

## READING PLAN WEEK 3 for The Epic of Eden – Isaiah – The Prophet as Poet and Rhetorician

**Word from the Author:** The prophets of the Old Testament are first and foremost public speakers. That means they are also rhetoricians. Rhetoric is all about finding a way to help your audience hear you. The standard aspects of rhetoric are *ethos*, the credibility of the speaker, *pathos*, the emotional appeal of a message, and *logos*, the actual content of the message. During this session, we will also look at the topic of poetry because it is the evident structure of so many prophetic texts. Specifically, we will consider Hebrew principles of poetry which is the repetition of brief, choppy, parallel clauses that expand, contradict or somehow reiterate a concept. The reason we want to understand these aspects of the prophet's means of communication is to close the Great Barrier, the cultural gap from the ancient words to our contemporary milieu, which may cloud our apprehension of the prophet's words and, yes, the Bible itself.

**Day #1: Read Isaiah 5:1-6.** Can you hear the short rhythmic lines of the poet? In this song, who is the singer? Of what does he sing? Peer deeply into the actions depicted in these verses and consider the eternally deep meaning of what is going on here. Consider the fact that the prophet intentionally used a storytelling medium and a rhythm of speech to implant this deep thought in the heart of his reader.

**Day #2: Read Isaiah 5:1-7.** (One more verse than Day #1). Bear in mind the average Israeli citizen was a farmer and the average US citizen is not. Isaiah's metaphorical language is intimately familiar to his audience; fully knowing the laborious preparation needed for a lifegiving and fruitful harvest. The poetic setup of verses 1-6 are foundational to the rich reading of verse 7. We don't read Hebrew, but if we did, we would see in verse 7 that the words used for "justice" and "bloodshed" are nearly the same word. As are the Hebrew words used for "righteousness" and "distress". Ponder the grave disappointment of the benevolent gardener as spoken in these verses.

**Day #3: Read Isaiah 5:8-30.** While reading, consider the list of crimes, consequences and displaced values which Isaiah is trumpeting here. This is an odd turn considering the much more poetic opening of the passage we've been looking at so closely thus far this week. Having caught his audience with the "Song of the Vineyard", Isaiah now is getting down to brass tacks pointing out how the nation has aroused the anger of their God. What is obvious is that the nation of Israel is oblivious to their grand offense and the consequential curses of the Sinai covenant made with Yahweh. They have literally begun calling evil "good". Give thought to how this may apply to our own lives and the slow erosion we, too, may tolerate because of slow moving cultural changes.

**This week's reflection question:** As we ponder the prophet's words, we need to ask ourselves, "Is my life actually bearing the sort of fruit that reflects my Christian identity? Do my habits and actions look like the fruit of my Father and my true heritage as a child of God? Or do my habits and my actions look just like my neighbors' and friends' who claim no faith? Heavy thoughts for sure. If you have extra time this week, give John 15:1-8 a read and meditate on what you find there.

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