

THE HEBREW PROPHETS

James D, Newsome, Jr., *THE HEBREW PROPHETS* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1984),

Isaiah

Judah is an evil nation which has allowed its sinfulness to corrupt its true and right relationship with God.

Is. 1:4:

James D, Newsome, Jr., *THE HEBREW PROPHETS* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1984), 63.

The upper classes have become greedy and have allowed their love of material wealth to lead to the suppression of the rights of the weak and defenseless. Isaiah would have been aware that the coronation of every Davidic king involved the imperative laid upon the monarch to protect the interests of the poor and powerless (see Ps. 72:1-4, 12-14). The failure of the king and those about him to fulfill this charge was loathsome in God's eyes.

Is. 1:23:

Those in power spend their energies piling up wealth in the form of silver and gold, horses and chariots. They allow the pure worship of God to be compromised by their awe of magicians and fortune-tellers and by their worship of false gods (2:6-8; 5:11-12, 22-23).

James D, Newsome, Jr., *THE HEBREW PROPHETS* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1984), 63.

Is. 1:4: "Ah, sinful nation, people laden with iniquity, offspring who do evil, children who deal corruptly, who have forsaken the LORD, who have despised the Holy One of Israel, who are utterly estranged!"

2:6-8: "For you have forsaken the ways of a your people, O house of Jacob. Indeed they are full of diviners b from the east and of soothsayers like the Philistines, and they clasp hands with foreigners. Their land is filled with silver and gold, and there is no end to their treasures; their land is filled with horses, and there is no end to their chariots. Their land is filled with idols; they bow down to the work of their hands, to what their own fingers have made."

Is. 5:7b: he expected justice, but saw bloodshed; righteousness, but heard a cry!

James D, Newsome, Jr., *THE HEBREW PROPHETS* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1984), 63-64.

Ezekiel

Ezekiel as a priest, saw the nation's guilt of idolatry (8:7-18), which Ezekiel compares to sexual prostitution (23:1-21). Child sacrifice is expressly condemned (16:20; 20:31), and this practice is inhumane and a distortion of the true worship of God. His emphasis in describing sin is upon the legal and cultic aspects of righteousness before God: "I Yahweh and your God; walk in my statutes, and be careful to observe my ordinances" (20:19). Ezekiel describes the Babylonians as the instrument who will bring God's judgment to pass (23:23-24); cf. 5:11-12; 8:18; 20:38).

Ezk. 23-23-24: 23 the Babylonians and all the Chaldeans..shall come against you from the north with chariots and wagons and a host of peoples; they shall set themselves

against you on every side with buckler, shield, and helmet, and I will commit the judgment to them, and they shall judge you according to their ordinances.

The prophet understood the Babylonians to be acting as the agent of Yahweh. James D, Newsome, Jr., *THE HEBREW PROPHETS* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1984), 134.

Ezekiel was aware of Yahweh's presence beyond judgment (to Babylon); Yahweh is with the people, wherever they may be, bringing them life (1:28):

“Like the bow in a cloud on a rainy day, such was the appearance of the splendor all around. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD.”

This was an indication that Yahweh had not abandoned his people, but was with them in their exile.

Ezekiel presents two significant visions that signify Israel's coming home; one is in Ezk. 47:3-12; the vision of the river of life which flows from the New Temple portrays the salvation of God in terms of restoration of life out of death (coming home from Babylonian exile). The other is in Ezk. 37:11-12, 21.

“Then he said to me, “Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.’ I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel...21 I will take the people of Israel from the nations among which they have gone, and will gather them from every quarter, and bring them to their own land.”

Newsome, Jr. claims that individuals, as well as the nation, have an obligation to respond to the presence of Yahweh, a response which centers upon the commitment of the heart. He quotes the following two texts: Ezk. 33:27: “I will put my spirit within you,” It involves Israel's commitment and reorientation of the heart. Newsome thinks Ezekiel had been influenced by Jeremiah 31:31-34: “I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts.”

James D, Newsome, Jr., *THE HEBREW PROPHETS* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1984), 135-136.

As Newsome reports, according to the Second Isaiah, in 539 Babylon fell to the army of Cyrus, the King of Persia. Cyrus' domestic policy was very different from that of his predecessors, the Assyrians and Babylonians, both of whom had used exile as a means of subduing their conquered peoples. Cyrus seems to have believed that the various national groups within his empire would be more cooperative if they were allowed a large measure of autonomy, including the exercise of their own religious customs upon their native soil. His policy was sending exiles home including the Jews, carrying with them the idols of their deities which the Babylonians had seized. It was within this context that the restoration of the Jerusalem community, (coming home) promised by Ezekiel and

others, took place. James D, Newsome, Jr., *THE HEBREW PROPHETS* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1984), 140-141.

The Second Isaiah announces Israel's coming home in 40:1-5 and describes God's help with Israel's journey home by making "highway of our God" which help Israel cut straight across the desert (the shorter route from Babylon to Jerusalem), leveling mountains and elevating valleys along the way. It will become the pathway for the returning exiles who, having entered Babylon in sorrow and defeat, will depart in triumphant joy (Is. 40: 1-5). Here Newsome emphasizes that Israel's coming home was not by the nations' virtue of even its repentance, but the gracious character of Yahweh. By means of God's gracious act, all humankind will know that Yahweh, the sole God, is active in the life of this people Israel. others, took place. James D, Newsome, Jr., *THE HEBREW PROPHETS* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1984), 1152-153.

Newsome Jr. would claim that according to the Third Isaiah, two groups are singled out for special treatment although Yahweh's love is universal. The gentiles are clearly to be participants in the glories of this new age, an understanding consistent with that of the Second Isaiah, but just as clearly they will occupy a subservient position, a viewpoint not shared with the Second Isaiah. "Foreigners" will join themselves to Yahweh (56:6). They and "aliens" will serve Yahweh in the age to come, but their menial labor is contrasted with the work of the Jews who are to be "priests of Yahweh" and "ministers of our God" (61:5-6). others, took place. James D, Newsome, Jr., *THE HEBREW PROPHETS* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1984), 175.