

## Under The Fig Tree



### WEEK 29

2 Kings 15 contains a brief record of King Azariah, who was also called Uzziah. He was a good king but, nevertheless, did not completely remove the high places. These were altars to false gods situated on the hills and mountains of Judah. If we consider the world today we might sympathise with Uzziah, but that would be seeing things from a human perspective. It is very demanding to remove every remnant of false gods from a nation. Even countries that have had a great Christian heritage have given some ground to other religions. It is no small task to establish a country with undivided allegiance to the God of Israel. Yet, this is what God expected of Israel and Judah. They were to be lights in a dark world and there was to be absolutely no compromise to other gods. The high places would become a snare to Judah and a door through which evil could come in. When Uzziah died, his son Jotham followed his father in the good that he did, but also left the high places. When, in turn, his son Ahaz became king, the door was open for Judah to turn further from God. In 2 Kings 16, Verse 4, we read that Judah became like Israel and *sacrificed and burned incense on the high places on the hills, and under every green tree.*

This is the context of Isaiah. He prophesied to Judah during the reign of these kings. He also had a vision of the distant future. Isaiah condemned the sins of the Children of Israel but also brought the message of hope. This message of hope is as relevant today as it was in the day when it was first given.

### Day 1

Isaiah Chapter 7. God stirred Syria to invade Israel. This was 65 years before the exile. The King of Israel made an alliance with Rezin, the Syrian King, to invade Judah. God sent Isaiah to Ahaz to tell him not to fear, because God had long-term plans for Judah that would not be thwarted. This is when the *Immanuel* prophecy was given. A young girl was chosen as a sign. She conceived a child who was to be named *Immanuel*, meaning *God with us*. This sign was for immediate encouragement but also have complete fulfillment when Yeshua was born to the Virgin Mary. God was indicating to Ahaz that there were long-term plans for the redemption of Israel and that he should not fear the Syrians, the Egyptians or the Assyrians. Despite their power, God could turn back these evil nations and make fools of them. Ahaz was to put his trust in God and not fear man. He was to keep to the terms of the Covenant and God would protect Judah.

The young child, *Immanuel*, was to be trained in Torah. This is symbolized by eating curds and honey. Just as honey is sweet and curds of milk are sour, so he would learn the principles of right and wrong from childhood. This is what God required of all Judah. The prophecy also speaks powerfully of Yeshua, God with us, who would one day be the perfect manifestation of the Torah and Prophets.

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Chapter 8. A second sign was given to Ahaz. A prophetess gave birth to a son who was named *Maher-Shala-Hash-Baz*, meaning *Speed the spoil, haste the booty*. Judah refused to heed the warnings of Isaiah and rejected God's promise of protection. Isaiah then warned Ahaz that soon the Assyrians would invade the country. The use of mediums and worship of false gods, and rejection of the God of Israel, would soon bring dark spiritual clouds upon the nation.

This is the history of Judah. These things really happened. Leaders of the nations of the world would be wise to study the details of this: if this happened to God's chosen people, how much more will it happen to all nations in the end times when God judges the entire world?

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Chapter 9. Despite all the gloom that Isaiah prophesied for Judah, a great ray of hope was also given. God made Covenant with Abraham that would one day be fulfilled, despite all. Just as there was a time when the Midianites were defeated by Gideon (Judges 7), so God would one day take away oppression from Israel and Judah once more. This is the prophecy of Yeshua being born in Bethlehem – *unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given....* He ministered first in the region of Galilee – the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali. When Isaiah brought this Messianic prophecy, Israel was shortly to go to exile and Judah would follow about 140 years later. Isaiah's prophecy will one day be totally fulfilled. It is God's commitment to a remnant of Israel and Judah who will seek Him through all their troubles. Yeshua first came 2000 years ago. He will return soon to regather the exiles and establish His everlasting Kingdom.

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Chapter 10. Assyria was soon to become the means by which God would judge Israel. Later Babylon would be the instrument of His judgment on Judah. Nevertheless, a remnant would one day be restored to Him. Hard days of discipline lay ahead, but God's people should not look only at their external circumstances. The Empires of the world might be too strong for them to withstand, but they are not too strong for God. He will save His people and His hand of mercy is always be held out for them to grasp. Despite all, He is faithful to His Covenant with Abraham.

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## Day 2

Chapter 11. Once more Isaiah prophesied about the coming Messiah. God chose days when Israel and Judah were in rebellion to speak to them about the end He had in view. Isaiah's prophecy has remained as relevant over the last 2700 years as it was when first spoken. Verse 1 reminds us that the Messiah will be a descendant of Jesse. Verse 2 describes the sevenfold Spirit of God that is also in Revelation 1:4. This is the Spirit of Yeshua. Take note of this – it is a description of Yeshua. Verse 6 of Isaiah has not yet been fulfilled. When the wolf lies with the lamb in this way, peace will have returned to earth again, as it was in Eden. After the Flood, God caused there to be fear between mankind and the animals (Genesis 9). Isaiah described signs of the Messianic Kingdom, when this fear would disappear again. Even a young child will no longer fear a cobra or viper.

Yeshua has been to earth once to redeem us from our sins. He will return to establish His Kingdom and remove the curse of the Fall for those who are chosen for His Kingdom. Verse 10 shows that there will be believing Gentiles who join the faithful from Israel and Judah. Verse 11 speaks of the second return from exile. The first return was at the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. In our day, we are witnessing the first stages of the second return of Israel. A remnant has returned to the Land. Soon a remnant will, through faith in Yeshua, be fully restored to fellowship with God. This will be at a time of judgment on all nations. Isaiah's prophecy was given 2700 years ago and is still being fulfilled.

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Chapter 12. The years of exile will end with a song of praise to God. They have been hard and long years for Israel and Judah, but this song is yet to be sung!

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Chapter 13. Babylon was to be the instrument of God's judgment on Judah. It is not that Babylon was a good Empire that caused God to use it to conquer Judah – quite the opposite. God will not use a righteous nation to be His instrument of judgment because that would mean that they themselves would come under judgment. The ruthless Babylonians are symbolic of the final Empire that will rise up in the end times. This final Empire, ruled by the antichrist, will have the characteristics of all the evil and deceptive Empires of history, including Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome. Isaiah 13 is a picture of both Babylon in the days of Judah and of the final evil world Empire that is taking root in the world today. The Chapter gives a picture of God's end-time judgment on the world similar to what is described in the Book of Revelation.

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Chapter 14. Verses 1 and 2 speak of the days in which we now live. After many hundreds of years when all might have seemed lost, God did not forget His promises to the Children of Israel. Isaiah foresaw the time when God would choose Jacob once more and add to their numbers those who are saved by faith from all nations. These verses remind us of Romans 11, where Paul the Apostle used the symbol of the Olive Tree to describe the one family of faith. Christians did not replace

the physical descendants of Jacob, when they were exiled from their Land. The entire family of faith is built on the Covenant promises first given to the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. We live in the days when Isaiah's prophecies are being fulfilled and our eyes of understanding are being opened by careful reading of this prophecy.

Lucifer, otherwise known as satan, and the serpent in the Garden of Eden, fell from his position in Heaven and went out to deceive the nations. His ambitions know no bounds: he seeks to gather himself a kingdom and to be worshipped. Yet, he will be exposed and humbled in the end. Nations who were deceived will be judged and they will see how foolish they were to follow this fallen angel.

King Ahaz was not a good king, and God spoke judgment on Judah during his reign. Yet, God's faithfulness to His covenant people was also remembered: even during these dark days, He took the opportunity to speak words of hope, right up to the year of Ahaz' death.

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## Day 3

Chapters 15 to 18. In Chapter 16, Verse 4, we read *let the outcasts dwell with you O Moab*. Moab was on the border of Judah, the other side of the Jordan. This is where Naomi had once sought refuge at the time of famine. The Book of Ruth has prophetic undertones concerning the later exile of Judah. Moab might have been a refuge for God's people, just as it had been for Naomi and her family. They were righteous Jews who were suffering on account of the famine in the Land - a judgment from God at that time. It would be enough for Judah to be cast out of their Land. Moab, like many nations since, misjudged how they should respond to the exile of Israel and Judah. They could have comforted God's chosen people, but they did not. Ultimately the judgment of God will fall on all nations, including Moab, Syria and Cush (Ethiopia), mentioned in these chapters.

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## Day 4

Chapters 19 to 21. Judgment was proclaimed on Egypt. The time would come when they would be humbled because of their idolatry. God had a plan of restoration for Israel. Isaiah also prophesied a new day for Egypt and Assyria. In the last days those saved from these countries will join the restored nation of Israel. God has not forgotten any of the men and women whom He created. This world became a dark place prior to the Flood and God washed it clean at the time of Noah. It has become a dark place again, but God's Covenant purposes are secure. Eventually all will be saved who persevere through the trials of this dark world and seek the One True God through faith in Yeshua. Isaiah foresaw all that God planned. He prophesied using profound imagery. The nations surrounding Israel and Judah were used as examples in the prophecies, to be applied to all nations in the end-times.

The task of the Prophet is often very difficult. In Isaiah's case, he walked naked to symbolize the coming judgment on Israel's enemies. He had been wearing sackcloth to symbolize mourning. He removed the sackcloth to announce the end of mourning and the beginning of judgment. Just as Isaiah's body was naked, so the enemies of God would be embarrassed through nakedness. God caused Isaiah to go to extreme lengths to make the prophecies known.

The fall of ancient Babylon was prophesied many years in advance. After Judah's exile this was fulfilled. Babylon's fall also symbolizes the fall of the antichrist world system in the end times. Isaiah's Prophecy points to the judgments in the Book of Revelation.

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Chapter 22. *He removed the protection of Judah*, said Isaiah, looking forward to the time when Babylon would be God's agent of judgment on Jerusalem and Judah. This is how God judges nations. He takes away their protection so that both spiritual and physical enemies triumph over the people, humbling them for a season. From the fall of Israel and Judah we learn what will happen in the entire world in the end. Paul spoke of the last great apostasy on the earth in 2 Thessalonians 2. There will come a time when there will be a great falling away from faith in God. At this time God will take away His protection from all nations that follow false gods and reject His laws. This dark time will precede the return of Yeshua:

*The mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. (2 Thessalonians 2:7-8)*

God intends us to lay a foundation for understanding the end times through the history of Israel, Judah and the nations of the ancient world.

Isaiah referred to Eliakim in Verse 20. He was an official in Hezekiah's court (2 Kings 18:18). The time when, during the reign of Hezekiah, God showed His grace to Judah and held back the Assyrians, is symbolic of the Messianic age. God used this King and his officials to raise hope that will be fulfilled ultimately when Yeshua HaMashiach establishes His Kingdom on earth. Verse 22 is fulfilled in Yeshua's promise to the faithful Church in Philadelphia (Revelation 3:7-13). Look up

this cross reference and consider how Isaiah's prophecy, relevant at the time of the Kings of Judah, has ongoing relevance for today.

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## Day 5

Let us pause for a moment of reflection. Many people find the Prophets hard to read and, as a result, fail to understand the ongoing relevance of their message. Isaiah is foremost among the Prophets. His ministry began with a vision of the holiness of Almighty God. This was a vision similar to the one John saw on the Island of Patmos, prior to writing the Book of Revelation. He saw the Son of God in all His Glory. Isaiah would have remembered his vision throughout the time when he prophesied to Judah. His prophecies brought eternal truths from Heaven to earth at a pivotal moment in the history of the world.

In our day, one of the deepest satanic deceptions centres on the theory of evolution. This theory encourages people to believe that the history of the earth is very long. It dulls people's minds so that they do not recognize the urgency of the events of our day. Peter recognized that this would happen when he wrote:

*...be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets...scoffers will come in the last days...saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation." (2 Peter 3)*

A key to understanding the Prophets is the *short* time-span of this earth. God has allocated, approximately, only 6000 years to redeem a family of people from all nations. He is using this time to teach us important truths about ourselves and about Him. The depth of our need was first demonstrated at the banishment of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. Then, through the Flood, God showed the just penalty for the sinful ways of mankind. This was taught to us before God showed that He would not let mankind go completely. He committed Himself to an everlasting Covenant through which He, Himself, would bear the penalty for the sins of those who would have faith in Him. The physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were chosen as a prophetic people. If it were not for sin, they would have been a strong light in a dark world, to people from all nations seeking the One True God. Their failure was inevitable but God still called them to be prophetic. Through them He would speak to the entire world.

The eras of Moses, of the Judges and of the Kings are all part of God's teaching. Through the history of Israel all mankind learns about their need and about the Covenant purposes of God. Embedded in Israel's history are types and shadows of the coming Messiah, through whom God planned to redeem a family from all nations. The Covenant is centered on His promises to Israel, but inclusive of all who will come through faith from the entire world.

One day there will be a separation of those who are saved through faith from those who resist the call of God. Towards the end, prior to the return of Yeshua, there will be great judgments on this earth, just like there were in Egypt at the time of the Exodus.

The climax for Israel and Judah was at approximately the mid-point of the short span of the history of the world. At this time, the Prophets spoke so that God could use the circumstances to speak to all people about His eternal plan. Isaiah prophesied powerfully about the coming Messiah and also about judgment upon all nations.



Isaiah Chapter 23. Tyre and Sidon were trading ports in the region of Lebanon. They were soon to be judged. In the midst of God's judgment on Israel and Judah, the Prophet also spoke to the surrounding nations.

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Chapter 24. Isaiah turned from the immediate judgment on Tyre to the final judgment on the entire world. Tyre was, in this sense, a practical illustration of the way God knew that the entire world would go. All nations, like Tyre and Sidon, would trade with one another and this would lead to all forms of corruption. In the end, all nations will be judged. The judgments on the entire world were confirmed by Yeshua and revealed in detail to John, who wrote the Book of Revelation. Consider the reasons for God's judgments and the extreme nature of them. The entire earth will be shaken.

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Chapter 25. Verse 4 is key: *You have been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress...* Recall the Sermon on the Mount, where Yeshua encouraged such people, fulfilling this Prophecy. God knows that it is always the poor who suffer at the hands of corrupt leaders, and He will not allow this to go on forever. Through his prophetic words, Isaiah conveyed the heart of God, torn between judgment on the wicked and care for the poor and needy. Can you hear the heartbeat of God through the mixed emotions of the prophetic word?

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Chapter 26. These are key Scriptures with ongoing relevance. God used the era of Isaiah to speak eternal truths. See what God says to you as you read these verses carefully. Do not forget the context – the time of judgment on Israel and Judah. While remembering this context, consider the eternal truths which are for every generation, such as:

*You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You...*

Verses 20 and 21 were relevant at the time of Isaiah and also speak of the end times when God rises to judge the entire earth. We are rapidly approaching this time and this is the reason for studying these Scriptures, so that we can be prepared.

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## Day 6

Chapters 27 to 30. Isaiah's prophecies cover between 40 and 50 years. After his vision of the Lord in the year that King Uzziah died, Isaiah was totally dedicated to prayer and listening to God on behalf of his people. His prophecies are like the heart-beat of God. Judgment of sin cannot be compromised and there are dark days ahead for the Children of Israel. But God also remembers His love for His people and of His covenant faithfulness. God has a plan for restoring a remnant from His people. Exile will result in a pruning of the nation so that a faithful remnant will be restored. These thoughts and emotions are embedded in imagery that clothes the prophetic word in mystery. The mystery is intended so that we read the prophecy over and over, seeking God for fuller understanding. As we do this we find the golden thread of the promised Messiah. Ultimately God will restore the fortunes of a remnant of His people through Him, and will also bring judgment to all nations.

In Chapter 27, Israel is likened to a vineyard which God will tend, removing the weeds. One day this vineyard will fill the entire world. When Yeshua said (John 15:1) that He is the vine and His Father the gardener, He was showing us that this Prophecy will be fulfilled in Him. In Verse 6 we find a hint of the inclusion of those who are saved from the Gentile nations. In Chapter 28, God promises to teach His people again. He will remove false teachers. Then there is another image of Yeshua. This time He is called the cornerstone and a sure foundation. Peter referred to this passage (1 Peter 2), understanding that the imagery of the Temple was to be fulfilled in Yeshua and those who live by faith in Him. This will not happen until Israel and Judah are humbled, while they are scattered among the nations (Chapter 29). God does not want to hear just empty words from them: He desires a heart to heart relationship. They will be scattered among the nations so that a remnant will seek Him. They must be careful not to seek counsel from these nations. They must not seek to be like Egypt from whom God once delivered them. The purpose of the exile is so that they will discover that they do *not* want to be like the Gentile nations, so that God can restore them to their Land and, more fully, to Himself. The nations where they are scattered will ultimately be judged for their evil.

*In returning and rest you will be saved, said the Lord, and Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "This is the way, walk in it."* Judah had not valued this close walk with God and so a period of exile would be used by God to build a new desire in a remnant of His people.

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## Day 7

### A Day for Rest and Further Reflection

We are taking just a few days to study what the Prophet Isaiah wrote over several years. It is a lot to take in, especially since the Prophecies are cloaked in mystery. Pause and reflect on what you have read so far. Go back to the accounts of the Kings and review the background to the Prophecies, and then consider the general principles contained in Isaiah, concerning the Covenant purposes of God.

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