

Under The Fig Tree



WEEK 31

This week, we will complete our reading of Isaiah. We will also read Micah, who prophesied at the same time as Isaiah. Isaiah reaches a magnificent climax in the last few chapters of his Book. The vision of Israel's redemption blazes forth. All the themes we studied through the entire Book of Isaiah are reviewed in these last chapters. Take this opportunity to review these interacting themes. They are picked up time and again through the Bible, but Isaiah has a role like no other Prophet. He prophesied at a key moment in the history of Israel and Judah, with words that have power to the end of time. God, during the reign of Hezekiah, showed His Covenant faithfulness, reminding the nation of His great commitment to Abraham and to David. He will certainly gather a family of faith ruled by His anointed King. He showed Judah that they were sinful nation, subject to temptation, following the ways of the surrounding idolatrous nations. He contrasted Himself with these idols of sticks and stones. He is Almighty God, Creator of Heaven and earth and they are just carved and moulded images with no power. Yet the nations of the world fall for Satan's deception and worship these foolish images.

Later, throughout the coming exile, Judah would experience more fully what it is like to be living in an idolatrous nation. Babylon was at the height of its power when Judah was exiled, giving impetus to the lessons that the people would learn. Through the experience of exile, God intended that a remnant would wake up from their foolishness and seek Him afresh. This remnant would be separated from those who continued to follow the ways of the world. The faithful remnant would then return to the Promised Land. God also promised to redeem them to Himself through His anointed King; He would take their sins upon Himself. Then, finally, He would also judge the wicked and idolatrous nations. From these nations, however, whoever rejects idolatry and has faith in the God of Israel will also be saved. Salvation is through the anointed King, *Yeshua*, whose Name means *salvation*, and whose title is *Immanuel*, meaning *God with us*. Believing Gentiles will be grafted into the Covenant community through faith.

These are the interwoven themes of Isaiah and it is useful to restate them here, as we come to the end of the Prophecy. The exile of Judah would follow in 586 BC, just over 100 years from the time of Hezekiah's death in approximately 700 BC. The Jews would have time to consider Isaiah's Prophecy prior to exile and then to consider it *during* the exile. This would be a preparation for the return from exile and for the coming Messiah. History shows us how stubborn people can be and how they often fail to understand Prophecy. Yeshua came to earth 500 years after the return

from exile. Many Jews believed in Him, but a larger number did not. He fulfilled the Prophecies of the Suffering Servant when He went to the Cross. Over the 2000 years since then, the Gospel has gone out to the entire world, and millions of people have been grafted into the faithful remnant of Judah. Yet Isaiah's Prophecies have not been totally fulfilled even now. God knew what it would take to complete His Covenant promises. The exile of Judah was not completed when they returned at the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. The ten Northern Tribes have been scattered for even longer than Judah. Over this time God has been continuing to identify the faithful remnant from the Tribes of Israel and one day they will be revealed. This is pictured in the 144,000 of Revelation 7. Also pictured is the great harvest from all nations who reject idolatry and humbly seek the God of Israel through faith in Yeshua. As we picture the praying remnant of religious Jews at the Western Wall of the Temple during the Feasts and Sabbaths of our day, we must remember Isaiah's Prophecy. He spoke powerful words from God at a key moment of the history of Israel and Judah to lay a foundation for future fulfillment. It has taken 2700 years for God to show the full meaning of all that Isaiah prophesied and still we have not reached the conclusion of the matter. Isaiah laid a foundation for the Book of Revelation, which shows more details of the dramatic events coming to this world, as awesome as Noah experienced at the time of the Flood, or as when Israel was brought out of Egypt. Soon, Yeshua will return and bring in the final fulfillment of the Prophetic Word, when His Kingdom is established and God's faithful people are fully restored to Him.

Day 1

Isaiah Chapter 57. Verses 1 and 2 show there will be a faithful remnant. They will go unnoticed by the world, but they are known to God. He has plans for their restoration. Verse 15 shows that God is looking out for those who are humble, and who seek fellowship with Him. Verses 17 to 18 shows the purpose of the exile. Those who respond to God's correction will be healed of their sins and restored to fellowship. By contrast the wicked will be judged. Those who are idolatrous will be allowed to slip away eventually. The exile will bring about this separation. There will be peace for those who accept correction, but *no peace for the wicked*.

Chapter 58. God, through Moses, gave instructions to the Children of Israel as to how they should live. He established a comprehensive framework of law and order that included every part of their lives. Isaiah 58, which focuses on the theme of fasting, shows how God's instructions were misinterpreted. They were turned into a religious framework that missed the central purpose that God had in mind. Fasting is a discipline of depriving oneself for a period to better seek God. Sometimes fasting is abstaining from food, though one can fast from other things too. Fasting can, however, be self-centred and have no meaning. God is not impressed by dutiful religious practices that do not bear the fruit He intended. Such practices are from a sinful heart. God showed this to Judah through Isaiah 58. Verses 6 to 14 show the true intent of *Torah*. When Yeshua confronted the religious authorities of His day He was reminding them of these same principles. How then can we fulfill the Torah of God? Through Yeshua we need to be transformed

from within so that our sinful heart is changed by the power of God's Holy Spirit. Isaiah revealed the sickness that can be healed only through Yeshua.

Chapter 59. Again, Isaiah showed Judah their sin and their need of salvation. One sin had led to another like the hatching of viper's eggs, and there is no remedy without God's help. An intercessor was needed, one who would stand between earth and Heaven pleading the case for the Children of Israel. The Priests were appointed as intercessors, but they too were corrupt. Verses 16 to 20 shows that God Himself provides an intercessor. He Himself brings this salvation. There is an implication in the Hebrew word for salvation. *Yeshua* means *salvation* and this is the Name of God's Son through whom Salvation comes. Here again is the great promise of salvation through the Son of God. Verse 21 reminds us that this is how God will fulfill His Covenant with the remnant of Abraham's descendants.

Chapter 60. Here is a picture of the world at the time of Yeshua's first coming: it is also a picture of the end times prior to His second coming. *Arise shine; for your light has come!* are words that point to Yeshua. He came as a light into the dark Roman world which oppressed Judah. God came to earth in His Son to save us from that darkness. Now the world has had 2000 years to consider the coming of the Light of the World. Multitudes have turned to Him and now we await His second coming when the light of God will blaze forth in full intensity. Verses 19 to 22 speak of the end times when God establishes His Eternal Kingdom. He Himself is the light and we will no longer need the light of the sun. This truth is repeated in the last Chapter of the Book of Revelation. Isaiah 60 is a picture of the Jews' second return from exile and also the faithful from all nations being stirred with the expectation of the Lord's coming. We are at the beginning of those days now. Isaiah speaks to us today.

Day 2

Chapter 61. When Yeshua opened the Scroll of Isaiah in Nazareth (Luke 4:16), He read this portion. By extending the prescribed reading of the Prophets on that day when He came forward to read in the Synagogue, He announced that He was the fulfillment of the Prophecy. How accurately Isaiah prophesied! Here is the full revelation of Israel's hope. The announcement by Yeshua, that He was the One whose coming God had foretold, so shocked the congregation in Nazareth that they wanted to stone Him as a false prophet! Read the Prophecy afresh. Note the details. This is a precise description of our Saviour and the ministry He came to fulfill. At His first coming He fulfilled up to the first half of Verse 2, *to announce the acceptable year of the Lord*. At His second coming He will fulfill the second half of this verse: *the day of vengeance of our God*. In our day we are still waiting for the full impact of the restoration of Israel through Him. The Prophecy of this Chapter is still being accomplished. It is as if we are in a period of time half-way through Verse 2.

Chapter 62. Here is another Chapter that is still being fulfilled in our day. Read the words carefully. God will not rest until His promises for Israel and Judah are completed. God calls His people to be watchmen and intercessors, constantly bringing His Covenant promises before Him in faithful prayer. Verse 10 reminds us of the ministry of John the Baptist, a ministry that had relevance when Yeshua first came. This ministry is also relevant for the end time purposes of God.

Chapter 63. Again we have the mixed emotions of the prophet and intercessor. The message of judgment is interwoven with mercy, as we remember what God has already done for His people, and what He will still do to complete His work on this earth.

Chapter 64. Here is the heart-cry from the Prophet. He heard and understood all that God had said and observed the sinfulness and apathy all around Him. This is the same heart-cry that we might bring to God in our day, pleading with God to revive His people, waking us up to understand the fullness of His Word, and be the people that He called us to be: *Oh that You would rend the Heavens! That you would come down!* Isaiah's prayer was answered when Yeshua came to earth. It was also answered through the giving of the Holy Spirit. From time to time God has come down on His people in a special way to strengthen them in times of need. We call this *revival*. Oh, how we, who understand God's ways and observe the apathy of the world, long for such revival in our day! The prayer of Isaiah will be answered once again when Yeshua returns to this earth.

Day 3

Chapter 65. God again tells us how He has held out His hands to save all who will come to Him in faith. *I have stretched out My hands all day long* (Verse 2) is a clear picture of Yeshua on the Cross. God has patiently invited all people to repentance and faith so that they will be brought to restored relationship with Him. Yet this will not last forever. There will come a time when those who reject His invitation will be allowed to go their way. There will come a day when the New Heavens and New earth, announced here and confirmed in the Book of Revelation, will be manifest as the place where the Covenant family live with God forever. What was lost at the Fall will be fully redeemed for those who live by faith in Him.

Chapter 66. We come to the last chapter of Isaiah. The Book began with a picture of darkness on the face of the earth and a coming exile for Judah. When Isaiah completed his Prophecy the exile was still to take place. Isaiah was given a vision into the Heavens. He saw a vision of God and He brought powerful words of hope to Israel and Judah, and also to all who will join the Covenant people through faith. He prophesied the coming Messiah, and ends the Book on the high note of the certainty of God's plan for His people. What a message to take to exile! What a message, which retains its power for all people right to the end of time! The curse of sin will be removed and God will gather His people. He will not only regather the remnant to the Promised Land. He will also gather all His people to the Eternal Kingdom. What characterizes those who will be inheritors of that Kingdom? It is in Verse 2: *on this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at my word.* Are you among those people? These were the ones whom Yeshua gathered and encouraged when He ministered on earth (for example when He gave the Sermon on the Mount). These are the ones for whom He will return. He will gather us together for the Eternal Kingdom: *I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the Gentiles like a flowing stream* (Verse 12). *Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad with her, all you who love her; rejoice with her all you who mourn for her* (Verse 10). Let the Lord show you what He has in store for you and how He will bring it about. Pause and reflect on all you have read in Isaiah.

Micah Chapter 1. Micah and Isaiah prophesied to Judah at the same time. Judah was a small nation, just one of the Tribes of Israel. When these two Prophets were commissioned by God, the Northern Kingdom of Israel was soon to be invaded by the Assyrians and exiled. The Southern Kingdom of Judah witnessed this and so the people were in exactly the right circumstances for the Prophets to warn the nation that, unless they repented, they too would soon go to exile.

These Prophets were real men, and the circumstances that they faced were as real as the days in which we live. Sometimes we read the Books of the *Tanach* (Old Testament) as if they are merely books of theology. The Prophets seem to be unreal, almost fictional characters. This is because they spoke the pure Words of God. These Words are majestic, full of imagery and unlike any literature that has been written throughout history. Yet, the Prophets were human like us. It is important to picture the Prophets in the circumstances of their day, as well as reading God's

Words with their continuing relevance today. They prophesied up to the time of Hezekiah, a shadow of the Messiah, through whose reign Judah retained hope for future restoration. Their Prophecies foresaw the exile of Judah and provided promise for the return from Babylon. Through the experiences of this exile, hope was given for the more distant future when the Messiah would come to save the faithful remnant and finally, at the end of time, bring in the Eternal Kingdom of God.

Micah and Isaiah would have known each other, meeting frequently as they went about their business in the small nation. They would surely have taken counsel together. Their Prophecies are, to some extent, independent but they also overlapped. They were two witnesses to what God was saying to Judah up to the time of Hezekiah. Micah is far briefer than Isaiah and serves as a confirmation of what Isaiah spoke. The thrust of the message is the same, first a rebuke to sinful Judah, then a statement of the judgment that will follow and, finally, the promise of restoration.

In Chapter 1, there is a statement of God's displeasure with His people, both Israel and Judah, and a warning that God will not ignore the sins of His people.

Chapter 2. Now we have the message. *Behold, against this family I am. I am devising a disaster* (Verse 3). Here is the judgment of God. First Israel will be exiled to Assyria, and later Judah will be exiled to Babylon. Recall how King Ahab took Naboth's vineyard by deception (2 Kings 21). This was in mind when God pronounced judgment on Israel (Verse 2). Sin must be accounted for, but still the Covenant promises of God were to be fulfilled. *I will surely assemble you, O Jacob, I will surely gather the remnant of Israel* (Verse 12). Here is the promise of restoration for those who remain faithful to God while being disciplined in exile. In hindsight, we know that this was a promise of the return from Babylon at the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. We also know that the greater meaning was that God will gather His people again in the end times when His Kingdom is established on earth.

Day 4

Chapters 3. Micah declared that the leaders of Israel and Judah had misled the people. The prophets had brought a false message and false hope. The nation had known the Torah of God but misapplied it. Truth and justice were perverted and the leaders used their authority for personal gain. This was about to bring God's judgement upon them. For a time they would suffer for their sins and even if they cried out, God would not hear their cry. It would be as if He hid from them.

Chapter 4. Micah now looks ahead to the redemption that God has in mind. Either Micah heard from God in exactly the same way that Isaiah did or, more likely, he quoted what Isaiah had already prophesied (Isaiah 2). Judah would one day be redeemed and established as the chief nation of the world. The Word of God would be understood and preached to the entire world, out of Zion. This Prophecy is still to be fulfilled. In part it is being fulfilled in our day as our understanding of the Torah of God is deepening, coinciding with the return of the Jews to their Land. Yet, Jerusalem is not yet perfected and the full impact of this Prophecy awaits the return of Yeshua and the coming down from Heaven of the New Jerusalem, pictured in the Book of Revelation. *Pangs have seized you like a woman in labour*, said the Prophet (Verse 9). One cannot help but see this as being fulfilled through intercessory prayer. The religious Jews go to the Western Wall and, with their hands on their stomachs as if in the pains of child-birth, pray to God with a rocking motion. Micah foresaw this, not in detail, but sufficient to give us relevant imagery for the days in which we live. Yeshua came as a baby the first time and Mary suffered the pains of child-birth. He will come to establish His Righteous Kingdom soon and the preparation for this is through *watching and praying*, also likened to the pains of child-birth.

Chapter 5. David the King was born in Bethlehem. He was a shadow of the coming Messiah whom God promised would come from David's family line. In Verse 2, Micah prophesied the precise details of Yeshua's birth in Bethlehem. Here also is the promise that He will come like a shepherd to His people. In the future, all the idolatry of the Children of Israel would be removed from a faithful remnant and idolatrous nations would know the vengeance of God (Verse 15). This is a Prophecy that was fulfilled in part on the return of Judah from exile in Babylon. It will be fulfilled completely in the end time, as described in the Book of Revelation.

Chapter 6. God briefly reviewed all He had done for the Children of Israel when He brought them out of Egypt. He reminded them of Balak and Balaam. We recall that the curse intended by Balak was turned to a blessing and that Balaam foresaw the coming Messiah – *I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near: a Star shall come out of Jacob; a Scepter shall rise out of Israel...* (Numbers 24:17) The people of Israel and Judah were intended to recall all that God had done for them and review His great promises, so that they would repent of their sinful ways. Verse 8 is a profound statement of God's purposes for His people, a simple statement of the purpose of

Torah: *He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?* (Verse 8) Ahab and Omri, the wicked Kings of Israel are identified by name. How terrible it is to be named by God as the ones who led the people into idolatry! Here, then, are the contrasts to be drawn as Israel and Judah are rebuked by God and warned about coming judgment. These same warnings have continuing relevance in our day, not just for Israel, but for the entire world.

Chapter 7. Finally, we feel the sorrow of the Prophet. This is the sorrow of God for His people and what is soon to come upon them. Despite all this, the firm message of redemption is also remembered as the conclusion of the Prophecy. God will not forget the promises He made to His people. The exile is to be redemptive for the remnant who will seek Him. *As in the days when you came out of the land of Egypt, I will show them wonders. The nations will see and be ashamed of all their might* (Verses 15 and 16). When we read the Book of Revelation, we find prophecies of judgments falling upon the earth very similar to the ones that Egypt experienced at the time of the Exodus. This is foreseen in these verses of Micah. The restoration of the remnant of Judah from Babylon was a forerunner of this. *Who is a God like You, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgressions of the remnant of His heritage?* (Verse 18) This reminds us of the first Passover, when the Children of Israel were protected through faith by painting their doorposts with the blood of a lamb. It is a clear Prophecy of what God will accomplish for those who have faith in Him through the shed Blood of Yeshua. *You will give truth to Jacob and mercy to Abraham, which you have sworn to our fathers from days of old* (Verse 20).

These were the final words of the Prophet. They were words to give encouragement to the Children of Israel in the future and they are still relevant today. Mary understood that these promises were to be fulfilled through her Son, Yeshua HaMashaich (Luke 1:46-55, especially 54 and 55). Verses 5 and 6 were quoted by Yeshua (Matthew 10:34-39): God was showing that, through Yeshua, the Kingdom of Heaven would be established through individuals who put their trust in Him. Even families would be divided because of the faith of some and the lack of faith of other family members. In our day, God is still working out this plan of redemption. The Prophets spoke at the time when the message would be received in a poignant way, so that the entire world, through considering what was said, might be prepared for the coming of Messiah. This goes beyond theology, which can be merely philosophical or academic ideas *about* God. God's purposes are shown us through the lives of His people. His truths are brought to us through experience. Our experience of God continues in what He is doing among His people in the world today.

Day 5

We now return to the accounts of the Kings of Judah, to review the final years of the Southern Kingdom. Isaiah and Micah prophesied up to the end of Hezekiah's reign (approximately 700 BC). 25 years before this, the Northern Kingdom of Israel had been conquered by Assyria. Then came a period of two evil Kings of Judah, Manasseh and Amon. Manasseh reigned for 55 years and Amon for 2 years, taking us up to the reign of Josiah in approximately 640 BC. Hezekiah had been warned (1 Kings 20) that, though his own life had been extended, during which time the Kingdom would be protected, the time of exile to Babylon would certainly come. It was on account of the apostasy of Manasseh and Amon that this would be fulfilled. There were Prophets in Israel through the reign of these two kings, but the next major Prophet was Jeremiah, who began his ministry during the reign of Josiah.

2 Kings 21:1-18 and 2 Chronicles 33:1-20. How quickly Judah fell into idolatry and, over the 55 year reign of Manasseh, the kingdom became like the *nations whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel*. Israel asked for a king in the days of Samuel so that they could be like the other nations. In so-doing, they rejected God Himself. The reign of Manasseh shows us what God had foreseen. Through God's grace the Kingdom would be one day restored to Him through His own Son Yeshua, but for now terrible times had come upon Judah. Lessons had to be learned – hard lessons. Manasseh had a taste of exile in Babylon. He also experienced the grace of God, when he humbled himself before Him. This gives us much food for thought and prayerful meditation.

2 Kings 21:19-26 and 2 Chronicles 33:21-25. Amon followed Manasseh and continued to lead Judah astray. His brief reign was cut short when he was killed in a conspiracy. Judah was now ready for a respite from this wickedness.

2 Kings 22 and 2 Chronicles 34. Josiah became King. He was only 8 years old but followed the counsel of good men. This was the beginning of the ministry of Jeremiah. Like Hezekiah, Josiah brought hope to Israel. He is a type of Messiah. Over his 31 year reign he restored Judah to Covenant relationship with God. The Book of the Law was found. Over the decades of Manasseh and Amon it had been ignored and lost. We do not know which Books of Moses were discovered at this time, possibly the entire Torah. Perhaps the Book referred to was Deuteronomy where Chapter 28 records the blessings and curses that were conditional on the way Judah lived before God. Josiah took the Covenant very seriously and led the nation to repentance. God brought blessing to his reign and withheld the calamity that was later to fall upon the nation. Through Josiah, we have a glimpse of the restoration of Judah. Herein lay hope for Judah when they were in Babylon for 70 years, where they could envision the reestablishing of their nation under God after their return. In hindsight we know that only through Yeshua can the nation be fully restored

to God. Josiah's reign continues to build expectation even in our own day, while we wait for the full restoration of Israel.

Day 6

2 Kings 23:1-30 and 2 Chronicles 34 and 35. Here is the end of the account of Josiah. He achieved as much as could be achieved by a King of Judah in those days. God blessed him and honoured him. It was a temporary respite, because Manasseh's reign was so wicked that judgment would not be turned away from Judah. Judah's permanent restoration could not be completed even through good King Josiah. In the following chapters we will read that the next kings turned away from God once more. Through the peaks and troughs of Judah's history we are learning the need of a more permanent remedy for God's people. This prepares the way for Yeshua HaMashiach and the New Covenant in His Blood. Josiah restored Temple worship and celebrated the Passover, pointing to the time when Yeshua would become the Passover Lamb. Josiah shows us that even the best of Judah's kings were not able to do what Yeshua came to do. Through God's grace there might be a temporary peace in Judah, but this only served as building thirst for the permanent peace that God would bring through Yeshua and the establishment of His Eternal Kingdom. Josiah died in battle and Jeremiah mourned for him.

Day 7

A Day for Rest and Further Reflection

We have touched on deep issues through the study of Isaiah and the Kings of Judah. We have reflected on the history of the Nation over approximately 175 years between Uzziah and Josiah, taking us up to 610 BC. The history of Judah is intended to teach us about our need of Yeshua HaMashaich, the anointed Son of God, King of the Jews. God is faithful to the Covenant He made with Abraham. This thread of truth is unbreakable throughout all the days of Israel and Judah. God is still working out His purposes in our day. Pause and reflect on what you have read. Be careful not to take an over-judgmental attitude concerning Israel. God chose this nation to teach all mankind about our need. We might consider the days of Ahab or Manasseh and wonder about their foolishness in leading the people into idolatry. Yet, consider all the nations of the world and how many people still follow false gods. Consider how even when God has blessed a nation it takes just one generation to forget what He did and to turn from Him. This is happening across the world today. In our day we have the Bible available in every major language and the Gospel message has, for 2000 years, been taken to every country. Yet still multitudes reject the grace and mercy of God and the leaders of nations gather as if in conspiracy against Him. God intends us all to learn from the history of Israel and Judah so that we might humble ourselves before Him in anticipation for the return of Yeshua. Through Israel and Judah, God teaches us our need. Reflect on this today, and listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit, as He speaks to you through what we have studied.
