

SCRIPTURE READING FOR NOVEMBER 21, 2021 @ CAPC OAKLAND

Isaiah 9:1-7

CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH VERSION

¹ But those who have suffered will no longer be in pain. *The territories of Zebulun and Naphtali* in Galilee were once hated. But this land of the Gentiles across the Jordan River and along the Mediterranean Sea will be greatly respected.

² Those who walked in the dark have seen a bright light. And it shines upon everyone who lives in the land of darkest shadows.

³ Our Lord, you have made your nation stronger. Because of you, its people are glad and celebrate like workers at harvest time or like soldiers dividing up what they have taken.

⁴ You have broken the power of those who abused and enslaved your people. You have rescued them just as you saved your people **from Midian**.

⁵ The boots of marching warriors and the blood-stained uniforms have been fed to flames and eaten by fire.

⁶ A child has been born for us. We have been given a son who will be our ruler. His names will be Wonderful Counselor and Mighty God, Eternal Father and Prince of Peace.

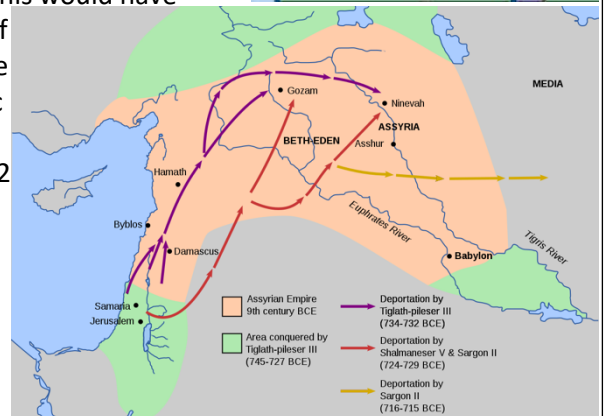
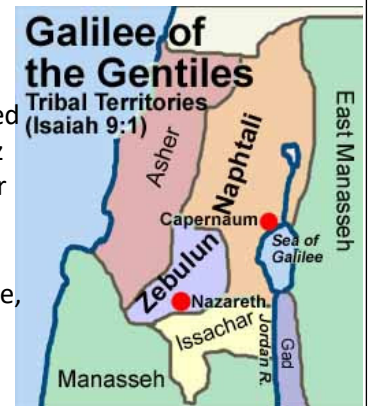
⁷ His power will never end; peace will last forever. He will rule David's kingdom and make it grow strong. He will always rule with justice and righteousness. The Lord All-Powerful will make certain that all of this is done.

LANGUAGE NOTES & TEXTUAL CONNECTIONS

Last week we heard from the prophet Amos, who worked in the northern kingdom of Israel in the mid-700s BCE. Today we will hear from the 1st prophet called Isaiah, who worked in the southern kingdom of Judah, mainly in the city of Jerusalem, a few years after Amos. Isaiah was speaking to people who were weathering attacks from the northern kingdom and other surrounding tribes, and were tempted to make political alliances with bigger empires to protect themselves, and Isaiah was insistent that they should rely on God and God's promise. While the kings in Jerusalem were mostly as corrupt as the northern kings were, there were two who weren't terrible and who made an effort to turn the people back to God's way so that they would be able to live faithfully in God's promise. One of those was Hezekiah, who became king sometime around the time that Isaiah wrote the words we hear today. [Written by @Teri Peterson on Facebook in the Narrative Lectionary Group]

Remember that the Hebrew prophets were also poets, they wrote in verse with metaphors, rhymes and word-pictures to try to articulate a vision that was beyond what mere words could hold.

WHEN WAS THIS? Isaiah prophesied from Jerusalem in the latter half of the 8th century BCE as the Neo-Assyrian empire was rising in power (think of the area of Syria and Iraq). Under its king Tiglathpileser III (745-723 BCE) the empire expanded into the region abutting northern Israel. Several neighboring kingdoms of Israel banded together to oppose Assyria. But Ahaz - the Israelite king - wouldn't join their coalition. So the kings of Samaria and Damascus attempted a coup, seeking to replace Ahaz with a more malleable, puppet king, who would side with them against Assyria. If they would have succeeded this would have broken the rule of David's family line (v. 7). This specific threat is talked about in Isaiah 7:2 and might be the troubles spoken of by Isaiah as "darkness" in our text.



Isaiah 25:1-9
THE LIVING BIBLE

¹ O Lord, I will honor and praise your name, for you are my God; you do such wonderful things! You planned them long ago, and now you have accomplished them, just as you said! ² You turn mighty cities into heaps of ruins. The strongest forts are turned to rubble. Beautiful palaces in distant lands disappear and will never be rebuilt. ³ Therefore strong nations will shake with fear before you; ruthless nations will obey and glorify your name.

⁴ But to the poor, O Lord, you are a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, a shelter from merciless men who are like a driving rain that melts down an earthen wall. ⁵ As a hot, dry land is cooled by clouds, you will cool the pride of ruthless nations. ⁶ Here on Mount Zion in Jerusalem, the Lord Almighty will spread a wondrous feast for everyone around the world—a delicious feast of good food, with clear, well-aged wine and choice beef. ⁷ At that time he will remove the cloud of gloom, the pall of death that hangs over the earth; ⁸ he will swallow up death forever. The Lord God will wipe away all tears and take away forever all insults and mockery against his land and people. The Lord has spoken—he will surely do it! ⁹ In that day the people will proclaim, “This is our God in whom we trust, for whom we waited. Now at last he is here.” What a day of rejoicing!

LANGUAGE NOTES & TEXTUAL CONNECTIONS

The territories of Zebulun and Naphtali These were two of the regions of Israel, settled by the tribes of the same names. In the north, in what would later be called Galilee they were some of the Jewish lands first defeated and decimated by the Assyrians. By the time of Isaiah those lands were populated primarily thereafter by pagans, and the few Jews remaining had difficulty holding onto their ancestral faith

from Midian. The name Midian means "strife" in Hebrew. It's the name associated with the nomadic descendants of Midian (known as the Midianites) who were distant relatives of the Israelites. They often oppressed and sought to overthrow Israel (See specifically Judges 6:2 & Numbers 22). They are both a specific enemy of Israel and a metaphor for those who oppose the people of God. Here the poet Isaiah is saying that just how God saved the people before from Midian, God will do that again now with their current enemies.

As you read Isaiah 25 you can hear that it's a bit different, it's almost as if it's another Isaiah in a different time. Whereas chapter 7 is filled with gloom, fear and darkness – wondering where God is in the face of the enemy of Assyria. Here, God seems to have already rescued the people – been a refuge from the storm that they faced when threatened by the Assyrian Empire that wanted to destroy their nation, erase their culture, and force them to worship foreign gods.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION & EXAMEN:

- What engaged you, enraged you, or surprised you in these texts?
- Isaiah lived and wrote during a time of great threat, trouble and unknown outcomes. The history and culture of the people was threatened. They were afraid of being replaced by other peoples by a foreign imperial power. What do you notice about this fear in the texts? What images of hope and God's faithfulness do you notice?
- We often jump right to the Christmas Story, the birth of Jesus of Nazareth, when we hear Isaiah 9; but if you linger in the context of the day; what image is Isaiah painting for the people? The meal of all meals in Isaiah 25 (a vision repeated in Isaiah 2 and Micah 4) is at the root of communion. How do you (*or don't you*) experience as this meal of peace-making for all the nations?
- What invitation do you heard the Spirit of God speaking to you – or to us, as a church – to act, speak, be or change through this word of scripture?