

READING PLAN WEEK 10 for **The Epic of Eden – Isaiah – The Restoration**

Word from the Author: “Under Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah, three different corps of exiles chose to believe God and make the difficult trip home [from Babylon]. Isaiah’s third and final audience is this remnant of Israel, who were courageous enough to leave Babylon and set out on Yahweh’s “highway in the wilderness’ that would bring [them] home. In 539 BC, Cyrus, the Persian emperor conquered the city of Baylon and quickly issued an edict allowing all the captives of Babylon’s conquests the chance to go home. Of all those to whom the offer was given, we know of only one story of a populace bold enough to return. That would be the remnant of Israel.”

Day #1: Read 2 Kings 25:1-17. This is a succinct and brutal description of the devastation of Jerusalem by Babylon’s King Nebuchadnezzar. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah recount the return of the remnant to Jerusalem. Ezra describes the rebuilding of the temple, and Nehemiah, the rebuilding of the city walls. **Read Ezra 1:1-2:2, 2:64-69; 3:10-13.** Reflect on the relatively small number of people returning to Jerusalem. Reflect and empathize, if you can, on the wide range of emotions brought about by the rebuilding of the temple. **Read Nehemiah 1:1-3; 2:1-8.** This remarkable narrative nests well against Ezra’s, describing not only Nehemiah’s Godly charge to return and rebuild, but the disposition of Nehemiah and those who would join him on his bold mission. As you read these scriptures, give thought to the breadth of the range of skills and vocations of all those who made the returning restorative journey, noting even of the leaders were diversely gifted; Zerubbabel, a religious leader, Ezra, an academic, and Nehemiah, a simple public servant.

Day #2: Before you read today, try to put yourself in mind of those who first heard these words. Isaiah is addressing the citizens of Judah who chose to worship idols instead of Yahweh – people who *built* their own gods instead of worshipping the one true God, committing atrocities against their own bodies, perhaps even sacrificing their own children. They have lied, cheated, stolen and violated Yahweh’s covenant so many times in so many ways that Yahweh had to send the nation of Babylonia to destroy his own capital city. They are now exiles. Imagine you are well aware that you are one of the “wicked” and “unrighteous” ones hearing these words as you **read Isaiah 55**. Pay close attention to verse 7. What are your thoughts and emotions when you hear these words of unreasonable redemption? This call to simply forsake your ways and return to Yahweh, not for punishment, but for compassion? Jot your thoughts down on the reverse side of this Reading Plan.

Day #3: Read Isaiah 43:8-13 and Isaiah 49:6-7. To whom will Yahweh make his Servant a light? For what reason? **New read Acts 1:1-9 and Matthew 5:14-16.** What do these verses tell you about Israel’s original mission? The Messiah’s mission? Our mission?

This week’s reflection question: It is no coincidence that the mission and purpose, of the living God is unchanged for his original servants and his (***continued over***)

So, clearly, like Yahweh's original servant, our mission is that of a witness, a light shining on the truth of the rescue and mercy of God, carrying His unchanging message. To what end? Well, Isaiah said it. "So that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth." (Isaiah 49:6). Godspeed to you, runner; carry it home.

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