

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

### ***Isaiah's Prophecies about Restoration and the Messiah Spiritual Renewal under Manasseh***

**Readings: *Isaiah 65:1-25; 66:1-24; 2 Kings 19:37; 2 Chronicles 33:10-17***  
**Also see *Isaiah 37:38; 2 Chronicles 32:21***

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

- Isaiah 65 outlines God's judgment against those who are rebellious and his blessing for the remnant that remains true to him. In many ways, Isaiah 65 finds a striking parallel to Jesus' teaching on the separation of sheep and goats in Matthew 25:31-46. Notice that one of the central reasons for God's judgment was the failure of the people to respond to him when he reached out to them and spoke to them: "I revealed myself to those who did not ask me; I was found by those who did not seek me. To a nation that did not call on my name, I said, 'Here am I, here am I.' All day long I held out my hands to an obstinate people." "...for I called but you did not answer, I spoke but you did not listen. You did evil in my sight and chose what displeases me." Their refusal to listen to God speaking to them resulted in them ultimately choosing their own way and rejecting God's way. Like the goats in Jesus' parable, they ultimately revealed that they did not know God or have any true relationship with him. The remnant on the other hand does know God and as a result are blessed by him with their needs being met, joy in their hearts and a new name!
- Isaiah 65 culminates in a wonderful promise of God's future salvation for all creation. Here we see a powerful parallel with John's book of Revelation 21:1-4 "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'" In Isaiah's prophecy the hope is long life. In John's prophecy following Christ we see the promise of eternal life. In both, ultimate salvation is not a heavenly state but the recreation of the earth and sky (new heaven) and full restoration of the original vision of

the garden. Here in this new order we see that intimacy with God is fully restored: “Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear.”

- As Isaiah returns to the present state of God’s people in Isaiah 66, we see God express his heart to dwell with his people and be in relationship with them. “Where will my resting place be?” As he speaks this out, he immediately affirms again the heart condition needed for people to live in loving relationship with him. Notice what it isn’t. It isn’t keeping the law or offering sacrifices or living the most flawless life. “This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word.” We see once again that even before Jesus came, God was making it clear again and again that he cares absolutely nothing about religion or rule keeping. What he cares about is humility and people who deeply desire to live in relationship with him. Living in relationship is valuing what God says first and foremost. In a very real way, we care about the same thing that God cares about. We want our closest friends and family members to hear what we say and truly value what we share. In this way, understanding how we are made in his image helps us to understand who he is and what is important to him.
- In the very next verses, Isaiah 66:3-6, we see exactly what God hates: Religion! Israel had rejected his heart and what he was saying and were just blindly going through religious motions. This infuriated God and brought down on them the severe judgment. The statements against keeping the law are shocking! “But whoever sacrifices a bull is like one who kills a man, and whoever offers a lamb, like one who breaks a dog’s neck; whoever makes a grain offering is like one who presents pigs blood, and whoever burns memorial incense, like one who worships an idol.” WOW! A parallel today would be something like, “Whoever goes to church out of blind ritual is like someone who goes to a strip club, someone who puts a thousand dollars in the plate to impress the pastor is like someone who loses it gambling, someone who helps out with youth ministry to get brownie points in heaven is like someone who trains kids to kill in a gang, someone who hands out tracts on a street corner because they think they are better than everyone else is like someone who deals drugs. The statements here are meant to shock the reader into a double and triple take. If you don’t actually have a relationship with God, religion doesn’t just become irrelevant, it becomes hyper-destructive and offensive. The only thing that matters is a trust relationship expressing itself through love and open communication. Sounds like a healthy marriage.
- Isaiah 66:7-14 returns to the theme of God’s salvation and deliverance. Here we see again that God will work swiftly. In fact, he will work so quickly that it will catch everyone off guard. No one will see it coming until it is upon them. I think it is safe to say that the work of the Jesus happened exactly this way. Before anyone realized it, the salvation event had happened. When all of his disciples and followers thought that everything was a complete failure and Jesus was another failed Messiah...BOOM! The

resurrection happens and God's salvation had been accomplished through his death and resurrection! A new nation, a new country had been born in a day!

- "As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you...." Again we see the mother-heart of God.
- Isaiah 66:17 again gives us a horrible image to drive home the point of the evil of religion. Who will be destroyed? The person who consecrates themselves to go into a temple garden as well as the person who eats the flesh of pigs and rats...both of these will be destroyed together. Yikes!
- Isaiah 66:18 -24 reminds the reader again that God is coming for all nations, not just for Israel. All nations will see his glory. From all nations God will call out a new priesthood for all peoples. God's name will endure forever and those who rebel will face his horrible judgment.
- Possibly these words of harsh rebuke led to Isaiah's death. Jewish tradition maintains that Isaiah was sawn in two by his enemies during Manasseh's reign. If this represents true history, it is a sober reminder of the words of Hebrews 11:35 and following where we see in the Hall of Faith that not all faithful leaders see God's promises fulfilled in their lifetimes. Sometimes they die waiting for God's promises to be fulfilled and must watch from a heavenly viewpoint among the great cloud of witnesses that cheer on all those who run by faith (Hebrews 12:1-3).
- The restoration under Manasseh continues to follow the normal pattern for Israel and Judah. The people ignore God and sin greatly. Judgment falls. The leader repents. God relents and restores the nation. The people still follow after their idols. This is where we as readers slap our foreheads and shout, "You have got to be kidding me!" Yes, once again we see that rules, punishment and even having a perfect environment and good leadership does not change the human heart. It must be changed from the inside out!