

Isaiah The Fifth Gospel Study # 4

The History of Israel during the time of Isaiah II – Divine Sorrow and Anger

King Hezekiah (715-687 B.C.E.) was the opposite of his father and no king past or future would compare to him (II Kings 18:5)

- ❖ He repaired and purged the Temple of its vessels
- ❖ Reorganized the priests (II Chron. 29:3-36)
- ❖ Refused to form an alliance with Palestine and Syria against Assyria.
- ❖ Judah had to send tributes in honor of the pagan god of Assyria “Ashur” but were also sending tokens of homage to the king of Egypt.

720 B.C.E. – Egypt is fragmented by civil war. Ethiopia became a powerful state. Shabako invaded Egypt, seized the throne, unified the government, and began the 22nd Dynasty.

- ❖ Egypt began intrigues in southern Palestine against the Assyrian ruler.
- ❖ A plan to overthrow the Assyria was made with Philistines, Moab, Edom and Judah.
- ❖ Isaiah interferes and tells Judah that God has not abandoned them, He is watching.
- ❖ It will not be Ethiopia that will deliver them from the Assyrians, another nation at God’s appointed time will (Isa. 18:1).
- ❖ Isaiah wears the garb of a slave and walks the streets symbolic of what would come to pass for Ethiopia and Egypt.

“...the Lord spoke by Isaiah the son of Amoz, saying, “Go, and remove the sackcloth from your body, and take your sandals off your feet.” And he did so, walking naked and barefoot. 3 Then the Lord said, “Just as My servant Isaiah has walked naked and barefoot three years for a sign and a wonder against Egypt and Ethiopia, 4 so shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptians as prisoners and the Ethiopians as captives, young and old, naked and barefoot, with their buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt. 5 Then they shall be afraid and ashamed of Ethiopia their expectation and Egypt their glory. 6 And the inhabitant of this territory will say in that day, ‘Surely such is our expectation, wherever we flee for help to be delivered from the king of Assyria; and how shall we escape?’ ” (Isaiah 20:2-6).”

“Isaiah could not accept politics as a solution, since politics itself, with its arrogance and disregard of justice, was a problem. When humankind is...spiritually sick, something more radical than political sagacity is needed to solve the problem of security...Indeed it is hard to learn to live by faith. But Isaiah insisted that one cannot live without faith. “If you will not believe, you will not abide (7:9).” Faith is not an easy or convenient path.” (Abraham Heschel, *The Prophets*, pg. 73).”

- ❖ Egypt was overcome by Assyria, Judah did not partake in the battle (711/713)
- ❖ The king of Assyria died (Sargon II) and his inferior son Sennacherib (705-681 B.C.E.) became king.
- ❖ Hezekiah refused to pay tribute to Sennacherib (II king 18:7)
- ❖ A rebellion broke out.

Sennacherib’s invasion of Judah – Isaiah predicts that Assyria will fall by a “sword” not of man

Assyria was but a tool in the hands of God for carrying out His work against sinful nations. But in her ruthlessness and arrogance perpetrated dreadful crimes instead of manifesting justice. While Assyria was at

the height of its power, Isaiah proclaimed her downfall...It was part of the divine plan and purpose for Israel and all nations (Heschel).

“Woe to the Assyrians; the rod of my anger, the staff of my Fury! I will send my wrath against a godless nation, and I will command him to take the spoil and seize plunder, and to trample the cities, and to make them dust...As my hand has reached to the kingdoms of the idols whose graven images were greater than those of Jerusalem and Samaria, Shall I not do to Jerusalem and her idols as I have done to Samaria and her images (Isaiah 10:5-11).”

“Thus said the Lord of hosts, As I have said, so it shall be: and as I have purposed, so the matter shall remain: even to destroy the Assyrians upon my land, and upon my mountains: and they shall be for trampling; and their yoke shall be taken away from them, and their glory shall be taken away from their shoulders. This is the purpose, which the Lord has purposed upon the whole earth: and this the hand that is uplifted against all the nations. (Isaiah 14:24-26).”

“Assyria shall fall by a sword, not of man: A sword not of man, shall devour him;...The Assyrians will be terror stricken at the voice of the Lord, when He smites with His rod (Isaiah 31:8-9, 31:30-31).”

- ❖ In 703, Sennacherib embarked upon a series of campaigns.
- ❖ He smashed Merodach-baladan in Babylon and launched an expedition against Syria and Palestine in 701.
- ❖ The petty kingdoms were stunned by his might. A large army dispatched by Egypt and Ethiopia was defeated.
- ❖ Sennacherib turns towards Judah the chief enemy in this entire campaign.
- ❖ Nothing hindered his entrance into Judah. The valleys were full of her horsemen and chariots.
- ❖ Sennacherib set up headquarters in Lachish, Judah’s strong frontier fortress where he awaited Hezekiah’s surrender.
- ❖ Hezekiah pays an excessive tribute, more than they could afford to the king but he wanted more, the surrender of Jerusalem. (II Kings 18:14-16).
- ❖ Jerusalem was besieged, Hezekiah refused to open the gates and withstood the onslaught.
- ❖ An Assyrian official Rabshakeh, addresses the people and says that it is the Lord, the God of Israel, who ordered Sennacherib to destroy Judah. (II Kings 18:17)
- ❖ Isaiah proclaims the word that the Lord has spoken against Assyria

“Because you have raged against Me, and your arrogance has come to my ears, I will put my hooks in your nose. And my bit in your mouth, And I will turn you back on the way by which you came. (Isaiah 37:22-29)

- ❖ A disastrous pestilence spread through the Assyrian camp, decimating the army. Sennacherib returned to Nineveh and murdered by his sons (II Kings 19:36-37).
- ❖ 75 years later (633 B.C.E.) would be the downfall of the Assyrian empire.

On Divine Anger – “Tongues of Fire” (5:24)

“As the tongue of fire devours the stubble and shall be consumed by a violent flame, their root shall be as chaff, and their flower shall go up as dust: for they rejected the law of the Lord of hosts, and insulted the word of the Holy One of Israel. Therefore the Lord of hosts was greatly angered against his people, and he reached forth his hand upon them, and smote them: and the mountains were troubled, and their carcasses were as dung in the midst of the way: yet for all this his anger has not been turned away, but his hand is yet raised...So the Lord cut off from Israel the head and tail, great and small, in one day: the old man, and them

that respect persons, this is the head; and the prophet teaching unlawful things, he is the tail...the Lord...shall he have no compassion on their orphans or widows: for they are all godless transgressors and wicked, and every mouth speaks unjustly. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is yet exalted. ...The whole earth is set on fire because of the fierce anger of the Lord, and the people shall be as men burnt by fire: no man shall pity his brother. (Isaiah 5:24-25;9:14-19)

“The sinners in Zion are afraid; trembling has seized the godless: Who among us can dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us can dwell with everlasting burnings? (Isaiah 33:14).”

“The destructiveness of God’s power is not due to God’s hostility to man, but to His concern for righteousness, to His intolerance to injustice. The human mind seems to have no sense for the true dimensions of the people’s cruelty towards one another. God’s anger is fierce because man’s cruelty is infernal. (Heschel, p. 80).”

Divine Sorrow (Pathos/Passion)

Isaiah (as did all the prophets) laid out the reasons for the coming “anger” of God. It is not understood in psychological terms, (a blind, explosive force, God losing self-control) but is accounted for by the misconduct and behavior of humanity and is motivated by a concern for righteousness and the consequences felt by the victims of their injustice and behavior.

- ❖ Isaiah pleads with the people the plight of a father whom his children have abandoned and deserted Him.

“Sons have a reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me. The ox knows its owner and the ass its master’s crib; but Israel does not know, My people does not understand (Isaiah 1:2-3).”

“As happened in the time of Noah, and is happening again, God’s patience and longsuffering are exhausted. He is tired of man. He hates man’s homage, his festivals, his celebrations. Man has become a burden and sorrow for God...The weariness of God brings about a greater concealment of His personal involvement in history. It is a time when divine anger becomes active in history. (Heschel, p. 81).”

“I myself have commanded my consecrated ones, have summoned My mighty men to execute My anger (Isaiah 13:13).”

- ❖ Isaiah sees the world’s great powers as instruments of the divine will. The “Passion” of God becomes His Divine action in history. It is a sign of God’s judgment.
- ❖ There is sorrow in His anger – “*My people, My rebellious children...*”
- ❖ God is Father – but for all his love and compassion He cannot tolerate the corruption of the leaders who succumb to bribes and run after gifts, who “do not defend the fatherless, and the widow’s cause does not come to them.”
- ❖ There is sorrow in God’s anger – it is an instrument of purification and it does not last forever (Heschel)
- ❖ The anger of God is not his disposition but a “state” He waits to overcome. There will be a faithful remnant that will come about due to the zeal of the Lord – *the throne of David will be established with justice and righteousness.* The Crucified King establishes His Kingdom with the remnant - the 12 Apostles
- ❖ Isaiah’s Sympathy for God in His sorrow – The parable of the Vineyard planted is barren (Isaiah 5) “I will sing of my Friend, the song of this love for His vineyard...”