the truth of God to the nations (light) but also to establish a new authority through the Messiah, king of kings and lord of lords. It is not just enough to know the truth. The Lord desires much more than knowledge of the truth. He desires humble obedience within the context of loving relationship. For this leadership is needed. This coming king will be "a covenant for the people." God is a God of covenant. He desires to work through committed relationship and his Messiah will form a new covenant of salvation through his very self/life that will result in all people being set free from the slavery of sin and the darkness of living without God.
- God's promise of blessing remains consistent: He will feed and provide drink even in the desert. He will have compassion as he leads them and takes care of every need. He will level every obstacle that gets in the way. This promise will now be for all people. (Isaiah 49:10-12)
- When Israel heard these words, they didn't believe it. "But Zion said, "The Lord has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me." In those seasons of life, when it seems nothing is happening, it is very easy to feel like God has forsaken us. Yet the truth is he loves us and will never forsake us. God asks, "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne?" God through Isaiah then goes on to give an image that will take on new significance with the coming Messiah: "See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands." The nail scars on Jesus' hands are permanent reminders of his sacrificial love and covenant commitment to us.
- Isaiah continues to find images to describe the triumph of God's people as enemy kings and queens become "foster fathers", "nursing mothers" and servants. "...then you will know that I am the Lord; those who hope in my will not be disappointed." God works in and through all circumstances as a way to reveal himself. He is trustworthy and seeks to cultivate that deep trust with those who love him.
- Isaiah 50 again gives us further insight into this coming servant of the Lord. "The Sovereign Lord has given me an instructed tongue to know the word that sustains the weary." First, many of the words of people are tiresome and discouraging. God's servant will come to bring a message of hope for the weak, the hungry, the sick and the needy. As we will see in John 1:1 and following, Jesus will be "the word made flesh." He as God's communication with humanity will not come to condemn the world but to save it. The word he will bring will not be a word of condemnation but of grace, forgiveness and mercy.

- We also see that he will be a suffering servant. “I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting. Because the Sovereign Lord helps me I will not be disgraced. Therefore I will set my face like flint...It is the Sovereign Lord who helps me.” The coming king will not be a king who lives a life of luxury, pleasure and self-indulgence. This anointed one (Messiah or Christ) will experience abuse and ultimately death. He will be rejected, and mocked and scorned. Yet we see in this passage that to be attacked is not the same as disgraced. When we willfully choose to embrace suffering as a part of serving God, we do not suffer humiliation but we experience intimacy with our God, the God who suffers with us. The message of the cross is that suffering does not need to be the ultimate force of the universe. It can be conquered by self-sacrificial love and in this laying down of one’s life, mercy triumphs over sin, pain and injustice.