

## Session 3: 2<sup>nd</sup> Isaiah

### Welcome

You are now familiar with the message of 1<sup>st</sup> Isaiah. Today we will look at selected passages from 2<sup>nd</sup> Isaiah.

Several generations of Israelites have been living in exile in Babylon. All of the things they had put their trust in (David king, Solomon's Temple, Jerusalem/Zion, The Promised Land) were gone. They had taken Jeremiah's advice and settled into their new lives in Babylon. Many were beginning to wonder if their God remembered the Covenant made with them, or worse yet, if their God even had the power to do anything about the mess they were in.

2<sup>nd</sup> Isaiah took these issues head on. He proclaimed that God was about to do a new thing. God would bring them back in a new Exodus, and when they arrived back in the Promised Land, it would be like a new creation. Marduk, the Babylonian god, was no god at all. 2<sup>nd</sup> Isaiah makes the strongest case in the OT for monotheism! Watch for this title for God when you read 2<sup>nd</sup> Isaiah: ("I am the Lord, and there is no other." Isaiah 45:6)

2<sup>nd</sup> Isaiah boldly goes where no one has gone before when he proclaims that the Persian king, Cyrus, is God's shepherd/anointed one = messiah! God is saving his people, but using a very unlikely hero. (Isaiah 44:28 – 45:1)

It might not surprise you to learn that very few of the exiles chose to follow 2<sup>nd</sup> Isaiah out of Babylon and back to the promised land. The vast majority chose to stick with what they were familiar with, and very few chose to risk the radical new vision offered by 2<sup>nd</sup> Isaiah. They preferred to continue to remember the former things, rather than trust that God might yet be able to remain in a covenant relationship with them using new things.

### Opening Prayer

Saving God, you surprised your people by bringing them out of exile and back to the promised land. Like those who chose to remain in Babylon, we know that it is hard to believe that you are calling us to follow faithfully into a new way of being your people in the world. We pray that the words of 2<sup>nd</sup> Isaiah will give us the courage to risk leaning into your preferred future for our personal lives, our congregation and your world. Amen

### Meeting 2<sup>nd</sup> Isaiah

To experience the radical change from 1<sup>st</sup> Isaiah to 2<sup>nd</sup> Isaiah, read aloud the assigned sections of Isaiah:

- Isaiah 40 and Isaiah 55, which form bookends of this portion of Isaiah. (You might chose to use Isaiah *"55 Choral Reading"* which is included in the extra material.)

In addition the four famous "Servant Songs" can be found here:

- Isaiah 42:1-4
- Isaiah 49:1-6
- Isaiah 50:4-9
- Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12

View the PPT *"Isaiah 55 Through a Lutheran Lens"* which includes a good overall picture of the emphasis of 2<sup>nd</sup> Isaiah.

Project Janelle Thompson's picture *"Ishtar Gate."* Imagine what it must have felt like to enter those huge gates wondering if you'd ever be able to return to Jerusalem again! Then imagine their surprise/shock to walk out of those gates with the permission of Cyrus the Persian. Talk together about the impact both experiences might have had on their ability to trust in God's covenant promises.

If your group didn't use either the *"Word Cloud of Names in Isaiah"* or the document *"Names for God in Isaiah"* you might find this helpful in understanding 2<sup>nd</sup> Isaiah.

If your group isn't familiar with the tumultuous period that immediately precedes the Babylonian Exile, work through the handout *"A Tale of Four Cities."* It summarizes the collapse of the Assyrian Empire, the rise of Babylon, and the final days of Judah.

### Questions for Discussion

1. What questions arose for your participants as they viewed the PPT?
2. Isaiah 43:16-19 draws a comparison between the first Exodus and the new thing that God has in store for his people. They are told: "Do not remember the former things or consider the things of old." When their annual festival of Passover comes around, how might this new message of 2<sup>nd</sup> Isaiah been received? Think of some of the treasured memories of the glory days of your congregation, or former pastors that were beloved leaders. What might 2<sup>nd</sup> Isaiah's advice be to you as we prepare to live in this brand new COVID world?
3. Over and over 2<sup>nd</sup> Isaiah describes God this way: "I am the Lord, and there is no other." (45:5a) Remember he is proclaiming this in the shadow of the massive ziggurat dedicated to Marduk, the god of the Babylonians. Share with your group how Isaiah's bold claims for God in the face of obvious other claimants on their allegiance, might give you hope now, when Christians seem to be very insignificant players on the world (or local) stage.
4. Share the Word Picture of "The Names of God in Isaiah." What claims for God are being made? How might those claims have helped the people respond to Isaiah's call to lean into the new thing that God was planning for them?
5. Often Biblical writers use "bookends" to emphasize the heart of their message. Read Isaiah 40:8 and Isaiah 55:10-11. In Genesis 1, God's word brings order out of chaos. 2<sup>nd</sup> Isaiah claims that God's word is doing it again! This time God's word is bringing order out of political, social and religious chaos. John 1 proclaims that Jesus is the Word! How might your study of the words of 2<sup>nd</sup> Isaiah help bring order out of the chaos of your life, the chaos of our church, and the chaos in this country?
6. 2<sup>nd</sup> Isaiah does what no other OT writer did. He names Cyrus, the Persian king, God's anointed one = messiah. When Isaiah proclaims that God was doing a new thing, he wasn't kidding! Imagine how difficult that must have been to accept for his hearers. What new things is God up to today? Who are the unlikely leaders God is calling to help God restore this broken world to what might resemble a new creation?

### **Closing Prayer**

Redeeming God, you called your exiled people through your prophet, 2<sup>nd</sup> Isaiah, to trust you and to risk imagining a new way to be your faithful people in the world. May your Spirit give us courage to risk being your people in the world in new ways. Amen

### **Assignment for Session Four**

If time permits, read all of 3<sup>rd</sup> Isaiah (Chapters 56-66).

Focus particularly on these sections of 3<sup>rd</sup> Isaiah:

- 56:1-8            One of the most inclusive passages in the entire Bible! What does it mean to keep the Sabbath and to hold fast to God's Covenant?
- 58:1-12            God says: "Here I am!" Unique in the entire Bible! Devotion = service of others
- 59:1-16            Echoes 8<sup>th</sup> century prophets like 1<sup>st</sup> Isaiah, Amos, Hosea and Micah by calling for justice
- 61:1-2            Compare with Luke 4: 16-21
- 62:1-4,12          Reverses 1<sup>st</sup> Isaiah (6:9-13)
- 66:12-23          Bookends 2<sup>nd</sup> Isaiah (40:1)