

READING PLAN WEEK 5 for The Epic of Eden – Isaiah
The Life and Times of Isaiah the Prophet, Part II: The Assyrian Empire

Word from the Author: The Neo-Assyrian Empire was birthed in 745 BC when Tiglath-Pileser III took the throne in Nineveh. His goal? To conquer the world. He established the first fully professional standing army of the ancient Near East and turned his attention west. The result was constant military activity throughout his reign. The power of the conquering campaign was overwhelming to those in the path of expansion. Local governments were either absorbed into the Neo-Assyrian Empire, becoming its vassals, or brutally overtaken, conquered and often exiled from their lands. The Northern kingdom of Israel was caught up early in this overtaking campaign due to their geographic placement and further turned the occupants of the Northern and Southern kingdoms against each other. This week, get ready for some powerful context!

Day #1: Read Isaiah 7 and 2 Kings 16:5-7. If you note that Ephraim = Israel, can you see who the players are in this chapter and where they originate? God is speaking to Ahaz (the king of Judah – the Southern Kingdom) through Isaiah the prophet. What does the Lord ask Ahaz to do? What is Ahaz's response to the Lord's request? Richter refers to Ahaz as the "faithless" king. Why is that? In whom does Ahaz place his trust?

Day #2: Read Isaiah 9. This passage contains some very familiar words. But we have rarely considered the original powerful context of those words. It is here, in Isaiah that we see the despairing origins of the people's plight (recall yesterday's reading) – and it is here that we see the contrasting salvation that God is promising; a king unlike previous betraying leaders, one who checks his ego at the door. One who would value the lives of his citizens more highly than his own. A prince whose chosen throne name would be "Prince of Peace."

Day #3: Read 1 Samuel 16:1, 11-13; and Isaiah 11 In Day #1's reading, we saw how Ahaz turned to the king of Assyria for help rather than trusting Yahweh to deliver him and his people. As a result of Ahaz breaking covenant with Yahweh, Yahweh brought the covenant curses upon the land of Judah. However, he did not leave the people without hope. In reflection on this day's reading, consider who Jesse is, for which kingdom (Northern or Southern) this prophecy/promise is made and what sort of restoration is promised here. Messiah means "anointed one" and comes from the verb meaning "to help, to save or to deliver." How dynamic was this messianic promise to the first ears that heard of Him?

This week's reflection question: A useful devotion for this week is found in Psalm 121. Take time to read and reflect on it. Savor the words and consider the reach of their meaning in your own life. Do not hasten to complete this reflection. Indeed brood over it for several days if you can. This week, ask the Holy Spirit to enlarge your understanding of God's message and lessons from the wayward children of Yahweh and, even more importantly, the lessons of the One who gave an eternal hope to those same souls.

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